

Foreword¹

William F. Pinar

Shauna Knox theorizes as she narrates “the process by which one Black Woman from the Third World experienced decolonization at the site of her subjectivity.”² This striking account of that process exceeds one woman’s experience as it is threaded through scholarship that contributes to and, I suspect, will alter curriculum theory’s ongoing engagement with subjectivity, racialization, gendering, and decolonization. “My purpose,” Knox explains, “has been to explore the interactions between curriculum, colonization, and decolonization, and add to the wider discussion of colonizing dynamics within the field of curriculum theory.” In my view “add” is too modest a verb to describe the significance of this book, a significance simultaneously theoretical and practical. Knox emphasizes the latter:

Though a theoretical understanding of decolonization is helpful for analysis and context, a theoretical study falls short of offering an operational knowledge of how colonization happens within the subject, how it impacts the subject and his or her subjectivity, and how that damage might be addressed. This book attempts to answer that lingering question of how decolonization happens at the internal subjective locus.

That this book does. An exemplary enactment of ethical self-encounter³ this book performs *parrhesia*, that ancient Greek form of speaking candidly that Foucault invoked so memorably.⁴

This extensively documented book addresses five discourses central to curriculum studies: Blackness, Africana womanism, Third Worldism, postcolonialism, and autobiographical curriculum inquiry. “Since Blackness is not monolithic,” Knox reminds, “any attempt to define it is at best incomplete,” as it is an “evolving subjective condition.” The Blackness with which she identifies is that of the “foreigner,” and, she reports, a “Black person on foreign soil is doubly invisible, and

doubly conscious.” Spurred to “activism,” Knox knows that yes, “people of Afro-Caribbean descent” ought to be acknowledged “in principle,” she also knows that “their exploits and discoveries are critical to the advancement of humankind.”

Regarding the second discourse - Africana womanism⁵ - Knox is adamant: “Not only does Africana womanism decline Eurocentric feminisms as a lens for understanding the Black woman, but it contends that the very definition of woman, as it is fashioned as a European construct, is destructive to Black women.” Knox confides that she was surprised by the “remarkable undertone ... of gender throughout the study,” adding: “To be perfectly honest, I only discovered that gender plays a substantial role in the system of colonization after analyzing the studies I completed; I never expected it to surface as a particularly meaningful feature in decolonizing journey.” I, too, was surprised how often, and thoroughly, gender structured race – and vice versa.⁶

Regarding the third discourse - Third Worldism - Knox reports that “I grew up learning that the ‘Third World’ is where I belong, and wherever that world is or has been banished to, I remain in it.” She continues: “Even as I elect to mobilize the ‘Third World’ terminology, I recognize it as a gravely problematic classification its own right. The phrase ‘Third World’ is a geo-political articulation that originates from Euro-hegemonic reasoning and control.” Despite being “enforced by loan shark capitalism,” she reports that “in the Caribbean this [cultural component of Third Worldism] has resulted in synonymity between Third World and Pan-Africanism.” Concerning the postcolonial sources of her scholarship, Knox writes: “I frame my discussion with postcolonial thought, thus drawing on scholarship from both education and postcolonial studies.” Finally, she addresses autobiographical curriculum inquiry as the site and the means by which these all-consuming topics become at once personal and public.⁷

Shauna Knox reveals herself to be “a singular truth that is universally accurate.” Accessing the universal through the particular (and vice versa) is a central aspiration of autobiographical

curriculum inquiry: self-understanding can provide a portal to understanding others. Such a private-and-public project requires fidelity to the facts. “[T]o access this complete unequivocal truth,” Knox knows, “one must put what is subjectively true through experience in concert with what is contextually true through factual precedent, and that the absence of either is something short of truth.” In the inner juxtaposition of subjectivity and objectivity – Knox invokes the concept of “third space,” noting that it is “neither liberatory nor colonized” – takes place one’s efforts at “truth telling, as it requires of its participants a more complete truth.” In the aftermath of a radical constructivism that has corroded the very concept of “fact,” Knox speaks candidly:

Epistemologically speaking, while I do believe that the knowability of truth requires the willingness to explore and critique existing theories and presumptions, I am not of the belief that truth is simply a personal construction which is never grounded in objective fact. In true third space fashion, the inherent challenge, and frankly contradiction, of the present study is that though it is an analysis of subjectivity, I believe principally that truth is objective.

It is the objective truth of colonization - and its political and psychic effects - that Knox lays bare and then confronts, engaging in an inner process of decolonization conceived (after Fanon) as “a rebirth that results from challenging the prison of colonialism.” In doing so, Knox formulates an original and creative concept and method - *currere* toward decolonization (CTD) – that, to my mind, constitutes a major intellectual advance,⁸ one that merits serious and sustained scholarly attention not only in *currere* studies but in curriculum studies overall.

As Knox knows, *currere* represents “an opportunity for scholars who identify with the conditions of the colonized subject to speak back against erasure and denial.” She acts on that opportunity, formulating a method – CTD - that “identifies power dynamics and societal structures like colonization, and it exposes their effects on the subjectivity of an individual within a society.” In her “analysis of subjectivity as decolonizing praxis,” Knox disinters her own internalized “colonizing

ideology,” enabling her to discern “the extent to which it distorts my values, culture, and well-being as a colonized subject.” Knox knows that working from within⁹ requires not only engagement with abstraction (as in “colonizing ideology”) but with specificity as well. Accordingly, she investigates “four discrete colonizing injuries” in her life.

To expose the extent of her own colonization Knox gives “voice to my deviant, and long-silenced colonizing thought pathologies.” In fact, she comes to see her “subjectivity as the colony occupied by foreign ideology, and my subjectivity as territory.” Not only an occupying force, colonization “destroys the colonized subject.” It commits not only cultural but also “internal genocide,” two intertwined forms of violence. What is revealed during CTD is “the complexity of the decolonizing process,” as “colonization” is multidimensional, simultaneously “physical, social, economic, and psychological.” Knox enacts this complexity right before our very eyes; her attempt “to lay down the self” becomes “an effort to save society from itself.”

Decolonization issues its own “demands”¹⁰ its own “call.”¹¹ (Knox writes: “[I] focus on the response to the call which requires a journey into the unknown strangeness within myself.”) It is a “gradual and evolutionary process,” frustratingly so for one eager and determined to be free.¹² “The ugly objective of confronting one’s own colonized subjectivity,” Knox warns, “demands that the self-as-researcher encounter a number of misgivings about self, and yet still elect to persevere in naming every defect and distortion in a decolonizing process that necessitates a violence against the self that is being undone.”

CTD has four stages: *remembering*, *identifying*, *imagining*, and *decolonizing*. Through these one returns to “a colonizing moment and then search[es] for echoes and traces of that instance in every direction of time: past, present, and future.” In the first stage, *remembering*, one locates “the initial site of colonizing injury.” In the second stage – *identifying* – one watches for “echoes, traces, and residue across the past, present, and future that are related to the colonizing moment identified in the

remembering stage.” In this stage one can “discover connections and reactions within subjectivity that were previously beneath [one’s] awareness.” Also in this stage one can come to discover which specific elements of the “colonizing ideology” became installed in one’s subjectivity following a “colonizing injury.” “If I am able to detect how my own subjectivity was changed by an experience,” Knox explains, “I am closer to unveiling my hidden beliefs.” Also in this stage, Knox explores the “wider historical and societal structures at play in order to accurately contextualize my memory.” In this second *identifying stage*, then, one “creates a map, illustrating the spread of influence from my root memory to my contemporary subjectivity.”

CTD’s third stage is *imagining*, “an orientation fostered by engagement in the third space decolonial imaginary that resists all confines and boundaries in analyzing the colonizing ideology that emerged from the *identifying stage*.” In the “third space” Knox explores the “distinction between lived experience of the past, as perceived through memory,” and her “understanding of it in the present as it illuminated by the analysis of colonial ideology.” She suspects that this *imagining stage* might be the “most difficult, as it requires one as a subject to think against thought.” Knox cautions: “Just one iota of insight from the *imagining stage* is so painfully layered and complex, that it is often the weightiest, yet least elaborated of all the stages.” In this sense the *imagining stage* “exceeds” the CTD sequence, “reverberating” through the entirety of one’s “self-reflection and self-expression.” Know that the *imagining stage* can be “a violent encounter with a colonizing ideology that is still effectively working against reason.” As key as “reason” is in CTD, Knox suggests that “decolonizing then is more a re-sharpening of instincts that have been long dulled by a learning process that has dismissed them into absence.” While she acknowledges that the “best” one can hope for is exposing “colonizing ideology,” she is also cautiously confident that “its visibility will diminish its control over me as a subject.” After all, when exposed, “the control of the colonizing ideology ... can be dissected, reviewed, and challenged.” Unseen, the “colonizing ideology remains.” In this *imagining*

stage one can come to a more “comprehensive understanding of what the ideology is, how it holds, and what it has meant.”

CTD’s final stage, *decolonizing*, enables one to understand where one is now in the process of decolonization. It juxtaposes one’s internalized “colonizing ideology and the decolonizing process” and puts these “in conversation with each other.” During this phase Knox discovered “new connections and subjective revelations,” enabling her to “both acknowledge moments of subjective progress and observe realities of my stasis, or attachments to seemingly insurmountable colonizing forces.” Knox named her own specific “decolonizing acts, and how they impact both me as subject and the wider society.” Knox knew that “if the process of invisibility can become visible, so can the subject.”

Summarizing, Knox reports that through CTD one can explore both one’s “patterns and modes of belief,” as CTD lays bare the “shaping of one’s subjectivity through colonization,” exposing how a “colonizing ideology” became “embedded and even remains unchallenged.” CTD offers a representation, “however provisional,” of one’s subjectivity—one’s inner life, one’s inner processes—as one “respond[s] to colonizing experiences as a political subject.” Such self-understanding engenders subjective and social reconstruction. Indeed, the point of *currere*, as Knox knows, is “to change the subject who engaged the *currere* process.” In *currere*, she continues, “the subject should journey to a new place, and arrive at new self-understanding.” *Currere* posits “lived experience as a data archive,” enabling the student “to journey through the *currere* process into new being.” In that “new being” there is “no material separation between the personal and the political within the *currere* journey.” One cannot know in advance the “new being” who will emerge, but CTD posits that the “knowledge of how to achieve the decolonization of subjectivity is already present within the colonized subject.” Knox affirms: “Liberation for the colonized subject must be generated from that subject, and I am the subject in question.”

Knox acknowledges that to surgically “remove colonized ideology and replace it with decolonizing ideology” is not possible. What *is* possible is the initiation of “a journey toward voice, place, and belonging.” The CTD method “centralizes the colonized subject and illuminates the transcendent voyage into the ever-elusive hope of decolonization.” What matters is accepting the challenge, cementing one’s inner resolve, taking the next step, as “decolonization is neither attained nor impossible, but instead an ongoing journey that ends in journeying.” Unequivocally, Knox demonstrates “that subjectivity is a place of possibility for the recovery of the colonized subject.”

And, I suggest, a place of possibility for the recovery of the colonizing subject as well. “The CTD method is not designed to serve Black women from the Third World exclusively,” Knox allows, “but it was created to comprehensively address the particularities of that specific marginalized subjectivity.” For the colonizer it is his or her own humanity that has been marginalized. That fact represents no plea for sympathy; it is, simply, a naming of what’s missing. For everyone Knox’s insight holds: “subjectivity is the place where one’s personhood is formed.” This insight is intensified when Knox affirms: “I am human to myself—this is within my power to regulate, after all—but my hope to be seen as human will never govern the world’s decision to rank me as such. This has resulted in me doing less to be understood and more to be known as I am whether or not I am understood.” Not needing to be understood by the colonizing Other – becoming proudly present “as I am” – breaks the bondage of one’s inner colonization. “As I am” registers the fact that Knox is “the agent of my own liberation, ... [as] all of the insights extracted from my subjectivity and all theoretical elaborations and discoveries came from and were made by me.”

The scale of the struggle cannot be overstated. “This book,” Knox acknowledges, “has confirmed my suspicion that what is done is very difficult to undo.” The internalization of colonization can be so extensive “that even simply ascertaining the measure to which it has been

done is nearly inconceivable.” Creating an “inventory” of colonization’s effects, and then simply “undoing” them, “is unimaginable.” To provide an example, Knox confides that she was – remains - conflicted over “the colonizing superiority of English,” but “I ... often submit to its stranglehold over me.... At this point in my own decolonizing process, I acknowledge in my subjectivity the unrelenting grip of a colonizing language that refuses to be broken.” Becoming conscious of such internalized elements of colonization is invaluable, but “even an awareness of the preposterousness of the indictments of White gaze did not liberate me from its control.” Decolonization, then, reveals that one is at “war” with – within – oneself, “wherein I struggled to dislodge its [colonization’s] hostilities from my subjectivity, while continuing to suffer its effects.”

Despite the odds, there is the possibility of winning that war, however partial and unstable such a victory might be. But decolonization – even when not fully achieved – is one’s ethical – educational - obligation to undertake. Knox asks her readers to undertake it too: “I invite the scholarly field to engage the *Currere Toward Decolonizing* method toward freedom.” She adds: “If no one chooses to make right the wrong of the absence of colonized peoples, like me, we will never really exist. This is the charge Curriculum Theorists must champion pragmatically and perpetually.”

To champion this charge – to right the wrong – is everyone’s obligation and opportunity. In naming and dislodging introjected elements of colonization – the very process of CTD - one initiates a process of “self-discovery” with social implications. Knox explains: “Now that I am pioneering myself into an academic space of self-discovery, I have an expectation that I should be able to learn about myself at every level of learning, and so should everyone. I am still uncertain about what this advocacy should look like, but I know that its materialization must be as practical as it is theoretical. Absence means we are not present, but I am now more here than I have ever been.” CTD, then, constitutes a praxis of presence.

“The CTD methodology,” Knox promises us, “is an act towards a more complete selfhood.” CTD supports the emergence of “voice” and the exercise of “freedom” for those who have been “silenced,” those submerged in “underlying subjective states of internal conflict.” CTD provides a “path to destroying one’s complicity with colonization ... reclaim[ing] and enunciate[ing] the self in an emerging and transcending freedom.” Knox concludes: “As we reclaim our dignity and ourselves, I invite you to take up the tradition.” I urge you to take it up: turn the page. Start the process.

References

- Baszile, Denise Taliaferro. 2016. Critical Race/Feminist *Currere*. In *The Sage Guide to Curriculum in Education*, edited by Ming Fang He, Brian D. Schultz, and William H. Schubert (119-126). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Baszile, Denise Taliaferro, Edwards, Kirsten T., and Guillory, Nichole A. Eds. 2016. *Race, Gender and Curriculum Theorizing: Working in Womanish Ways*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Casemore, Brian. 2008. *The Autobiographical Demand of Place. Curriculum Inquiry in the American South*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Luxon, Nancy. 2013. *Crisis of Authority. Politics, Trust, and Truth-Telling in Freud and Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nazari, Saeed. 2021. *Dialogue for Student and Teacher Development: My Persian Currere*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Palmer, Leslie L. 2019. *Intern Teachers Using Currere. Discovering Education as a River*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Pinar, William F. 1972. Working from Within. *Educational Leadership* 29 (4), 329-331.
- Pinar, William F. 2001. *The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Pinar, William F. 2006. *Race, Religion and a Curriculum of Reparation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pinar, William F. 2007. *Intellectual Advancement through Disciplinarity: Verticality and Horizontality in Curriculum Studies*. Sense Publishers.

Strong-Wilson, Teresa. 2021. *Teachers' Ethical Self-Encounters with Counter-Stories in the Classroom. From Implicated to Concerned Subjects*. New York: Routledge.

Wang, Hongyu. 2004. *The Call from the Stranger on a Journey Home*. New York: Peter Lang.

Wang, Wanying. 2020. *Chinese Currere, Subjective Reconstruction, and Attunement: When Calls My Heart*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Endnotes

¹ Pinar, William F. 2022. Foreword to *Engaging Currere Toward Decolonization* by Shauna Knox. Routledge.

² All quoted passages come from this book.

³ Strong-Wilson 2021.

⁴ Luxon 2013.

⁵ See Baszile et al. 2016.

⁶ Pinar 2001, 2006.

⁷ Baszile 2016, Palmer 2019, Wang 2020, Nazari 2021, <https://www.currerexchange.com/>

⁸ Pinar 2007.

⁹ Pinar 1972.

¹⁰ Casemore 2008.

¹¹ Wang: 2004.

¹² Baszile 2016.