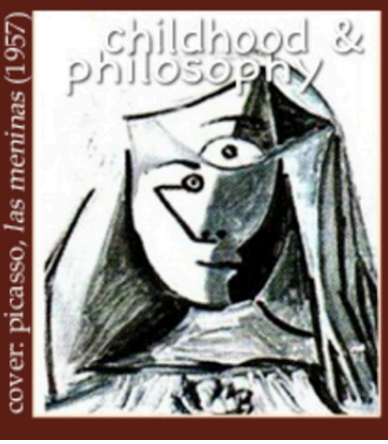

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article

breaking out of the cave by encountering the other:

a call for decolonial education

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abstract

Plato's allegory of the cave is a seminal image that can be interpreted in creative ways. Its assumption that the slaves in the cave can free themselves from the oppression, control, and deception of the cave by going out into the reality of the outside world opens the question of how to achieve such self-liberation in the educational setting. The allegory is intended to point out that human beings live mentally immature until they reach perfection in the contemplation of eternal and true ideas. Emphasizing this kind of perfection, however, may leave out an essential component of human liberation: coexisting face-to-face with other human beings. Inspired by the philosophy of liberation we approach the allegory of the cave in this paper as a textual stimulus, recognizing that colonial education, like the allegory's cave, has been a space of ideologization: it prevents any encounter with the Other and with one's true situation in the world. The act of liberating oneself and one's community from colonial education will then consist in meeting the rejected, the oppressed, in short, the dehumanized. The invitation is then to think of colonial education that is still practiced as a cave that prevents the encounter, coexistence, and charity with the last, the rejected, the excluded of our

society. In the end, reinterpreting Plato's allegory of the cave in the light of the philosophy of liberation will allow us to imagine a "decolonial education," where the priority is not only an intellectual liberation but an encounter with the marginalized of the world. Inspired by Paulo Freire's ideas, this reflection envisions a four-stage process of empowerment: engaging the oppressed in critical reflection on their reality, fostering dialogue between the oppressed and their allies to build a shared understanding of oppression, encouraging praxis that integrates reflection and action to challenge the systemic limitations of education, and creating educational initiatives that enable the oppressed to take ownership of their education and their path to liberation.

keywords: allegory of the cave; philosophy of liberation; decolonial education.

salir de la cueva encontrándose con el otro: un llamamiento a la educación decolonial

resumen

La alegoría de la caverna de Platón es una imagen fundamental que puede interpretarse de formas creativas. Su suposición de que los esclavos de la caverna pueden liberarse de la opresión, el control y el engaño de la caverna saliendo a la realidad del mundo exterior abre la cuestión de cómo lograr esa autoliberación en el entorno educativo. La alegoría pretende señalar que el ser humano vive mentalmente inmaduro hasta que alcanza la perfección en la contemplación de las ideas eternas y verdaderas. Sin embargo, hacer hincapié en este tipo de perfección puede dejar de lado un componente esencial de la liberación humana: la convivencia cara a cara con otros seres humanos. Inspirados en la filosofía de la liberación, abordamos en este trabajo la alegoría de la caverna como estímulo textual, reconociendo que la educación colonial, como la caverna de la alegoría, ha sido un espacio de ideologización: impide cualquier encuentro con el Otro y con la verdadera situación de uno en el mundo. El acto de liberarse a sí mismo y a su comunidad de la educación colonial consistirá entonces en el encuentro con el rechazado, el oprimido, en suma, el deshumanizado. La invitación es entonces a pensar la educación colonial que aún se practica como una caverna que impide el encuentro, la convivencia y la caridad con los últimos, los rechazados, los excluidos de nuestra sociedad. Al final, reinterpretar la alegoría de la caverna de Platón a la luz de la filosofía de la liberación nos permitirá imaginar una «educación decolonial», en la que la prioridad no sea sólo una liberación intelectual, sino un encuentro con los marginados del mundo. Inspirada en las ideas de Paulo Freire, esta reflexión imagina un proceso de empoderamiento en cuatro etapas: implicar a los oprimidos en una reflexión crítica sobre su realidad, fomentar el diálogo entre los oprimidos y sus aliados para construir una comprensión compartida de la opresión, alentar una praxis que integre la reflexión y la acción para cuestionar las limitaciones sistémicas de la educación, y crear iniciativas educativas que permitan a los oprimidos apropiarse de su educación y de su camino hacia la liberación.

palabras claves: alegoría de la caverna; filosofía de la liberación; educación decolonial.

sair da caverna pelo encontro do outro: um chamado à educação decolonial

resumo

A alegoria da caverna de Platão é uma imagem fundamental que pode ser interpretada de formas criativas. Sua suposição de que os escravos na caverna podem se libertar da opressão, do controle e do engano da caverna saindo à realidade do mundo exterior abre a questão de como alcançar essa autolibertação no cenário educativo. A alegoria pretende assinalar que os seres humanos vivem mentalmente imaturos

até que alcancem a perfeição, na contemplação das ideias eternas e verdadeiras. No entanto, enfatizar esse tipo de perfeição pode deixar de lado um componente essencial da libertação humana: a coexistência cara a cara com outros seres humanos. Inspirados na filosofia da libertação, abordamos neste trabalho a alegoria da caverna como estímulo textual, reconhecendo que a educação colonial, como a caverna da alegoria, tem sido um espaço de ideologização: impede qualquer encontro com o Outro e com sua verdadeira situação no mundo. O ato de libertar a si mesmo e a sua comunidade da educação colonial consistirá, então, em encontrar o rejeitado, o oprimido; em resumo, o desumanizado. O convite, logo, é para pensar a educação colonial, que ainda é praticada como uma caverna que impede o encontro, a coexistência e a caridade com os últimos, os rejeitados, os excluídos da nossa sociedade. Por fim, reinterpretar a alegoria da caverna de Platão à luz da filosofia da libertação nos permitirá imaginar uma "educação decolonial" em que a prioridade seja não apenas uma libertação intelectual, mas também um encontro com os marginalizados do mundo. Inspirada nas ideias de Paulo Freire, essa reflexão prevê um processo de empoderamento em quatro etapas: engajar os oprimidos em uma reflexão crítica sobre suas realidades; fomentar o diálogo entre os oprimidos e seus aliados, para construir uma compreensão compartilhada da opressão; encorajar uma práxis que integre a reflexão e a ação, para questionar as limitações sistêmicas da educação e criar iniciativas educativas que permitam aos oprimidos apropriarem-se de suas educações e de seus caminhos até a libertação.

palavras-chave: alegoria da caverna; filosofia da libertação; educação decolonial.

breaking out of the cave by encountering the other:
a call for decolonial education

introduction

Unlike the notion of the cave as a mysterious, sacred, and meaning-laden place (Moyes, 2012), the allegory of the cave presents a kind of totality in the form of a "cavernous cell down under the ground" (Plato, *Republic*, 514a[1]) in which there are people imprisoned since childhood who can only see shadows of human statuettes and animal models that have no substance or meaning. As Plato explains, the prisoners have "their legs and necks tied up in a way which keeps them in one place and allows them to look only straight ahead, but not to turn their heads" (Plato, *Republic*, 514b). Behind the prisoners is a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners is a parapet where puppeteers can walk. The puppeteers, who are behind the prisoners, cast shadows on the wall of the cave. Prisoners perceive these shadows as reality because they have never seen the objects or the outside world. In this article we interpret the allegory of the cave as colonial education. We will draw on liberation and decolonial philosophers and educators to show how decolonial education can be practiced. Brief examples of colonial education in the contexts of Puerto Rico and the Congo will allow us to explore and imagine new ways of liberation from coloniality. In addition, the work serves as an intercultural stimulus, through which different philosophers from different cultures contribute their analysis, exploration, and recreation of reality to better understand the central problems that human beings have posed and continue to pose to us today.

The allegory of the cave illustrates that when the prisoners escape and are exposed to the outside world, at first, they suffer from the brightness of the sun because they are not used to it, but with time they see and understand the true shapes of objects, noticing that what they saw in the cave were mere shadows. Upon returning to the cave to free the others, they are met with hostility, resistance, and disbelief because the cave constitutes the totality of the denizens: it is the only thing they know, that they can imagine and understand.

[1] Plato, *The Republic*, book VII, 514a-520a.

The prisoners in the cave make sense of the reality around them without interacting with each other. They are subject to the meaning they can derive from the shadows of the statuettes. In other words, the cave presents a dominating, controlling, and manipulative totality. It alienates humans from their humanity, preventing the human encounter as a liberating act. The alienated fear any movement of liberation because of the manipulation and control that overshadows them in the cave. Thus, any attempt at liberation is met with hostility, insecurity, and confusion because they cannot imagine any other totality outside of their vision from the cave.

The prisoners are part of the totality of the cave. By totality, we understand a system that unifies and gives meaning to the entities, things, and objects found in it (Dussel, 2011). The problem is that the prisoners do not know any other totality; their totality has never been changed. Therefore, the totality assimilates the prisoners. Coming out of the cave will allow the prisoners to question the totality and to notice that they are different from the totality that assimilates and dominates. The "cave" we will analyze is colonizing education. Escape from this totality is not possible in isolation or in contemplation of ideas. For this reason, we want to propose another way of liberation: the face-to-face encounter with the poorest, the oppressed. Sometimes, the only way to break free from a colonizer's educational system is to meet other people who live in a different totality, whether they are the very marginalized or those who seek to practice epistemic and practical privilege to the most marginalized. In the encounter with the most dehumanized human beings; it is possible to find liberation that does not come from an isolated act, but from an interpersonal and communitarian one.

It is our understanding that in the field of education, the allegory of the cave can be used to make students aware that decolonial education is conducive to liberation, since it allows us to expand the epistemic horizon and understand the world in which we live. We hope to demonstrate that there is also liberation in accompanying and meeting people who suffer the consequences of social, systemic, and structural injustices. We thus aim to add to the existing liberation and decolonial narratives, providing a reinterpretation of the allegory of the cave to imagine an education that can liberate us from exclusionary and marginalizing totalities. The cave allegory will only serve as a textual stimulus to maintain an

intercultural and philosophical dialogue, in which we can imagine the decolonization of education. Here we are interested in interpreting colonizing education as a cave, in which students, educators, and other members of the educational community are subjected to the dominant narrative, which does not give way to encounter the humanity of others, especially the most disadvantaged. In this way, education becomes an act of ideologization, which hides reality and truth under layers of deception and an incomplete vision of the reality of those who suffer the onslaught of coloniality. Faced with this scenario, we propose that the liberation of the imprisoned, colonized, of the poorest consists in accompanying them to be others in a new order (Dussel, 2020), that is, not to be treated as prisoners to be contained in a system, but to allow them to be fully what they already are, human beings capable of interacting with other human beings, with the power of being free.

from the allegory of the cave to the encounter with the other

The allegory of the cave shows that the material, being corruptible and transient, does not have the value of ideas, the truly incorruptible, the eternal (Dussel, 1978). Therefore, in contemplation one can access ideas, leave the material world and, by entering the world of ideas, reach perfection. Thus, in the Hellenic worldview, the body has no value, but the soul; the person is not free, but an imitation of divine archetypes; and the historical is not valuable because it is transient (Dussel, 1978). But, how can we make education valuable for the whole world if it only liberates the mind, not the body; if it does not recognize the free will of the independent being; if human relations are not lived from the commitment with the neighbor; if it is not recognized that we live in a particular historical context that has repercussions in the future? Following the invitation of Enrique Dussel (1978), Argentine-Mexican philosopher, historian, theologian, and prominent co-founder of the philosophy of liberation, we believe that the Semitic tradition that inspired Jeshua of Nazareth serves to build and develop an education that liberates. Our desire is to move away for a moment from the Hellenic tradition, to imagine a decolonial education inspired by the Semitic tradition of Jeshua of Nazareth, which recognizes the unity of the body (*basar*) and life (*nefesh*), the responsibility of the autonomous human being, the commitment to

the orphan, the poor, the widow and the neediest, and the recognition that human beings build history (Dussel, 1978).

The idea is not to propose that Semitic culture is superior to Hellenic culture. Rather, if we recognize the perfection that resides in the encounter with the needy, we are urged to share ourselves and to open ourselves to the physical needs of others. Thus, in the Semitic tradition, perfection is achieved in charity. Not charity in the sense of self-love (Silva, 2019), that is, love only for my relatives or people who are like me. Love for the other, for the stranger, for my enemy. Hence, the way out of the cave, inspired by the Semitic tradition (Dussel, 1978), consists in abandoning the closedness of an isolated and selfish "I" to encounter the Other who cries out from their poverty and misery. The "I" that meets the "Other" thus participates in the liberating process of the oppressed. The invitation here is to seek liberation in attention to the physical need of the Other rather than a liberation alibied by the very idea of liberation, a product of contemplative isolation.

In Paul Ricoeur's (1990) philosophy, the concept of "Other as Exteriority" is essential for understanding the continuous evolution of self-identity that is not static, as it would seem to be for prisoners in Plato's cave analogy. French philosopher and anthropologist Ricoeur (1990) argues that encounters with exteriority—whether individuals, cultures, or ideas—act as catalysts that compel individuals to reconsider and transform their preconceived notions of self. This process is central to his notion of narrative identity, where the stories we tell about ourselves are constantly reshaped by external influences, leading to a more complex and nuanced understanding of who we are and what we should be. The exteriority introduces new narratives that disrupt static self-conceptions, challenging the self to engage in a dynamic process of reinterpretation and growth (Ricoeur, 1990). Moreover, Ricoeur's (1990) emphasis on the ethical dimension of these encounters underscores the moral responsibility inherent in recognizing and engaging with the Other. The Other's exteriority demands not only acknowledgment but also respect, pushing the self to transcend egocentric perspectives and embrace a more relational and ethically grounded identity. This ongoing interaction with the Other, shaped by time and memory, rejects the notion of a fixed identity, instead framing the self as a project of continuous

reinterpretation. Ricoeur's (1990) framework thus highlights the interconnectedness of human relationships and the transformative power of engaging with the Other, making identity a fluid and evolving narrative rather than a static essence.

Hence, the "other as exteriority" in the context of the allegory of the cave represents that which exists outside the immediate experience and existence of the prisoners. It is an exteriority that challenges the common existing worldview and makes the being in existence uncomfortable. The person in the cave despises otherness because it is different from their immediate experience (Levinas, 2015). The allegory of the cave exposes the knowledge and truth found in the exteriority or otherness of the immediate experience. The prisoner of the cave or the prisoner of the system needs a broader and hidden truth that is only found outside their limited perceptions of reality and limited totality (Gadamer, 1975). Hence the need for an encounter with the Other, so that the reality provided by the totality is questioned and exploded. Just as in the cavern of allegory, education requires an encounter with the Other, and this poor, colonized, violated, and demeaned Other.

colonizing education as a totality, as a cave

Colonizing education, historically and contemporarily, functions as a mechanism of epistemological and cultural dominance, fundamentally shaping how knowledge is constructed and disseminated (Rivera Santana & Akhurst, 2021). At its core, colonial education enforces a singular, often Eurocentric, mode of understanding and learning, marginalizing alternative epistemologies and cultural practices. This form of education is characterized by its rigid adherence to a predefined set of knowledge standards and pedagogical approaches that prioritize certain ways of knowing while disregarding others.

As Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018), prominent Latin American scholars in decolonial studies argue, colonial education is grapho-centric, valuing written text over oral, visual, and other sensory modes of communication. It enforces a mono-semiotic and monolingual approach that treats Western knowledge systems as superior and universal. Furthermore, as noted by Eric Havelock (1986), a Canadian classical scholar, and Jack Goody (1988), a British social anthropologist, such educational practices laid the groundwork for scientific

and technological advances in Western civilization, reinforcing a hierarchical view of knowledge that positioned the Global South as inferior. This perspective aligns with the insights of Freire (2005), the influential Brazilian educator and philosopher, who critiqued the banking system of education that suppresses critical engagement and reinforces existing power structures.

Colonial education often manifests in the imposition of Western curricula, pedagogical methods, and assessment criteria on diverse cultural contexts. This practice not only tries to erase indigenous knowledge systems but also perpetuates a form of intellectual colonialism where alternative epistemologies are undervalued or ignored. As a result, students educated under these systems are often alienated from their own cultural heritage and epistemological traditions.

The United States, a nation state in which white supremacist colonial culture has been in force and operative (Ruíz, 2024) has attempted to Americanize Puerto Ricans through colonizing education since 1898, after the Spanish-American war. As the Puerto Rican academic Aida Negrón de Montilla (1976) states, from 1900 to 1930 the U.S. government and military used the legal system to legitimize the alienation and assimilation of Puerto Rican students and teachers by forcing English into the classroom, persecuting and firing pro-independence teachers, hiring American teachers, and integrating American curricula. The idea was to deculturalize Puerto Ricans, avoiding any hint of rejection of the new white Anglo-Saxon colonial culture. Some of the *de jure* measures that implemented Americanization are still in force today, only now they operate *de facto* (Padilla Rosas, 2023). This is so much so that it has been documented that in public schools in Puerto Rico, racism is not discussed unless the teacher or the school develops a strategic plan to address the issue (Díaz Ramos, 2022).

Furthermore, by way of illustration, education in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains a striking relic of its colonial past, a system meticulously crafted not to empower but to subjugate. As Martin Ekwa bis Isal (2004), a Congolese Jesuit and practitioner in the educational system argues in *L'école trahie*, that the Belgian colonial administration deliberately designed an educational framework that prioritized obedience over intellect, replication over innovation. This system, initially constructed to produce a subordinate workforce, has

endured with astonishing resilience, continuing to shape the nation's intellectual and economic destiny.

Despite decades of independence, the Congolese curriculum remains deeply embedded in Western epistemologies, prioritizing foreign languages—particularly French—over indigenous languages and cultural wisdom. This linguistic hierarchy alienates students from their native heritage, reinforcing the colonial mindset that devalues local knowledge and indigenous problem-solving epistemological mechanisms. The education system, rather than fostering critical thinking and innovation, remains an instrument of intellectual dependency, perpetuating an elite class trained to serve external interests rather than addressing the pressing socio-economic challenges of the nation. By merely reproducing existing Western knowledge, Congolese education fails to cultivate the creativity necessary for local technological and scientific innovation necessary for the development. It remains an echo chamber of colonial indoctrination, stifling the emergence of a generation equipped to redefine African culture's intellectual sovereignty. If education is to be a tool for liberation rather than subjugation, then the DRC must urgently reconstruct its curriculum, centering indigenous knowledge systems and fostering a pedagogy that inspires critical consciousness, innovation, and self-determination.

As the above examples demonstrate, the problem with colonial education lies in its inherent lack of flexibility and its failure to acknowledge the rich diversity of knowledge systems. It is criticized for creating educational environments that are culturally alienating and epistemologically limiting (Poe, 2022). By prioritizing Western ways of knowing, colonial education restricts students' ability to engage with and value their own cultural and intellectual traditions. This creates a one-dimensional educational experience that fails to recognize the complexities and nuances of global knowledge systems.

Thus, the process of liberation, when the prisoner meets with exteriority, with the Other, can be implemented through an education where the encounter with the otherness is not unilateral but multidimensional, and such an encounter becomes a liberated process that brings the person to see the totality of reality. However, post-colonial education has become a one-sided liberation built on knowledge that does not always consider the contextual reality and historical

oppression of the learners. This infused knowledge which completely forgets the personal and otherness altogether, keeps the learners in the cave with the same shadows rather than liberating them by bringing light to the truthiness of their conditions. Thus, the educational system does not want the learners or prisoners to be uplifted from their miserable human condition but wants them to fit into the same oppressive systems by upholding what they can bring to continue totalizing, dominating, and impoverishing them. Thus, priority is given to the act of depositing or inducing knowledge in the imprisoned person rather than to meeting them as an intelligent, capable, and knowledgeable being (Freire, 2005).

On the other hand, liberatory and decolonial education seeks to empower students to become active agents of change in their communities, enabling them to break free from the cave of misconception and illusion in an educational environment that recognizes them as agents of change. For example, liberatory and decolonial education seeks to dismantle colonial ideologies and structures embedded in the educational system, emphasizing the inclusion of indigenous knowledge, critical pedagogy, and culturally relevant curricula that empower marginalized communities and foster critical consciousness among students (Chisale, 2019). The liberation of students consists in both their criticism of injustices and their contribution to the creation of a more equitable society (Paul VI, 1965).

Plato's allegory of the cave can be profoundly reinterpreted as a metaphor for decolonizing education and liberating the whole person, not just their minds. The cave symbolizes the colonized embodiment, where individuals are confined to a narrow, distorted reality imposed by dominant colonial narratives. The shadows on the wall represent the myths and ideologies perpetuated by colonial powers, which maintain control by restricting access to alternative knowledge. The prisoners, bound by these narratives, accept them as the only reality, mirroring how colonized minds are conditioned to see the world through a limited, imposed lens. The journey of the freed prisoner illustrates the transformative power of education, which challenges these dominant narratives, exposes oppressive structures, and encourages critical thinking, leading to a deeper understanding of reality that transcends the constraints of colonial ideology.

Indeed, the sun in the allegory, representing the ultimate truth, can be seen as decolonial education—a source of enlightenment that reveals the full spectrum of human experience, including the histories and cultures marginalized by colonial powers. This education restores agency to the oppressed by providing the tools to understand and challenge the systems that have shaped their realities. The freed prisoner's return to the cave highlights the educator's responsibility to help others break free from colonial mindsets, despite the resistance they may face. This allegorical interpretation underscores the necessity of persisting in decolonizing education to liberate minds and build a more just and equitable world. However, decolonizing work is never the work of a single person. It is necessary for human beings to meet each other, from their lights and shadows, their identities and beliefs, so that a collective liberating process can begin.

Liberation from the cave can only be achieved through the perception of the true light and reality that each person represents, present in the encounter with otherness in a decolonial education. The practical aspect of education understood under the cave is nurtured by the restoration of anthropological and holistic liberation from the previous darkness of one who is locked in loneliness, in antipathy, in selfishness. There is darkness in one who is locked in loneliness, antipathy, and selfishness knowledge that does not allow them to fully see the Other as agential people. Therefore, in the educational process, students can receive not only external knowledge to enable them to learn, but above all action-oriented practices. Actions influenced by decolonial education could empower young people and give them hope for a better future to restore their human dignity and not reproduce the same oppressive systems. The process of liberation from the cave becomes a process of empowerment and enlightenment that allows the learner to explore reality for themselves and redefine the course of their future as they dismantle the root causes of oppression through decolonial education.

decolonial education in the light of the encounter with the other

Decolonial education emerges as a response to the limitations and exclusions of colonial educational practices. It seeks to reframe educational approaches by incorporating and valuing diverse epistemologies and cultural

practices. Decolonial education challenges the epistemological hegemony of Western knowledge systems and advocates for a more inclusive and relational understanding of knowledge. According to Santos (2018), achieving global social justice necessitates global cognitive justice, which involves recognizing and validating diverse ways of knowing. This perspective aligns with decolonial scholars who argue that decolonization must address both material and epistemological injustices (De Costa et al., 2017; Slinkard & Gevers, 2020).

A critical aspect of decolonial education is its emphasis on embodiment and relationality. It posits that knowledge and understanding are not separate or hierarchical but are co-constructed through the interaction of various domains, including mind, body, and environment (Cushman, 2013). This approach challenges modernity's Eurocentric dichotomies of mind/body and text/context, advocating a more integrated and holistic view of knowledge. In practice, decolonial education involves creating pedagogical spaces that respect and incorporate the otherness. This can include revising curricula to incorporate multiple perspectives, employing teaching methods that honor indigenous and local knowledge systems, and fostering an environment where all forms of knowledge are valued and explored. By engaging with the Other as indigenous, queer, people of color, subaltern subjects in a respectful and inclusive manner, decolonial education not only addresses the historical and ongoing effects of colonialism but also enriches the educational experience for all students. This kind of education offers a transformative approach to overcoming the limitations of colonial educational practices. By embracing diverse epistemologies and fostering an inclusive learning environment, it aims to create a more equitable and comprehensive understanding of knowledge that reflects the richness of the world's diverse and different intellectual traditions.

As Walsh (2013) presents "decoloniality is not a theory to be followed but a project to be assumed. It is an active process to pedagogically walk" (p. 67). It consists of "other" modes of thinking, questioning, being, feeling, knowing, imagining, listening, looking, and being that challenges the single reason, the single story, of colonial power, to recreate and make possible the liberation of the oppressed, their affirmation as "others," their re-existence (Walsh, 2013). For Walsh (2013) the decolonial consists of a constant struggle against coloniality to make

visible the Other, the different, the dehumanized. Pedagogy, as a methodology, serves to continue the decolonial struggle.

As Elena Ruíz (2024), a Latina philosopher and advocate for survivors of structural violence and inequality puts it, coloniality is always self-correcting to continue operating, dominating, annihilating. Faced with this scenario, people as power, as political agents (Dussel, 2008) unite to prevent coloniality from prevailing. Returning to the case of Puerto Rico, where the economic, political, and legal crises are by design (Atiles, 2024), that is, not by chance or accident but as a product of U.S. colonialism, Americanization is confronted day by day by the people. That is, Americanization becomes a cause for resistance and political engagement by the population. Puerto Rican cultural identity, with its lights and shadows, motivated Puerto Rican public school teachers during the period 1900–1930 to resist the imposition of English in schools, strengthening the cultural significance of the Spanish language (Barreto, 2020). This is how liberatory education operates, resisting imposition and creating possibilities for liberation from oppressive practices. The resistance of teachers, although imperfect, is fundamental for liberation pedagogy to operate constantly.

Although not exclusive to the educational field (Walsh, 2013), pedagogy serves to develop a liberating education, as it is a porous, flexible, dynamic term. As Alexander (2005), Caribbean educator and activist from Trinidad and Tobago points out, pedagogy can be understood "as in breaking through, transgressing, disrupting, displacing, inverting inherited concepts and practices, those psychic, analytic and organizational methodologies we deploy to know what we believe we know so as to make different conversations and solidarities possible" (p. 22). Breaking through what we think we know to go beyond what is in front of us, beyond what is at hand, is necessary to overcome the totality of coloniality, the interwoven legacy of colonialism, and the effects of racism and capitalism that continue to evolve and perpetuate in the social, political, and global reality (Quijano, 2000).

Inspired by Freire (2005), critical pedagogy encourages students to question dominant narratives and power structures. It promotes dialogical learning, where students and teachers co-create knowledge through critical reflection and action. This critical pedagogy can be transmitted to learners at an early age by using

decolonial language, key to empowering children. As Dussel (2011) states, "The child, being human, discovers very early the meaning of the sign; that is, the reference of the sign or signifier to a signified" (p. 132). Through language, children can already interpret and question their reality. Their capacity to ask "why" can be challenging, provocative, because it arises from beyond the world, from the ideologizing totality. This moving forward is already "exposure, risk, courage" (Dussel, 2011, p. 135).

Ideologization, however, constantly resists the interpellation of the Other, be it child, youth, adult or elder. Ideologization, like the cavern of Plato's allegory, "violently imposes semiotic totality as ideological domination" (Dussel, 2011, p. 135). That is, it uses the "expression of signifiers, signs" (Dussel, 2011, p. 181) to name the Other, dominate them, and construct a narrative that keeps them subdued. However, before semiotics, there is silence, the "face-to-face" encounter of the newborn child with their family, with their community. This encounter is "protosemiotic," since in silence something is said, not with words but with the act of revealing oneself, with one's close presence. This face-to-face revelation is such that it constitutes us. "The Other as free is the primordial sense of being" (Dussel, 2020, p. 115). In other words, we are thanks to proximity.

The encounter with Otherness, then, is not merely a moment of recognition but a fundamental movement between unconsciousness and consciousness. It is in this pre-semiotic space that the self is shaped, not only by what is spoken but by what is silently revealed. In this unfolding, the Other disrupts the totalizing grasp of ideology, opening a fissure where genuine ethical responsibility emerges. As Levinas (2015), Lithuanian philosopher and writer of Jewish origin suggests, the face of the Other calls us beyond being, toward an infinite responsibility that precedes and exceeds ideological constructs.

In any case, the semiotic totality of colonial education as ideological domination, as ideologizing tautology, suppresses the exposure of the Other. This education dominates the Other, alienates them, and their silence and the revealing word of the Other, who, being free, could communicate with others and use their capacity to interpret and question reality.

The negation of the colonial education as ideology, as negation of the Other as slave, is not enough to initiate liberation. There must also be an "affirmation of

the alterity of the new system that emerges from the manifestation of the exteriority of the Other" (Dussel, 2011, p. 148). This affirmation must be translated into a concrete and real economic and human relation.

The first economic system was a utopia: to feed the newborn and breastfeed it (Dussel, 2011). That is the first participation of the economy, that is, of "the practical-productive relation, the relation of the 'person-other' mediated by the product of the relation 'person-nature'" (Dussel, 2011, p. 151). Childhood, at least in its first years of existence, depends on its mother, on other(s), to fulfill the "lack of" food, warmth and attention. Once they grow up, the child begins to live their freedom, their "power-to-be," to fulfill their project, taking care of their "lack-of" by themselves, participating in the economic and solidar service to the other as a people. Hence, the economic or solidarity service allows for an economic liberation; that is, the act par excellence in which "knowing how to think the world from the alternative exteriority of the other" (Dussel, 2011, p. 65) is still realizable.

If we return to the allegory of the cave, prisoners like the Other have been there since they were children. Have they ever had a face-to-face relationship with their family? How much of an encounter with the Other have these prisoners of the cave experienced? Although we do not know, we can imagine that their human nature calls them to be more human, to find meaning, to meet the Other to satisfy their "lack-of." If at least the prisoners could help each other, imagine a fuller life in which they could exercise their need for the construction of a new order, then they could put into practice the "realization of the exteriority of the other" (Dussel, 2011, p. 81). Thus, the human being is determined by the preferential option for the Other as needy, ceasing to be free with respect to them. This occurs because by choosing the realization of the exteriority of the Other, the project of the person advances in that direction, that is, it moves dialectically in the chosen dimension and not in the other possible ones (Dussel, 2020). Thus, to serve others, to put oneself at stake for them, is an act that subverts reality itself. Hence, the liberation of the prisoners of Plato's cave does not only consist in leaving the cave, but also in meeting the Other face-to-face and taking a gamble for them in their process of liberation. Something similar happens when a decolonizing education is practiced in favor of the excluded of this world.

Education in most colonized countries has been based on a global methodology and pedagogy but does not address the root causes and challenges in the local context. Given this scenario of lack of attention to context, it is pertinent to develop and implement what the African American pedagogical theorist and teacher Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) calls a culturally relevant pedagogy, a pedagogy that highlights the cultural competence of students through a critical awareness that challenges the status quo of the current social order. In a sense, culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to insert education into inherited and acquired culture, rather than the other way around. By embedding education in culture, the learning community draws from the rich cultural, social, historical, and familial experiences that come from the communities that educators intend to serve (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In other words, culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes that, without culture, education loses an ontological and existential foundation that ends up distancing students from the learning experience itself and from the possibility of transforming their social environment. Therefore, a decolonizing education starts from the Other, who with all their personal, family, social, cultural and political identity, always presents themselves from their exteriority, beyond any system that seeks to totalize, assimilate, equalize.

the analectic as a basis for a liberating education

Going back to Plato's allegory of the cave, the prisoner is always situated "beyond" the cave. It is analectical, that is, "it is always situated beyond (anó-) the horizon of totality" (Dussel, 2011, p. 167). To affirm such exteriority is to affirm semantically its distinction. Indeed, to know how to think of the Other, or the dignity of the Other, outside the cave, from a viable utopian system, of a more just future, is an analytical question (Dussel, 2011).

The analectical moment of the Other consists, among other things, in the totality of the caver being called into question by the provocative interpellation of the Other as prisoner; listening to their word (and their silence), even if it cannot adequately interpret the word (or the silence) of the Other that bursts forth from beyond the foundation; accept, out of respect for the Other, the word (or the silence) that bursts forth; "gamble" its existence in order to fulfill the requirements of said "lack-of" and demands of the imprisoned Other; and launch itself into

praxis for a future project of liberation (Dussel, 2011). Praxis is the last step since, "the first in intention is the last in execution" (Dussel, 2020, p. 128). In this praxis of liberation participates the imprisoned Other who is eager to free themselves from prison.

Thus, both the allegory of the cave and decolonial pedagogy seek to liberate the oppressed from the chains of present injustice. Just as the prisoners in the cave are liberated from ignorance, decolonial education aims to free students from colonialism's mental and cultural chains (Freire, 2005). Both paradigms stress the importance of moving from darkness (ignorance and oppression) to light (knowledge and empowerment). In both models, the educator is not merely a conveyor of information but a guide facilitating the learner's journey toward critical awareness and self-empowerment. The educator must challenge students to question their assumptions and perceive a broader reality (Smith, 2012). Moreover, the Other is part of the exercise of critical consciousness. This critical consciousness is important because "[t]he liberation of the oppressed is effected by the oppressed, through the mediation of his critical consciousness; of the 'organic intellectual' with and in the people" (Dussel, 2011, p. 107). Critical consciousness is what allows a people to discern the worst and the best that they have in themselves.

In the case of education, to recognize what we each carry within us is to identify the cultural contexts that have shaped us. In many cultural contexts, there exist too many forms of education and training methodology that are broader than a normal school setting would allow. In many cultures, education also refers to the acquisition of various skills, including cultural competencies (Rodet & Razy, 2016). This can enhance the humanity of children from their earliest childhood. Whatever the system and program, the transformation of the cultural perspective that restores the dignity of humanity is highly needed. In other words, any form of education to be adopted should consider the identity, context, and cultural background of the students. They must learn theories and practices that re-establish their relationship with the local context and challenges to know how to cope with the crisis and counteract anthropological pauperization (Mveng, 1980). In fact, true development comes from a consciousness of a cultural cycle. It is a cycle where people are conscious of their conditions and accept the means to

free themselves. The cultural cycle should aim at analyzing the situation in which people live and act to humanize them and bring them out of oppression and anthropological nihilism. The dialogical consciousness method of Freire (2005) gives back the oppressed the power to liberate themselves, raise their voices and become masters of their destinies. It empowers them to transform their world and culture.

A particular way in which education for liberation operates is in the practice of the pedagogy of questioning, inspired by Paulo Freire (Kohan, 2023). This pedagogy consists of raising questions provoked by textual, visual, auditory stimuli and by the world as a reality to be interpreted. Since for Freire (2004) education is political, the art of questioning allows students to re-politicize education, becoming more aware of their context, to analyze it, examine it and recreate it in more ethical, more humane ways. Moreover, the act of questioning in community, with the Other, is a means to a reflective life. Thus, questioning is a political act through which one attempts to maintain curiosity, collaboration, community, and a sense of practicing affection for, toward, and with others. Thus, philosophy, or as the Argentine educator and philosopher of the intersection between philosophy, education, and childhood Walter Omar Kohan (2021) calls it "the wisdom of love," is exercised in favor of the physical need of the Other who challenges and questions from their otherness.

Approaches, actions, and education of children should be inclusive in that they build on their culture, beliefs, and historic background. Adults should listen and learn from children to construct values from their knowledge and background but also provide enough lights in their historical, present situation in the cave and future challenges. This approach is necessary because it gives respect and protection to children in initiating them into society and reconstructs their memories and heritage.

what is the liberation of the other as a prisoner of the cave?

The validity of philosophy of liberation is demonstrated by its negative destructive capacity, critical of ideologies, and by its theoretical constructive capacity "that allows us to think about the issues that are most urgent to the oppressed world, to the people, to women, to the youth" (Dussel, 2011, p. 185).

Here we are interested in approaching the cave of Plato's allegory as ideology, from its most pejorative aspect. As Ellacuría (1985), Spanish-Salvadoran Jesuit philosopher, writer, theologian, and martyr of structural violence states, negative ideology has the function of hiding and deforming reality to impose an appearance of truth, as if it were the truth itself. It is the one that covers up the domination of the cave. When negative ideology is methodical, it justifies more fully the dominating praxis (Dussel, 2011). It acts as a "simple premeditated deception, in which it is intended, as a social and not purely individual phenomenon, that public opinion considers as true and just what is really false and unjust" (Ellacuría, 1985, p. 49). Thus, negative ideology becomes "ideologization," which "is in close connection with social realities that are very formative of both collective and individual consciences" (Ellacuría, 1985, p. 49). When negative ideology operates as a collective-systemic phenomenon, it is ideologization. This occurs with the cave as ideology.

Faced with this scenario, it is necessary to criticize and unveil "what is ideologized in a given discourse" (Ellacuría, 1985, p. 52) and to create "a new theoretical discourse that instead of covering up and/or deforming reality uncovers it, both in its negative and positive aspects" (p. 52). In this way, the philosophy of liberation does not rely only on its dialectical function, that is, "on the negative movement of negation" (Dussel, 2011, p. 148) but assumes the creative function of affirming the otherness of the new system that arises from the manifestation of the Other (Dussel, 2011).

In the case of liberatory and decolonial education, it is essential to emphasize the importance of confronting racism and colonialism, since passivity or evasion is not the way to confront social injustices. As Simmons (2019), Black activist and educator states, "Educators have an obligation to confront the harm of racism" (p. 1). In the process of committed action against racism, Simmons (2019) identifies five steps to take. First, it is important to recognize and reflect on our privilege and power as educators and members of a community. Noticing whether our power and privilege is affecting or empowering our students of color should be a necessary step to better serve and address the needs of our students of color, primarily. Second, it is important to name racism and white supremacy. It is in that act of naming it that we can notice it, confront it, and repudiate it. Third, it is

fundamental to study and teach history, as it permeates our reality. History can give us an understanding of how racism permeates our educational system, for example. Fourth, talking about race is non-negotiable, since, as Coates (2015), Black author, journalist, and activist states, "Race, is the child of racism, not the father" (p. 7). That is, if we do not talk about race, we cannot understand how our understanding of race is founded on racism. Fifth, racism can only be countered by countering it. In other words, to end racism one must engage in consistent, anti-racist practices that seek to highlight Black joy while naming and criticizing the system that perpetuates racism. The same is true for decolonizing education. To liberate ourselves, we need to meet the Other, so that together we can name injustice and violence, and seek to create a more humane world, where the Other as poor, imprisoned, colonized is the starting point for creating liberation.

conclusion

As opposed to the cavernous totality of Plato's allegory, decolonial education must operate through the Other in the affirmation of their otherness, with the Other in a collaborative effort and in the Other, recognizing it as a constitutive part of the communitarian human reality. Decolonial education, like the prisoner who wants to free themselves, proposes a death to the ideologizing cave; a death that transforms, changes and opens to a new horizon of liberation. In that death lies the possibility of reimagining and concretizing other forms of liberation, in which the Other as prisoner is inspiration, motive, and participant of the liberating praxis.

Plato emphasizes the transformative power of education, suggesting that true education is not merely the transfer of information but a profound reorientation of the soul towards the good and the true. Liberating education for children is all-encompassing and includes intellectual, moral, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of human development to brighten their future. The call and action for a change in the educational systems is needed to liberate the minds of children from ideological and alienated knowledge. Liberation can be conceived through popular education, service to the Other, and hope in our human capacity. There is a need for an education that helps learners to acknowledge and believe in their power to bring change to the community (Ogude, 2019). This

self-empowerment empowers self-liberation, not in isolation, but as a provocative act of community liberation. Empowerment and enlightenment through education play an important role in the anthropological development of humanity.

Through education, society participates in the liberating process of the poor and empowers the weak and vulnerable. Education can be a peaceful weapon to end colonial dependency and marginalization. As Freire (2005) argues, in the context of oppression and marginalization, we should prioritize education as a tool that liberates and humanizes. Thus, in this context, education should remove "dependency syndrome, victim syndrome, and initiate a survival syndrome through advocating for praxis-oriented and prestigious education" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). That fits the local context and places emphasis on creativity, entrepreneurship, and self-employment.

In examining the steps to free the prisoner and the transformative nature of education, we can draw a parallel between the allegory of the cave and the call for decolonial education. Both narratives aim to transform the learners' understanding of the world, empowering them to engage with it critically and actively. While Plato's allegory focuses on the philosophical journey towards truth and enlightenment, decolonial and liberation education emphasizes the political-communitarian journey towards the liberation of the poor and denied Other. To actualize decolonial education, it is necessary to dismantle the historical ideologies of the educational systems, emphasizing the humanity of the encounter with the neediest and despised of this world. This shared emphasis underscores the crucial role of education in achieving personal and collective liberation. As in the allegory of the cave, most educational perspectives and policies in many countries have followed a unidirectional view of education. Education does not always respond to the cultural context but keeps people in the shadow of the cave. Faced with this lack of response to the cultural context, a decolonial education is necessary, which allows us to leave the cave, finding wisdom and perfection in the service of the Other, the one most in need of unconditional love.

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