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Keywords

school violence, neocolonialism, Trinidad, hierarchies, curricula, student discipline, attractors

Disciplines

African Languages and Societies | Curriculum and Social Inquiry | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies | Secondary Education and Teaching

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A neocolonial warp of outmoded hierarchies, curricula and disciplinary technologies in Trinidad's educational system

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Introduction

The image of a space-time warp has long captured our imagination. It often conjures notions of disorientation, and it is this essence I re-appropriate for this article, by arguing that colonialism created a warp in the Caribbean which endures today. I conceptualize this warp as a neo/colonial state of thinking and being that informs and constrains the actions of the Trinidadian state and its citizens, because it is difficult to structurally perceive, analyze and destabilize. By utilizing the notion of attractors--organized patterns of systemic behavior--I focus on outmoded aspects of Trinidad's educational system as evidence of a neocolonial warp; a contemporary iteration of the original. I view these aspects as outmoded because they are not able to foster the kind of critically-minded, self-decolonizing citizen that Trinidad needs.

This warp is not unique to Trinidad, but it may be a characteristic of many former colonies. In this article, I write of neocoloniality because the prefix ‘post’ in postcolonial may be deceptive in that it blunts the capacities of independent nation-states in recognizing how dependencies still exist. As Jabri (2013) notes: ‘the postcolonial condition does not suggest the end of coloniality, but it is constitutively meaningful only in relation to coloniality and its legacies’ (pp. 5-6), legacies that I call ‘lingering colonialities’ (Williams, 2016).

In joining the 'search for a vocabulary and analytics that might speak to the stark and occluded durabilities of imperial effects, [and] to their tangible and intangible effects' (Stoler, 2013, p. x), I hone in on three aspects, from data collection, that are part of maintaining an educational neocolonial warp: hierarchies, curricula and disciplinary technologies. My main entry point is a research study I have been conducting on school violence in Trinidad which reveals a wider network of structural violence in which ‘youth violence’ is anchored. In other words, the focus on direct/material violence is rather depoliticized and disconnected from historical antecedents, while the more structural influences on violence remain largely unquestioned (for elaboration, see Williams, 2013). In sum, I expose the structural violence of lingering colonialities within Trinidad’s educational system, and the role that they play in sustaining a sort of existential warp.

Theoretical Framework

Colonialism was about order, control, exclusion, marginalization, violence, exploitation, and infantilization. These were informed by ‘a logic of coloniality’ which created a ‘colonial matrix of power’ (Mignolo, 2011). This matrix and its logic of coloniality are the centerpiece of my critique because they constructed subjects, knowledges and institutions within a Western template, while denigrating anything else that did not conform to that mold. I contend that this had the effect of warping subjugated peoples’ sense of space and time. Hierarchies, curricula and disciplinary technologies were some of the tools used to bring about order, control and exclusion, generally, and in education specifically (Carnoy, 1974). Neocolonialism extends this logic (see Nkrumah 1965; Ashcroft et al, 2000; Crossley & Tikly, 2004, for conceptualizations of the term, and Jules, 2008; Bacchus, 2008; Rivzi et al, 2006, for discussions of colonial legacies in education amid this epoch of globalization), for it has been internalized in the ‘postcolonial’ era (Fanon, 1986).

As regards my purposes, I use neocolonial to mean 'a continuation of past [colonial] practices' (Altbach, 1971, p. 237), which have become ‘calcified and persistent’ (Lavia, 2012, p. 25). I also utilize the prefix ‘neo’ because to say a ‘colonial warp’ would be empirically and intellectually untrue, for there have been advances in Trinidad’s educational system and the wider society; for example, Trinidad boasts universal access to primary, secondary and tertiary education. But upon closer examination, I observe the ways in which ‘schooling is a specific site where the conceptual force of coloniality continues to operate’ (Richardson, 2012, p. 541), from the simple to the sublime and from the visible to the latent: from school uniforms and corporal punishment to the hidden curriculum as enforced by the binary of ‘prestige’/non-prestige schools.¹ As Burnham (2008) notes from his 1989 data collection on the Trinidad educational system, 'on the whole, despite expansion of the system, socially conservative conceptions of education have continued to predominate through the post-independence period' (p. 318).

Hickling-Hudson (2004) states that ‘the model of education inherited from European colonial history is more than dysfunctional for Caribbean goals of improvement’ (296), a wished-for improvement which is often measured by internationalist (read Western

European/American) metrics. Developing countries (like Trinidad) subscribe to these metrics (including PIRLS and TIMSS) to gain ‘legitimacy’ in the global arena. These subscriptions to modernity are perhaps Sisyphean, developmentalist efforts in a game inaugurated and stacked by the logics of imperialism and coloniality, and now by the logics of neoliberalism and contemporaneous globalization. Mignolo (2011) describes modernity as a double colonization of time and space, shaped and enforced by a ‘resilient colonial and colonizing epistemology’ (Nyamnjoh, 2012).

This resilient (neo)colonial warp can be more deeply and theoretically explained by metaphorically appropriating research conducted by Coleman (2011) and others who merge theories from complexity science, dynamical systems, social psychology and conflict studies, because the warp is indeed dynamical, non-linear, complex and has immense staying power. In his research on intractable conflicts, Coleman writes about attractors, which are organized patterns of systemic behavior (p. 8). Vallacher et al (2010) describe an attractor as a subset of potential states or patterns of change to which a system’s behavior converges over time. Metaphorically, an attractor “attracts” the system’s behavior, so that even very different starting states tend to evolve toward the subset of states defining the attractor. In the absence of an attractor, a system can change and evolve in response to whatever influences and forces it experiences. When a system’s dynamics are governed by an attractor, however, the system is resistant to perturbing influences that would otherwise move it to a different state or pattern of changes. An external factor might promote a temporary change in the state of a system, but over time the system will return to its attractor (p. 265).

I characterize the logic of coloniality, and its accompanying impacts, as an attractor. As regards this paper: hierarchization, epistemological dependence and the biopolitical employment of disciplinary technologies have become neocolonial attractors which provide a framework for systemic behavior for and within Trinidad’s schools. However, Trinidad’s educational state of affairs is not purely neocolonialist or deterministic. There are obviously instances that deviate from and resist the norm, but overall, the attractors are quite potent in their power to shape the contours of processes, institutions and discourses.

Context

The Caribbean underwent significant changes as a result of the oppressive triad of colonialism, slavery and indentureship², which contributed to the emergence of complex hybridities, processes and phenomena. Benitez-Rojo (1992), in using chaos theory to describe the Caribbean, portrays it as a site of simultaneous super-fragmentation and super-syncretism, each reinforcing the other; in other words, he contends that the Caribbean’s intricate histories have made it a unique but almost schizophrenic space of new cultural, linguistic and ethnic formations and also intense balkanizations. These seeming antagonisms impel what I call a neocolonial warp.

The region confronts an epidemic of violence. Six of the world’s top ten most violent nations are located in Latin America and the Caribbean (Moestue et al, 2013); relatedly, youth/school violence has caught the attention of various governments. In Trinidad, there have been reports of school violence involving ‘murder, attack[s] with a weapon, rape, larceny, kidnapping’, just to name a few (Phillips, 2009, p. 197). Youth violence and crime in the Caribbean are tethered to other issues, such as ‘high levels of youth unemployment, poor educational opportunities, and feelings of voicelessness and exclusion from national and regional

governance processes', with access to drugs and firearms and volatility in some communities playing contributing roles as well (UNDP, 2012, p. 45). While I acknowledge the gravity of youth violence in the Caribbean, I am interested in penetrating the superficial 'analytics of violence that points solely to agents and intentions' which too often obscures 'more pervasive forms of violence that are "built into" structures, institutions, ideologies, and histories' (Dilts, 2012, p. 191). In so doing, I seek to disrupt/complicate the neoliberal casting of youth violence as 'an important development challenge worldwide' (see UNDP, 2012, p. 45), thus my interest in examining the structural violence of this neocolonial warp in Trinidad's educational system.

Brief History of Trinidad's Educational System

In the 1700s, when different people were settling in Trinidad, a hierarchy of social status developed, reinforced by a differentiated set of educational provisions based on one's societal position. There was hesitancy in providing any education to the black slave population, lest it contribute to revolts; whatever little that was provided was religious instruction by missionaries. A few 'token blacks' were educated/trained to staff administrative roles (Bacchus, 1990), while any other educational provisions were for the children of the white ruling elite. Colonial schooling was therefore 'part of the ideological state apparatus for establishing a desired social order', 'inculcat[ing] into the colonized a world view of voluntary subservience to the ruling groups' (London, 2002, p. 57) and 'secondary citizenship' (A. Natsoulas & T. Natsoulas, 1993, p. 108). This was intended to 'reinforce colonial values and hierarchies of power' (Lavia, 2012, p. 12).

In the post-emancipation era, as the desires increased for expanding educational provisions (Gordon, 1998), the colonial government provided grants via religious bodies to build more schools and hire teachers (Campbell, 1965). There was however a focus more on primary than secondary schools; 'an unstated objective of this reluctance to provide government aid for secondary education was to discourage any rise in the educational and occupational aspirations of the lower classes' (Bacchus, 1994, p. 220). With the global pivot away from Caribbean sugar, many white people left, thereby leaving various bureaucratic vacancies; secondary school education thus became vital for social mobility (Bacchus, 1994).

The assortment of different religious bodies providing their own education caused conflicts, leading to the colonial government's decision in the late 1850s to provide some of its own schools. In effect, this birthed a dual education system (Gordon, 1962), and strengthened the hierarchy of educational provision and opportunity, which reflected the social structure at that time (King, 1999). This dual system still persists; a configuration, I argue, that sustains educational inequity in Trinidad.

As independence approached, the need for mass education became even more apparent. Across the Caribbean, educational expansion was linked to economic development/progress (Springer, 1965). In Trinidad, the government wanted to integrate this dual system, however, the religious denominations persisted (Stewart, 1981). They managed to procure the 1960 Concordat, which effectively concretized their authority over the schools they supervised.

The Trinidad and Tobago government (GoTT) created many junior and senior secondary schools (new sector schools: NSSs), which became part of an expanded dual educational system (Campbell, 1992; London, 1994). The NSSs operated on a shift system, so that for example, students would attend classes in the morning session, leave at noon and an entirely different batch of students would attend the evening sessions. Essentially, thousands of students across

Trinidad did not receive a full day's worth of instruction for many years. Additionally, some of the NSSs were derided for being under-resourced, and not producing the same educational outcomes as their colonial counterparts (called 'prestige' schools). This provides a snapshot of why there is much contention over Trinidad's dual educational system.

The international financial crises of the 1980s hindered the construction of the NSSs to match demand. In 1999, the GoTT implemented the Secondary Education Modernization Program (SEMP), whose primary aim was to transform all junior and senior secondary schools into full five-year or seven-year schools (i.e. Forms/Grades 1-5/6-10 or 1-6/6-12), and construct more secondary schools to effectively widen educational access to all school-age students. Trinidad's contemporary system, with its spectrum of schools built in the colonial era versus a host of post-independence schools (which feature their own hierarchy as well), amply reflects a neocolonial logic of hierarchisation.

Methodology/Data Analysis

The data for this article are from a qualitative, longitudinal case study, generated at a secondary school in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad³, from 2009 to the present [over 4 Phases: Phase A: 7 months (December 2009 – June 2010); Phase B: 3-week follow-up (June 2013); Phase C: 3-week follow-up (June 2015); Phase D: 7 months (December 2015 – July 2016)]. Collecting data over a 6-year period, albeit intermittently, allows me to track patterns, especially in light of my interest in attractors. The school (Survivors Secondary School: SSS), built in the late 1970s, was a former junior secondary school (i.e. having only 3 Forms/Grades) but now features Forms 1-6 (Grades 6-12). Names of the school and participants are all pseudonyms, and some characteristics of SSS have been altered to increase confidentiality.

During Phase A, I conducted 34 interviews with the principal, vice-principal, guidance counselor, 20 teachers, 4 deans, 2 safety officers, 4 Ministry of Education officials and 9 focus groups/class discussions with a total of 84 students. I conducted participant observations and took copious field notes. During Phases B and C, I continued observations and conducted informal follow-up interviews. Observations thus far surpass 800 hours.

The analysis provided in this paper is sourced primarily from observations and field notes. My participants did not explicitly stitch hierarchies, curricula and disciplinary technologies into a coherent structural critique, but my extensive observations and insider-outsider positionality--i.e. I was born/raised in Trinidad but have spent half my life in the US--informed this. However, I have used grounded theory to mine the data for themes that speak to colonial notions of order, control, marginalization, exclusion and violence.

Outmoded Hierarchies

In this section, I'll provide some literature on hierarchies, and then anchor SSS's place within Trinidad's educational hierarchy.

Hierarchisation was integral to the logic of coloniality, and was/is linked to order, status, verticalized relationships, authoritarianism and exclusion. Over time, hierarchisation has become an attractor within Trinidad's educational system and neocolonial processes, institutions and discourses of today prominently feature it.

Although hierarchies are often critiqued as 'relics of the past' (Leavitt, 2005, p. 3), it seems that most societies/social systems possess hierarchies and stratifications (Diefenbach, 2013; Diefenbach & Todnem By, 2012), with some researchers even pondering if these traits are

part of human nature (Leavitt, 2003). Hierarchies have proven to be very persistent, both temporally and spatially (Diefenbach & Todnem By, 2012; Leavitt, 2003), for which, there are indeed some seemingly plausible reasons: 1) they are quite efficacious when it comes to significantly large and complicated, ongoing tasks, 2) they satiate our 'deep need for order...security', and certainty, and 3) they can incentivize career and personal development (Leavitt, 2005, p. 163; Leavitt, 2003; Diefenbach & Todnem By, 2012).

However, there are a number of serious downsides to hierarchies; 1) as authoritarian structures, they can foster fear, rigidity, dependency, distrust, greed, corruption, and conflict, and inhibit imagination and creativity, 2) they can become 'unresponsive' and 'inflexible' and therefore ineffective (Leavitt, 2005; 2003), and 3) they are 'routinely represented as antithetical to the realization of...freedom, equality' (Byrkjeflot & du Gay, 2012, p. 86) and democracy (Leavitt, 2005). Some view hierarchies as expressly exploitative and oppressive (Diefenbach & Todnem By, 2012), and structured so as to deliberately skew more resources and privileges to the few while marginalizing the many (Diefenbach, 2013). Diefenbach (2013) asserts that hierarchies are systems of power and control, that the benefits do not outweigh disadvantages, and that because of them, people have very different life trajectories (p. 4). This complex view helps explain the durability of hierarchisation, which was inherent to colonialism.

Leavitt's statement that 'authority is hierarchy's inseparable handmaiden' (2003, nd) becomes more salient when hierarchisation within colonialism (and colonial education) is more closely examined. Colonial administration and education were about steep hierarchies. Stoler notes that 'colonial administrations were prolific producers of social categories' (2008, p. 1), and as regards education, the intended effect was 'to produce bifurcation, a split in the loyalties and identities of the colonized' (Fanon, cited by Tikly, 2009, p. 37).

With this literature on hierarchies and the aforementioned history of Trinidad's educational system in mind, I will now place my research site (SSS) within this context. SSS was at first a junior secondary school and was converted to a seven-year school under SEMP (i.e. converted from having only three forms/grades [Forms 1-3/Grades 6-8] to now having seven [Forms 1-6/Grades 6-12]). However, the administration, teachers, parents and students understand all too well SSS's place in the academic hierarchy; the school has a notoriety for violence and academic underachievement. During fieldwork over the past few years, I see how hierarchisation is manifested and replicated within the different tiers; i.e. SSS's location within the national psyche (and the hierarchy of schools), the Ministry of Education's (MoE's) relations with SSS, SSS administration's relations with teachers, teachers' relations with students, student relations with each other and the students' relation with the curriculum. The common threads among these tiers are alienation and exclusion; hierarchisation is a reminder of one's place in the system, and exertion of authority, alienation and exclusion facilitate this.

SSS is considered a non-prestige school. Many students who attend SSS have obtained below a thirty percent score on or failed the national entrance exam (at the age of 11-15⁴), therefore, many arrive at SSS knowing its/their status within the system's hierarchy. In an interview with Mr. Romany, the principal, he spoke about how the status quo conveys to SSS students that they are failures and 'garbage' and not of much worth (June 8, 2010). Students and parents have also internalized this message: during a pep talk, I was encouraging a class of all boys to be studious and to possibly pursue study-abroad scholarships. In response, one student said that he could not accomplish that because 'this school is for slow children' (June 21, 2013). On another occasion, one parent, who was called in because her son was 'in trouble', commented to a dean: 'he got 76% on the [national secondary school placement] exam and got placed here

and I believe that has added to why he doesn't like this school' (June 14, 2013). She was intimating here that her son was 'too good for SSS' and that it was the school environment that was affecting his behavior. The message that SSS is a low-tier school has profound implications for society's expectations of it, of SSS teachers' reduced expectations of their own students and even more tragically, for students' reduced expectations of themselves.

As regards MoE-SSS relations, the school's administration is hardly ever consulted, especially for major decisions that impact the school. About 6 years ago, the MoE decided to change SSS from co-ed to all boys as a measure to curb violence. Many teachers and students were against it but hardly any comprehensive and sustained consultations were had with the various constituencies. This failed experiment was ended 3 years into its implementation without any substantive evaluation. SSS thus resorted to being co-ed, left feeling strained by this (and other) major reforms. These reforms are handed down to schools like SSS because the MoE is aware of the differential socio-cultural capital that SSS's students and parents possess. 'Prestige' schools have far more leverage in policy creation and implementation that affect them. This differentiated treatment has historical precedence and is impelled by the logic and attractor of (neo)coloniality and hierarchisation. Elsewhere, I argue that 'such a mode of neocolonial governance, which denies democratic participation, in favor of exclusion, alienation, othering, dominance, hierarchy and control...provides an environment in which violence in schools is exacerbated' (Williams, 2014, p. 141); in essence, a form of structural violence (Williams, 2013).

This hierarchisation--this top-down ethic--at the macro levels of the educational system is also reflected at the lower tiers: a number of teachers feel disempowered from the governance of the school, and many students feel alienated from their teachers and each other. Several staff at SSS (teachers and other personnel) feel as if their voices do not matter, and in turn students feel put down by teachers and they frequently complain that their voices do not matter to many teachers. Commenting on teacher treatment of students, one student noted that some teachers 'treat us like dogs' (June 9, 2010) and 'call children stupid' and 'ass[es]' (June 16, 2010). This critique of teachers is echoed by the younger students about the older ones: bullying is prominent at SSS and 'taxing' (extorting money from younger students) is a major problem. Disaffection courses through every tier of the educational system, and I argue that the resultant disempowerment and power imbalances play out in oft-unhealthy ways (as described above).

Many students of fewer means and with a host of educational needs are relegated to under-resourced schools like SSS. This logic of hierarchisation, and the processes/practices which it engenders and shapes, is a neocolonial extension of some of its colonial correlates: exclusion and the maintenance of a certain social order. The contemporary effects, where the best academically-trained students, and often, children of financial means, attend 'prestige' schools, are indeed part and parcel of a well-oiled system of social reproduction.

Outmoded Curricula

In the prior sections, I gave a bit of the historical trajectory of education in Trinidad and how hierarchisation emerged from therein. It is against this backdrop that I'll discuss outmoded curricula (which include 'content, methodologies employed, evaluation strategies and the hidden curriculum', Dick & Thondhlana, 2013, p. 35) and how they reflect the logic and attractor of (neo)coloniality that creates epistemological dependency, inferiority and marginalization.

A significant aspect of colonialism was 'epistemicide' (Nyamnjoh, 2012): the crushing imposition of the Western episteme onto indigenous knowledges/ways of knowing, by promoting

a ‘monoculture of the mind to maintain control over knowledge production’ (Shahjahan, 2011, p. 189; Said, 1978; Wa Thiong’O, 2011). Indigenous cosmologies were ruptured,⁵ for their own histories were ‘both unknowable and pointless’ (Zachernuk, 1998, p. 491). The curriculum was marshaled toward this project of epistemological colonialism (Zachernuk, 1998) and the colonized were ‘denied...freedom of choice or input in the planning and implementation of policies that affected them’ (Omolewa, 2006, p. 280). Mangan (1993) argues that curricula, across the world, were used to colonize both minds and bodies, and to foster and maintain inequities. I argue that contemporary curricula serve these same purposes, and concur with the assertion that ‘[w]e continue to see and experience overwhelming exclusionary practices in education’ (Moreira & Diversi, 2011, p. 230).

A significant aspect of my analysis is a focus on the hidden curriculum, which Booher-Jennings (2008) defines as ‘the taken-for-granted understandings about the world that schools and teachers, often unknowingly, teach. It is [delivered] through subtle features...such as the way that activities, interactions, and social relationships are structured’ (p. 150). In its subtlety, the hidden curriculum often goes uninterrogated and, in so doing, its messages to students, over time, can be internalized; these congeal and can reproduce ‘unequal relations of power in the social order’ (Edwards & Carmichael, 2012, p. 577). Trinidad’s educational system reflects this disequilibrium of power--in resources, in educational inputs and outcomes, etc.-- and as regards the divide between ‘prestige’ schools and NSSs, ‘the level of differentiation remains the same or may be increasing’ (De Lisle, Seecharan, & Ayodike, 2009, p. 9). It is a differentiation that I argue is intentionally maintained for I observe how the ‘institution of education and the discourse of pedagogy have been largely eliminated from discussions of politics, power, and democratic transformation’ (Giroux, 2001, p. 3), all tantamount to a certain discursive violence.

In his research on Trinidad education, London (2002) documents similar curricular ideologies between the colonial era and the post-independence era: mental discipline (as evinced by ‘monotonous drill...recitation and repetition or the memorization of rules and tables’, pp. 61 & 63), and social efficiency (for ‘maintaining social order’, p. 62). He concludes: ‘despite massive efforts to change the Anglocentric nature of the curriculum since political independence...many restrictive approaches to teaching (and learning) which have been inherited from the colonial past are still in operation’ (p. 68). Hidden and actual curricula are shaped by the neocolonial attractors of order and control; the system cannot escape its reliance on colonial methodologies.

At SSS, neocolonial curricula are firmly entrenched. In classroom observations, many students often seemed quite disengaged, and much of the pedagogy resembled the banking education model that Freire (1990) describes as a teacher depositing information into students for future withdrawal/regurgitation. Below, I share extensive fieldnotes that reflect these points:

For the next two weeks I plan to sit in one class... It is deemed, by some deans and teachers, as the ‘worst-behaved class’ among all Form 1 (Grade 6) classes. It is all young men, ranging from ages 12-17. I requested this type of class to ascertain how they are being taught and treated. They are indeed quite an energetic bunch; they barely sit still and they frequently fight. They are often unsupervised, which creates space for these fights...During this period, a teacher (Mr. Singh) is supervising for an absent colleague; the students keep asking ‘sir, can you take us outside?’ He responds ‘No! Mr. Seeram is not here, so just relax yourselves!’ There are a number of outbursts in the class; he yells ‘Hey! What happen to all of you? You all are stupid or dotish? Which one?’ The bell rings, announcing break-time. By this time, the class has not had any instruction for two whole class periods...After the break, there is another period of no instruction.

In the following period a teacher, Ms. Lockby, arrives...She has spent about fifteen minutes of a forty-minute period trying to settle them; she refuses to teach until they are completely quiet. She writes on the board then walks around the class, grading the work of the few who have been paying attention and managed to complete what she had assigned. The class remains loud and unsettled. No actual dialogic instruction is taking place; merely 'depositing' and regurgitation...This mode of teacher-student interaction has been common over this two-week period. One dean, Ms. Jaden, in chatting with me about this 'trouble class', said 'this is why many teachers take their holidays because many are frustrated'. This is in reference to teachers taking vacation time.

After lunch, I return to the class...A teacher enters and does not greet them the way most teachers do (i.e. awaiting them to stand up in unison). She heads to the board and begins writing. One student is not seated and has been causing a bit of a stir in the classroom; she pushes him out of the class and into the corridor...So far, the pedagogical modus operandi involves lots of yelling to procure order, sharing information on the board (because it is usually too loud to teach), and checking work of individual students who manage to complete the tasks. She addresses the whole class in an attempt to teach; this is the first time all day that I have witnessed someone trying to teach the entire class. Her lesson is on limericks. She reads one to the class about a duchess having tea and her rumbling abdomen. Some students ask 'what is abdomen?' Student miscomprehension seems rife, but she presses on. After reading the limerick, she returns to the chalkboard and continues writing. One student says aloud 'I'm not understanding some things on the board!' The teacher does not respond. Another asks 'Miss, is this for marks? (i.e. 'will this be graded for points?'). She says 'no'. The bell rings and the students run out. I ask her 'is class always like this?' She responds 'always...it is not that some of them are dunce; they could do the work but it's just I feel ADD or whatever is going on at home and spilling over into school. Many parents don't check their homework or show concern' (Excerpts from fieldnotes, June 10, 2013).

This snippet of fieldnotes catalogues many problematic aspects of the education that SSS students receive (or do not receive). Although teachers are permitted a number of absences, many students are often unsupervised and thus do not receive any educational instruction. A staff member told me that sometimes 'teachers are here and do not even go to their classes' (informal conversation, January 2016). When a teacher is absent and another steps in to supervise that class, yelling is oftentimes used to gain the students' attention. The typical teacher-student relationship is one that is very hierarchical and demands a certain silence and docility from the students. The pedagogy itself is frequently rote, didactic, authoritarian, and culturally unresponsive, and lacks any critical engagement for the students. The few students who were trying to follow along and who sought to comprehend, were summarily ignored; they seemed resigned to note-take that which they barely understood. The logic of coloniality feeds this pedagogical structure and methodology, and repeatedly indicates to students their place in the educational hierarchy, developing a sort of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) of disposability and uneducability (Williams, 2013). The dependence on this antiquated mode of teaching and learning reveals how it has been internalized and how it engenders the same outcomes of colonial approaches to education: to create hierarchies that benefit an elite and to foster feelings of inferiority and marginalization within the lower classes.

This inferiorization is internalized by the students and is demonstrated repeatedly. The word 'dunce' has become an insult/weapon used by the students against each other. One afternoon (June 11, 2013) during a computer class with the same group of boys (mentioned above), when the teacher was frustrated with the class being unsettled, a student yelled out 'all yuh duncee niggas, watch dem dunce niggas!' (you all dunce niggas, watch those dunce niggas!) The next day in class, a student told another who was grappling with a particular assignment: 'dat lil easy ting you cyah do! Dunce!' ('that little easy thing you can't do! Dunce!'). The frequency with which they police each other's intellectual worth is indicative of an internalization of the hidden curriculum at SSS.

Many of these students, by not seeing themselves in their curricula, develop feelings of alienation and exclusion, amounting to what Freire (1990) calls a necrophilic education, for it stifles intellectual curiosity, imagination and ownership. The drop-out rates partially indicate this alienation. For example, the school tried an experiment where they pulled the 'trouble' students together from different classes to create a separate class, but by the end of that year, fifty percent had dropped out of SSS (or transferred elsewhere). During a visit (June 2015), I noted that the class of 21 boys (from the fieldnotes above) had dwindled to about ten. Dropping out of school without any kind of skill or certification makes the students ripe for low paying jobs, the drug trade and/or gang warfare. Therefore, the cycle of social reproduction and inequity continues.

Outmoded Disciplinary Technologies

Disciplinary technologies refer to mechanisms used to surveil and control the bodies of others (Foucault, 1995). I characterize many of the punitive 'interventions' used at SSS to address school violence as disciplinary technologies. In this section, I argue that the reliance on colonial and outmoded disciplinary technologies has become an attractor, and is intended to perpetuate docility, control, and punishment. I concur with Irby's assertion (2013) that we must 'consider whether disciplinary contexts, practices, and programs undermine or promote educational success' (p. 198). Violence was a major colonial tool deployed toward psychological, spiritual and corporeal subjugation and control. The modern state is no different in its attempt to create 'useful, docile, practical citizens' by employing 'new forms of social control and techniques of government' (Besley, 2002, pp. 422, 420). A product of colonial societal forces was social exclusion. Young (1999) posits that 'the modernist gaze'--by othering those who have been excluded--leads to a 'demonization and manufacture of monsters', which in turn requires a regime of punishment (pp. 5, 114). I contend that such a regime is at play in Trinidad's exclusionary and punitive educational system.

Societal (and neocolonial) predilections with order and control are evinced by the 'profound fears about the moral constitution of youth, social disorder and threats to the accepted cultural norms and practices' (Besley, 2002, p. 419). As regards the Trinidad context, these fears (historical and current) facilitate the usage of outmoded disciplinary technologies. Some of these technologies at SSS (used as 'interventions' to address school violence), are part of an emergent zero-tolerance discourse, and include suspensions, different forms of corporal punishment, threats of expulsion, community service, varied deprivations, and a securitized physical ecology. Because of space constraints, I will focus on only a few of these.

Irby (2013) notes that disciplinary frameworks have shifted to a point where schools are relying heavily on militaristic philosophies including 'zero-tolerance, panoptic surveillance of student bodies, and removal as a form of punishment' so as to maintain order and control (p. 198). As reported by interviewees at SSS, about half the interventions used to address school

violence are of a punitive nature, with one of the major technologies being corporeal surveillance: a colonial, biopolitical tool of dehumanization and containment. This surveillance runs the gamut from regulation of school uniforms, hairstyles and personal accoutrements (e.g. jewelry) to forms of physical punishment. The former are policed for adherence to certain codes, because of the belief that curtailment of school violence begins with an enforcement of simple rules; one could call this a subtle application of the criminological theory of broken windows policing. Students' book bags were also checked at the main entrance for potential weapons, drugs, condoms, etc. and they were also pat-down. At the main entrance one morning, a male student's body was being checked and he retorted 'you wouldn't find anything on me; I is not no criminal you know!' (June 20, 2013). The penitentiary discourse/practices and corporeal policing around uniforms, appropriate hairstyles, and accoutrements are not only oppressive and require lots of energy by school personnel, but are 'part of the larger vestigial socializing practices and processes of the colonial obsession with order and control' (Williams, 2012, p. 162); in other words, they constitute a modern-day 'civilizing mission'.

As regards forms of physical punishment, these (which, with great variance, are still used today), include writing lines (which entails writing a sentence repeatedly to instill a message, and as a form of punishment. e.g. having to write 'I promise not to hit girls', 500 times), pinching, back slaps, beatings (on the butt or hand with a rod), and kneeling for prolonged periods. Corporal punishment in schools is not permitted anymore, but it is still employed. Adult and student respondents perceive it as among the most efficacious methods in addressing school violence. Ms. Jaden, a dean, said 'I was against it, but it works' (April 12, 2010), with another teacher, Ms. Mohabir, adding 'I think for *some* children they need fear, cuz that's the only approach that seems to work cuz they can't rationalize action and consequences unless they see a direct physical here and now' (April 12, 2010). Students and adults were quite cognizant of this element of fear that corporal punishment engendered. When I asked respondents if they had had all the possible resources needed, what interventions would they use to address school violence, about half of them desired increased securitization, including: more safety and security officers, installation of video cameras (even in classrooms), and metal detectors. Presented with an opportunity to envision boldly different alternatives, participants could not help but remain conceptually-anchored within a hyper-securitized framework. The colonial, docilizing logic of punishment, order and control have become very potent attractors, and they therefore constrain the envisioning of alternatives outside of this schema.

SSS students are caught within the interstices of society's constructions of them; conflation of perceived academic deficiency and violence procure the school and its students a stamp of disability, criminality and pathology, a kind of exclusionary labelling which is a key mechanism of social control.

Systemic destabilization

As Mignolo (2011) states, 'global modernities imply global colonialities' (p. 3). There are sturdy, connective threads between a colonial yesteryear and a neo/post-colonial present, despite complex discontinuities, resistances and ruptures. By using examples of hierarchies, curricula and disciplinary technologies, I have argued that Trinidad's educational system is entrapped within a neocolonial warp. The warp is anchored by the principal attractor of coloniality's logic, with its penchants for control, authoritarianism, exclusion, epistemological dependency, inferiorization, docilization and punishment being sub- or co-attractors. This neocolonial warp is an entrenched phenomenon, therefore a systemic, de-stabilizing intervention

will be required. Vallacher et al (2010) posit that more positive attractors can be created over time as counterweights to long-standing, negative attractors. Below, I offer some nascent thoughts on a Systemic Restorative Praxis (SRP) as a means of de-stabilizing the warp; the SRP aims at fostering attractors such as healing, inclusivity, and horizontalization of relationships.

In terms of addressing school violence, much of the literature suggests systemic/multi-sectoral interventions, because school violence is anchored within a broader network of violences. In urging for a systems approach to issues of school violence and educational inequity, Rigoni & Swenson (2000) state that a focus on '[the] single, most visible aspects of the problem are likely not to solve it, and may create additional problems' (p. 293), with Coleman & Deutsch (2001) suggesting that five levels be tackled simultaneously: 1) student disciplinary system, 2) curriculum, 3) pedagogy, 4) school culture and 5) community.

I envision restorative justice/practices as a possible component of this systemic, de-stabilizing intervention, because the warp has caused lots of damage (e.g. disparities in academic outcomes, psychologically-harmed youth, deflated dreams, etc., which do have material consequences). Restorative justice is considered a philosophy, process, outcome and a set of techniques (Bolitho, 2012). As an alternative method for addressing conflict (Bolitho, 2012), restorative justice/practices entails a 'victim' coming face-to-face with his 'offender' so as together acknowledge the harm caused and co-determine an outcome (McCold, 2008; Crawford, 2015). This rests on several core principles: healing/repairing harm, stakeholder involvement/participation, accountability, dialogue, reintegration, and transforming community relationships (Bolitho, 2012; González, 2012). Although its usage in schools is a fairly new endeavor (Schumacher, 2014), restorative justice/practices are being used as alternatives to harsh and punitive disciplinary measures (see González 2012 for examples).

Because a restorative justice 'framework...recasts youth as problem-solvers and assets to school communities' (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014, p. 14), peace/conference circles and peer mediation can be used to address bullying or other 'infractions' (Ashley & Burke, 2009; see Knight & Wadhwa, 2014, for examples of implementation). Instead of suspensions and other punitive measures, restorative justice techniques aim to reinstate student autonomy and disrupt the increasing trends in zero-tolerance student discipline.

However, restorative justice has been critiqued for being employed mostly for low-level offenses and interpersonal communication skills, and being inadequate in tackling more significant conflicts and structural injustices (Ali, 2013; Dyck, 2008; Gil, 2008). It should not be about 'making people behave so that they fit in to some predetermined whole' (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010, p. 111), for this may be simply re-integrating them into structurally-unjust situations/societies (Gil, 2008) by privileging hierarchies and consensus dynamics, and presuming order and stasis (Arrigo, 2008, p. 481). It must go beyond low-level conflict so as to address structural violence, because, by not expanding its reach, it may be co-opted by neocolonial attractors. In pursuing a systemic target, critical restorative justice can for example connect curricula to historical and economic inequities (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014). Beyond just curricula,

Restorative justice [can be] understood in broad pedagogical terms with implications for all facets and fields of education including how adults relate to each other and students, curriculum choices, evaluation and assessment, committee composition, the physical environment of the school and classrooms, and much more (Vaandering, 2010, p. 170). In other words, what is called for is a 'structurally-responsive restorative justice' (Dyck, 2008), one that recognizes power relations on/in multiple educational levels and spaces. As regards the

Trinidad context, I envision a Systemic Restorative Praxis (SRP): one that runs the gamut of multiple tiers of the educational system and one that is iteratively aimed at building a sustainable peace.

This SRP re-conceptualizes relationships (structurally, interpersonally, etc.) so that it continually strives to deconstruct hierarchisation, curricula, discipline and beyond. As regards, hierarchies, this praxis envisions systemic horizontalization of relations; at each tier, relations ought to involve the empowerment and participation of as many varied voices and stakeholders as possible. As Lundholm et al (2012) characterize it: ‘horizontalization is about “undoing” the formal every day practice’ [of hierarchies] (p. 119); this, therefore, must become an integral ethic of practice (and a praxis) so that over time it becomes a positive attractor. Horizontalization of relations and processes brings hitherto separated parties face-to-face on a regular basis, so as to create spaces to repair harm caused by past exclusions, co-interrogate prevailing modus operandi and co-envison and co-construct alternatives that are transformative and generative. Constant self-evaluation of these spaces is the de-institutionalizing praxis that can keep this from calcifying and perhaps resorting to the (neo)colonial default.

Many in Trinidad’s educational system ought to be (re-)educated about these new kinds of human relations because the warp reinforces traditional structures, epistemologies, etc. This re-education calls for a systemic critical pedagogy--similar to what Crick and Tarvin (2012) call ‘a pedagogy of freedom’--because critical pedagogy ought to transcend the school itself. On a deeper level, this constitutes a ‘critical ontology’, which involves ‘freeing ourselves from the machine metaphors of Cartesianism’ (Kincheloe, 2006, p. 33), in my estimation, a cartesianism that was integral to colonial functionalism. We see those divisions among disciplines and different types of knowledges, driving wedges between the indigenous, the qualitative and the ‘scientific’, and as regards Trinidad’s educational system, we see these divisions with ‘prestige’ versus non-prestige, and academic versus quasi-vocational binaries. Critical pedagogy is integral to this Systemic Restorative Praxis because it is about questioning and disrupting dominant systems/master narratives and the relationship between knowledge and power, exposing injustices and inequities, and empowering the subjugated and the marginalized to craft and pursue alternative systems (Childers & Meserko, 2013; Cho, 2010; Derince, 2011; Gruenewald, 2003; Howard, 1999). Through critical pedagogy, students are potentially equipped with the skills and knowledges needed to analyze and transform ‘classroom practice, institutional policy, and societal injustice’ (Chubbuck, 2007, p. 241).

There are many more details that I could sketch through this Systemic Restorative Praxis framework/model. However, its mainstay is the inclusion of many voices in co-summoning a revolutionary, de-stabilizing intervention that challenges and unravels this warp. This would resonate with the concept utilized by Jamaican scholars Rex Nettleford and Charles Mills, of ‘smadditization’, which means ‘to become somebody’; that is to say, the insistence of having your personhood be recognized (see Mills 2010, p. 175). The neocolonial warp in Trinidad’s educational system holds a citizenry macro-developmentally hostage and retards efforts at the truly postcolonial project of systemic resubjectivization.

Untitled, Indefinitely

There’s a centuries’ old ladder, staked deep in our retinae;
Upward-bound, pulled taut our gaze.
Our dreamscape dotted with zeniths and nadirs,

And nary an interstice to call our own.
 Accursèd be the ladder,
 For rungs have become our quotidian reference.

hmaw.

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¹ In Trinidad, schools built during the colonial era are today called 'prestige' schools.

² Trinidad society is a cultural mélange of peoples of Indigenous, European, African, East Indian, Chinese, Lebanese and Syrian descent.

³ Trinidad is part of the two-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. My case study was in Trinidad, therefore I will use that term only and not include Tobago, though the educational system is similar and may benefit from my findings.

⁴ Nationally, most students sit the secondary school placement exam at the age of 11 or 12, but for many students who have been kept back in the primary school system, they often sit the exam when they are older and many of these students are ushered into schools like SSS.

⁵ However, I do acknowledge the many instantiations of indigenous agencies, resistances and appropriations. Although colonial knowledge may have constructed colonial subjects, the relationship between power/control and knowledge is dialectical, and by no means unidirectional (London, 2002; Sengupta and Ali, 2011). On a meta-epistemological level, Stoler (2008) deconstructs the notion of an all-seeing colonial gaze, even asserting that there was not as much rigid, consistent certainty in colonial governance as is usually ascribed to it.