Breaching the Colonial Contract
EXPLORATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE

Volume 8

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Joe Kincheloe (1950-2008)

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Breaching the Colonial Contract

Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada
For my mom, Patricia E. Smith (1948-1996),
who left Tulsa running and never looked back.
I would first like to thank Joe L. Kincheloe (1950-2008) who made this book possible. Joe’s tragic death in December of 2008 came as a tremendous shock to activists, scholars, students, family, friends and acquaintances around the world (I fit into the latter category). We are fortunate that his work lives on however, and that it surely will for some time. Over the better part of two years Joe supported this project, and of course countless others, as part of his and Shirley R. Steinberg’s series Explorations of Educational Purpose with Springer. Joe’s sustained enthusiasm and support for the work were both contagious and necessary for its completion. Let me get in line to thank you Joe.

Thanks are also due to the 18 contributors to this book. Clearly, without them there would be no book. In particular, I would like to thank Antonio Reyes Lopez, whose paper (now his chapter) at a conference in El Paso in the fall of 2006 provided the initial academic spark for the work. It’s a lucky book. To begin with, I was able to include work from prominent senior scholars who I have been reading for a long time. This has been a most humbling honor and a wonderful privilege. An equally important part of this good fortune has been the inclusion of work from senior students and junior scholars whose works bring insightful analyses to issues of colonial relations in North America and around the world. I am profoundly grateful to have worked with this medley of voices. Thanks as well to Professor John Willinsky of Stanford University, for his guidance and for providing a pre-publication quote for the book (and more generally for his scholarship on colonialism and education).

At the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), I have to thank Professor and activist George Jerry Sefa Dei, whose work continues to guide my understandings of power and resistance, particularly with regard to anti-colonial studies. George Sefa Dei’s work has been at the cutting edge of anti-colonial studies for some time and indeed it was his teaching and writing that brought me to the topic. A special thanks for writing the afterword. I also wish to thank Professor Peter Sawchuk whose continued support for the project and much needed guidance with the prospectus have been invaluable. To Professors Dei and Sawchuk, as well as to the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at OISE/UT, my sincere thanks for these and countless other supports over the past few years.
At Springer, I would like to acknowledge the tremendous work, patience and skill of Padmaja Sudhakher and Bernadette Ohmer who seemed to tolerate my learning curve and who have, I feel, turned out a very well-produced book. Thanks also to Harmen van Paradijs, Senior Publishing Editor for Education at Springer.

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Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful family: Randall Kempf for continuing to show me what lifelong learning and reflection look like; to Lola and Cy, for always being the brightest part of my day; to Darlene McKee, for providing me with the space and freedom to do this work; and finally to Meghan McKee, my partner with whom I stumble down this road – for all that you are and do. I love you madly.
Every new colonial act re-imprints old forms of domination as well as reinstalls new ones and the emerging hybridity transcodes social relations of domination and exploitation such that it can appreciably be called a collective form of subjectification, more specifically, a perpetuated neocolonialism. What is interesting about many of these new forms of colonization is that they are now legitimized retroactively as kitsch art and media spectacles that colonize our subjectivities, and shape subalternity by giving impetus to the direction of our desiring. We are living in willing captivity to our worst nightmares, ensepulchred inside a pseudo-ethnographic pornscape of the exotico-folklorico, those savage documentaries of the 1960s that have their roots in such 1950s films as Sex Madness, Savage Africa, Mau Mau, Cannibal Island, Continente Perdido, Magia Verde and L’Impero del Sole—documentaries who go by such names as Mondo Cane, Mondo Nudo, Mondo Freud, Hollywood’s World of Flesh, Onna Onna Onna Monogatari, La Femme Spectacle. If, decades ago, we sought out the bizarre and the lascivious in the thrill of mondo cinema, in films that exploited the abject other, sensationalizing and mythologizing the delights of the imperial unconscious, today we no longer need to seek out the repressed underside of the representational dreck that has garrisoned our white settler ideology, our empire of normative claims, since it is fully integrated into our daily lives.

Immersed in a popular culture unswervingly saturated by endless spectacles meant to divert attention from substantive political issues and debates and to proselytize for capital, we have become silent accomplices in the ravages of corporate expansionism and imperialism and the resultant dislocation and widespread misery. In the name of the most holy acts of consumption, the state media apparatuses, powered by turbines of moral turpitude, not only have failed to resist the complete takeover of the public sphere by the logic of capital, but actively promote capitalist logic. In other words, under the guise of de-fanging the alienation produced by the social labor of capital through forms of entertainment, or making us more critically informed citizens through its mission to educate and shape the character of the vox populi, the media actively promote such alienation.

We are living ablaze the spectatorial gaze of imperial desire in reality television shows, in porno sites that cater to every specialized sexual desire, in sci-fi channels where we can be destroyed or saved by alien life, in the “nature” channel where we
can watch lions devour buffalo and fight hyenas and snakes injecting lethal poison into unsuspecting victims, in posted video streams where we can watch beatings of the homeless, teenage girls pummeling each other unconscious, Islamic militants beheading American contractors in Iraq or even suicides caught on videotape in sleepy suburban U.S. communities.

We know in advance that the outcomes we seek will never be realized, they will always the same, fixed in their present absence not by their own interior logic but by the rules of the capitalist game where a grotesque inequality possesses overwhelming preponderance. But it is the act of revelation that is important—that we will be victorious and will claim the planet for our own again—because then we can, if only briefly, suspend for a moment our knowledge that nothing will substantively change, and indulge ourselves in undermining our own fears with fantasies of hope—enjoying our symptoms as some Lacanians might put it. We have become imprisoned in basic Christian fantasies that a leader will magically appear at the gates of Jerusalem and turn the world upside down, putting it back on feet of righteousness. The promise of the American Dream has not lost its currency, but it is engaged as an empty promise, endlessly deferred, and recognized—resignedly—that it is now part of post-future America, not as an immoveable horizon but still something that might survive the current economic crisis, but in reverse-form, as a lurid parody of itself, as a kind of reversal of the Weberian notion that death has become more anguishing in modernity due to a perpetual postponement of happiness. The American Dream has become a promise from beyond, like the resurrection of the flesh at some unknown time in the future, when the oppressors and the oppressed join the lions and the lambs in the Elysian Fields watching Elvira Madigan and her lover gorge on an eternal supply of raspberries and cream.

Unable to impose limits to growth that sustains the current empire or operate outside the empire’s own Manichean logic of “us-against-them”, the current capitalist system has lashed us to the mast of the creditor class and its bubblemeisters, to the banking system of widespread negative equity (which included gangster capitalists who headed Citigroup as well as master manipulators who ran hedge funds attached to investment banks such as Lehman Bros. and Bear Stearns), to over-mortgaged real estate, and to over-indebted corporations.

Unbridled capitalism and the juggernaut of imperialism that follows in its wake has the potential to wreak havoc upon the world in terms of further imperialist wars for resources and strategic geo-political advantage, not to mention ecological destruction of the entire planet. And now the results are starting to reach into our neighborhoods.

Towns that rely on just a few major employers—or a single industry or company—are the most vulnerable during these tough economic times and it is not uncommon to see Depression-era scenes such as food lines. U.S. Senator Hilary Clinton’s healthcare package was going to cost the government $110 billion a year, but the Federal Reserve just handed the American International Group Inc. $150 billion, and that was just the tip of the iceberg. We continue a policy of socialism for the rich and privatization of the trauma of the poor; with the latter carrying a debt burden conditioned by unbound capital and stoked by the market’s hidden hand.
Not far away from where I am writing this, in Echo Park, approximately five hundred people are gathering on the sidewalk, waiting for the weekly St. Paul Cathedral (Episcopalian) food handout consisting of beans, potatoes, onions, and cereal.

Those who suddenly become jobless often resort to suicide, murder, arson and robbery. Exurbs and suburbs are witnessing strange sights—people picking through green plastic garbage bags at home foreclosure sites as the former owners grab what they can and leave the rest.

The recent presidential election was perhaps little more than a rehearsal for a return of the same, a pretext for the restatement of business as usual in a different voice, whose message is more about timbre and pitch than policy. This is because the hope of which Obama speaks is impossible to achieve under capitalism. Even if Obama has the best intentions, and that look likely to be the case at this point in time, the rules of the game prevent the kind of difference that will make a real difference. Everything that could conceivably bring about the kind of social transformation that will dramatically change for the better the warp and woof of everyday life in America is unmasked as an impossible contradiction if we place it in the context of the persistence of capitalism as the only alternative way to organize the globe for overcoming necessity. The richest 400 Americans own more than the bottom 150 million Americans combined; their combined net worth is $1.6 trillion. During the Bush years, the nation’s 15,000 richest families doubled their annual income, from $15 million to $30 million and corporate profits shot up by 68 percent while workers’ wages have been steadily shrinking (and the workers are not the ones who are being bailed out by the government). That scenario isn’t about to change radically with the election of Obama, whose administration is as likely to enhance the rule of capital as challenge it.

Arlo Kempf’s important book, *Breaching the Colonial Contract*, is about hope, but it is specifically designed to counter the false revelations of hope and bring us directly into confrontation with the enduring crisis of colonialism through an astute archeology of the present. Kempf’s book comes at a precipitous time in world history, when a new anti-colonial pedagogy is emerging to challenge the limitations of cultural critique and its postcolonial and poststructuralist advocates in a broad attempt to challenge race-based oppression, economic exploitation and cultural and economic imperialism.

Leaving aside the academic gallants of cultural critique, whose laborious expositions float down to the masses from the oxygen-starved summit of Mount Olympus like metaphysical flatulence and for whom decolonizing pedagogical practices have become a pathological transgression, it remains case that the educational establishment has impounded anti-colonial research as too polarizing or too extremist at a time when we must band together like brothers and sisters and fight the war against terrorism. And at a time when universities are turning out propagandists for imperialist wars that urge us to put an “Iraqi face” on the US occupation of Iraq, and an “Afghan face” on the war in Afghanistan, we can only wonder how well these nationalist masks are able to hide an imperial Michael Myers from *Halloween*. Probably very well. As Kempf notes in the introduction:
Secure in its place at the top of the evolutionary ladder, the US is now legitimized in its inward and outward projects of civilization. America is a feminist in Afghanistan, an anti-racist in Iran, a peacemaker in Israel, a champion of human rights in Cuba and an omniscient (and worthy) big brother at home. The US is now the world’s foremost expert on tolerance, and those who say otherwise must, sadly, be themselves afflicted by intolerance. This mission, like all colonial missions, is a moral undertaking infused with a pedagogy of tolerance aimed to raise the most savage racist to a higher level – the highly Islamaphobic climate of the post 9–11 era is the most powerful marker of this phenomena.

We are living at a time that remains balefully oblivious to Marx’s warning that the ruling ideas are the ideas of those who rule. Much of the poststructuralist attempts at rescuing difference from the process of capitalist commodification have only a contingently subversive capacity since in raising difference to a transcendental status they have too often scuttled the dialectic altogether. It is difficult to confront the notion that our pedagogies and research endeavors are worthy of the protagonistic praxis they are intended to generate when they surpass only superficially the necrophilic brand of liberal and left-liberal reformism that they try so hard to subvert. While critical and postcolonial educational critique has embraced mightily the possibility of decolonizing the conceptual, philosophical, epistemological and cultural dimensions of learning, many of these attempts have been expurgated by the flat-lined anti-politics of postmodernism.

Many post-structuralists unguardedly—and rightly—claim that we are semiotically situated in hermeneutic horizons, in gendered and racialized positionalities driven by power-sensitive and power-expansive relations of symmetrical privilege, and in social space aligned and vectored geopolitically and cross-hatched socio-culturally, and this description is accurate as far as it goes. But too often it fails to take into account the totalizing power of capital and acknowledge that this power has created an overarching matrix of exploitation in which all of these antagonisms have been accorded value in relation to the sale of human labor power in the global marketplace. And during the current structural crisis of neoliberal capital that we are witnessing today, we are experiencing a particularly vicious time where, like force-fed swine made blind and crippled in preparation for mass consumption, men and women are led to the slaughterhouse of capital hoisted on hooks of poverty and debt. While it is important to explore and celebrate the ethnic heterogeneity and heterodox temporalities that power our subjectivity and building border identities that escape the lineaments of Eurocentric epistemes we need at the same time to recognize that the totalizing power of capital creates constitutive limitations in which subjectivities are formed. This, I have argued, can be seen as a form of controlled consent made possible by the production of social amnesia both generated and enforced by the corporate media, and the deep psychology that turns the engines of mass propaganda disguised as a free marketplace of ideas (where the only free cheese available is in the mousetrap). Democracy has become synonymous with profit-making, requiring a rollback of trade union power and a generalized hollowing out of social democracy, not by military dictatorship but by an endless stream of maledictions and execrations against leftist movements and Marxist analyses that deal with the totality of capitalist social relations and address questions of
universality. Canadian theologian Gregory Baum (see Miller, 2005) has marshaled similar reservations with respect to contemporary postmodern thought:

“I have … quarrels with the ‘linguistic turn’ in postmodern thought. You cannot eat words! The linguistic turn corresponds to middle class preoccupations: it is of interest to people who have never suffered from hunger and thus makes the material basis of human existence invisible. Unemployment is not a purely linguistic issue either. I regret that so many philosophers are unwilling to ask themselves how their thought is related to their social location and what the social implications of their discourse are. Karl Manheim in Ideology and Utopia says that we cannot fully understand a sentence unless its social context has been clarified. A sentence by itself has no clear meaning. You must know on what occasion it is said, to whom, and under what conditions. When I teach this, I always give the example of the German anthem, ‘Germany, Germany Above All.’ In 1848, this was the song of the German revolution, and it meant: Germany above all the feudal structures. After Germany became an empire in 1871, the same song acquired an aggressive political message. ‘We shall overcome’ was the song of the powerless who hoped that justice would prevail: if the police department adopted this song, its meaning would be quite different. Thought is always related to a social base. Philosophers sometimes think that thought floats above history and above the economic order, but this is not true. In a context marked by grave inequalities and patterns of exclusion, thought either questions the existing order or contributes to its stability” (pp 28–29).

I wonder what members of the Abahlali base in Mjondolo would think of reading the arrests of their members as a poststructuralist text? Or the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, and other emerging antisystemic movements? This is not to say that linguistic analysis is not important, but any social critique needs to be at the same time conjugated with class and anti-racist struggle.

The paradigmatic innovation of anti-colonial analysis in North America has been significantly impacted by what has been taking place since capital began responding to the crisis of the 1970s of Fordist-Keynesian capitalism—which William Robinson has characterized as capital’s ferocious quest to break free of nation state constraints to accumulation and 20th century regulated capital-labor relations based on some (at least a few) reciprocal commitments and rights—a move which has seen the development of a new transnational model of accumulation in which transnational fractions of capital have become dominant. New mechanisms of accumulation, as Robinson notes, include a cheapening of labor and the growth of flexible, deregulated and de-unionized labor where women always experience super-exploitation in relation to men, the dramatic expansion of capital itself; the creation of a global and regulatory structure to facilitate the emerging global circuits of accumulation; and, finally, neo-liberal structural adjustment programs which seek to create the conditions for unfettered operations of emerging transnational capital across borders and between countries. There still exists national capital, global capital, regional capitals, etc., but the hegemonic fraction of capital on a world scale is now transnational capital. So we are seeing the profound dismantling of national economies, the reorganization and reconstitution of national economies as component elements or segments of a larger global production and financial system which is organized in a globally fragmented way and a decentralized way but in manner in which power is concentrated and centralized. In other words, as Robinson notes, there is a decentralization and fragmentation of the
actual national production process all over the globe while the control of these processes – these endless chains of accumulation—is concentrated and centralized at a global level by a transnationalist capitalist class.

The transnational capitalist class, that has inherited a nocuous rationality, understands that it costs less to keep workers alive in places like China or India or Mexico than it does in the United States because it is far easier to hire non-unionized workers with no medical benefits who are frantic at finding food and shelter and can be hired at a fraction of what U.S. workers would cost.

The most urgent issue for this time, living as we are at the razor-edge of a very dangerous historical juncture is to advance the struggle for a socialist alternative to capitalism, for a supersession of capitalism, for a breakthrough into a post-capitalist future.

Initially developed to repudiate the intemperate and highly reactionary attitudes—all too prevalent within the North American education establishment and redolent of the backlash against non-White immigrants—that affluence bestows intelligence, that working-class students are responsible for their own underachievement (achievement as measured against the standardized test scores of the children of the rich)—anti-colonial pedagogy has been astute in creating an archaeology of the present that can develop (sociological, anthropological, philosophical, etc.) languages of analysis such that students and teachers (‘educands’) can begin to understand their experiences and subjectivities as ‘constructed’ through the intersection of a multiplicity of forces linked to the modes and social relations of production, to spaces and places of capitalist production, accumulation and circulation, to systems of mediation that involve their families, their religious upbringing, their class and racial formations, as well as organizations and institutions linked both to the state and civil society. Initiatives involving ideology critique, de-naturalizing what is assumed to be unchangeable, de-reifying human agency, and de-objectifying the commodity culture of contemporary capitalism have helped discourage progressive educators from a sole reliance on a politics of human rights antiseptically cleaved from the issue of economic rights and unburden cultural studies of its textuality of the negative, that presumably arrived on the wings of the Angel of History (thanks to the prayers of the postmodernists) to save us from the old bearded devil: Karl Marx.

Anti-colonial criticism has helped to deepen the purpose and challenge of critical/postcolonial pedagogy and free enterprise imperialism by asking questions and raising issues dealing with what Anibal Quijano (2000) has called “the coloniality of power”: Are the transformations needed to eliminate oppression and exploitation achievable within the current value form of labor within existing capitalist economic arrangements? What are the limitations of liberal-democratic discourses of social, political, economic and educational equality when viewed in terms of the globalization of whiteness? How can we use anti-colonial work to de-commodify our subjectivities and help whom Kempf calls “people resisting erasure, amputation and genocide” fight the colonial matrix of power? How can education play a part (a necessary but, alas, not sufficient) in social revolution? These questions are far from
mere academic exercises, not only because of the severity of the current crisis, but because the crisis has been acute for the past half millennium. Kempf notes:

Almost a decade in, empire is the dominant mode of cultural production of the 21st Century. If we are unable excavate the archaeology of the present through a holistic and resistance based understanding of the workings of oppression, empire promises to be the definitive fact linking the dawn of this century with that of the next. Anti-colonial theory and practice bring such a reading to the workings of our world. Anti-colonialism responds to the system of imposition as well as to individual acts. An anti-colonial understanding is a holistic response to all, or to portions, of a given system or systems of power. While the implications if anti-colonial struggle vary in nature, and from context to context, two broad colonial trends are worth mentioning specifically when articulating an anti-colonialism of the 21st Century. First, Indigenous people are waging some form of anti-colonial struggle in every inhabited region of the world. This is the key form of anti-colonial resistance of our time. These are not abstract struggles against abstract phenomena; these are the struggles of people resisting erasure, amputation and genocide. Forced to battle the dominant narratives of historical memory, Indigenous people from throughout the world have no Israel to recover from their holocausts, and in many cases have seen no end to these holocausts. The bad guys are still winning. Although many of these struggles are old, they are phenomena of the present. In the North American, Australian and New Zealand contexts, Indigenous peoples are doing battle with the European colonialism of the 17th, 18th 19th and 20th centuries. In these contexts no new understanding of colonialism is needed to understand the perpetuated relevance of colonialism in the 21st Century. There is very little subtlety, nuance or sophistication needed to understand the injustice visited historically and currently upon indigenous peoples by colonial authorities. Subtlety, nuance and sophistication are needed instead when constructing the silence, ignorance and apathy characterizing public discourse around these injustices. It is to these processes of obfuscation, silencing and denial that we must bring a critical and self-interrogative anti-colonial approach to theory, practice, knowledge production and daily life.

Issues such as these, including related themes that draw attention to and frequently explode the limitations and complexities of the post-colonial approach, have been astutely raised in Breaching the Colonial Contract, a book that, through initiating an anti-colonial conversation, seeks a deeper means of challenging repressive and violent social structures brought into being by new incarnations of capitalist globalization. The book addresses numerous topics of major significance in the anti-colonial struggle which include the development of anti-colonial theory and practice; the discourse of critical whiteness through an anti-colonial framework; an anti-colonial approach to historiography; Fourth World liberation struggles; the organization of white settler ideologies and institutions through the lens of anti-colonial pedagogy; Paulo Freire and postcolonial criticism; the Chicana/o student walkouts and colonial schooling processes in the US/Mexico borderlands; the relationship between people of color and Aboriginal peoples in North America; the politics of African centered schools in Canada; anti-colonial trade unionism and community unionism; the politics of disability, the role of the “plantation approach” to the university and intellectual labor in Canada; and building anti-colonial spaces within classrooms. Breaching the Colonial Contract will help readers resist more fully the geopolitics of imperialism and to gain a deeper understanding of how such a politics gives birth to new colonial relationships. Only by re-centering ourselves with uncaptive minds in solidarity with the agency of