

# Mapping interpretations of decolonization in the context of higher education

**Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti**

*University of British Columbia*

**Sharon Stein**

*University of British Columbia*

**Cash Ahenakew**

*University of British Columbia*

**Dallas Hunt**

*University of British Columbia*

## **Abstract**

This article presents a social cartography of responses to the violences of modernity and uses this cartography to analyse different meanings and practices of decolonization in the context of higher education. As a pedagogical rather than normative exercise, we have tried to map tensions, paradoxes and contradictions we have observed in different responses to the violences of modernity. We start with a brief synthesis of selected literature that outlines the challenges of engaging pedagogically with critiques of modernity. We then present our tentative cartography of responses to modernity's violence. Next, we apply the cartography to the literature on higher education focusing on interpretations and practices of decolonization. We conclude with some reflections on the challenges of developing a different relationship to modernity's grammar in the task of being taught by a violent system in crisis.

**Keywords:** *decolonization; higher education; modernity; pedagogy*

## Introduction

As the inaugural editorial of this journal noted, “decolonization is a messy, dynamic, and contradictory process” (Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012, p. II). This is so not only because the violences of colonization affect nearly every dimension of being, but also because decolonization has multiple meanings, and the desires and investments that animate it are diverse, contested, and at times, at odds with one another. Yet, in the face of the magnitude of the force, speed and devastating violence of colonization and interrelated systems of violence, there is an understandable impulse to suppress these contradictions and conflicts in order to collapse decolonization into coherent, normative formulas with seemingly unambiguous agendas. This tendency is only intensified in moments of crisis and unpredictability, which can leave little time and few spaces for exploring the complexities, tensions and paradoxes of decolonizing work without an immediate need for resolution, coherence and prescriptive action.

However, in the wider context of current social, economic, environmental, and existential crises, it is increasingly difficult to respond with coherence and consistency to unpredictable, short sighted, and often violent institutional changes, all of which may be signs of a system resisting its own collapse. We believe that the frustration that this process generates amongst scholars, students, and activists requires taking stock of a bigger picture to examine how modernity itself has conditioned the responses available to its own violence by naturalizing a grammar (i.e. interlinked ontology, epistemology and metaphysics) that captures and reinscribes our attempts to interrupt and resist it.

Thus, we believe that examining the complexities, tensions, and paradoxes that emerge in different decolonization efforts is vital pedagogical work. In our efforts to engage students and colleagues in discussions about the violences of modernity and the complexities and paradoxes that emerge in different processes and ideals of decolonization, we have started to use social cartography (Paulston, 2009) as a pedagogical tool to generate new vocabularies that can potentially lead to imaginaries beyond the naturalized grammar of modernity. According to Paulston, social cartographies offer a visual synthesis of different positions in tension, highlighting choices that are often made invisible in everyday arguments. In this sense, social cartographies are not meant to be neutral representations of reality, but situated snapshots of crossroads that can highlight different choices, and open new affective, discursive, performative and existential possibilities. In this article, we present a cartography of responses to the violences of modernity, discuss different pedagogical narratives that can be derived from it, and outline its implications for mapping different visions of decolonization in the context of higher education.

We cannot emphasize enough that our use of cartography is *pedagogical* rather than *normative*: our intention is not to categorize positions with which we agree or not, but to offer a visual representation of complex and juxtaposed spaces that we inhabit. Although the main description of the cartography may be initially read as normative, the various modes of interpretation, narrative and reconfiguration that cartography employs has a clear pedagogical dimension. It is our hope that the cartography we present in this paper will generate further

conversations about the contradictory imaginaries, investments, desires, and foreclosures that arise in efforts to address modernity's violence and enact commitments to decolonization.

We begin the article with a brief synthesis of the critiques that have informed our understanding of the violences of modernity, which discloses the theoretical frames of reference from which our social cartography emerged.<sup>1</sup> We then introduce the pedagogical challenges that arise in introducing and addressing critiques of modernity in educational spaces. This section is followed by a presentation of the social cartography itself, describing its formation as a pedagogical tool. Next we outline the implications of the cartography for discussions of decolonization in higher education. We conclude with some reflections on the challenges of dwelling at the limits of (critiques of) modernity.

## **The pedagogical challenges of critiquing modernity**

Walter D. Mignolo's (2000a; 2011) work offers useful metaphors<sup>2</sup> that explain the difficulties of working pedagogically with the violences of modernity (see also Andreotti, 2012). One of these metaphors implies that modernity is commonly defined in relation to a bright, shiny side associated with concepts such as seamless progress, industrialization, democracy, secularization, humanism, linear time, scientific reasoning, and nation-states, amongst others. These concepts, in turn, depend on subjectivities deeply invested in: the notion of universal reason and history; teleological, logocentric, dialectical, and anthropocentric thinking; the objectification and commodification of 'nature'; and the Cartesian self.

Modernity's 'shine' is articulated in ways that hide its shadow, or the fact that the very existence of the shiny side requires the imposition of systematic violence on others. This violence can be articulated through what Quijano (2000) calls coloniality. Coloniality can be understood as a system that defines the organization and dissemination of epistemic, material, and aesthetic resources in ways that reproduce modernity's imperial project. In other words, coloniality represents the spaciality (expansionist control of lands), ontoepistemic racism (elimination and subjugation of difference) and geopolitics of knowledge production (epistemic violence) that are constitutive of modernity (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Mignolo (2000b) therefore argues that modernity's shadow of coloniality is both the hidden face of modernity (for those enchanted by its 'shine') and the condition of its possibility (p. 772). The link between deep investments in modernity and the role that these investments play in the systemic production of violence must therefore be denied (foreclosed) for those who want to continue believing themselves to be good, altruistic people progressing towards a

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<sup>1</sup> This article first emerged through conversations about the difficulties of addressing modernity's violence in educational spaces, as well as through the lived realities of related challenges in academic spaces and in society on Turtle Island. Two of the authors of this paper are First Nation's Cree and two are non-Canadians.

<sup>2</sup> We draw on Indigenous studies' scholarship to conceptualize metaphor as the deliberate use of visual narratives to re-orient constellations of meaning from logos to mythos. As this definition is based on purpose, rather than form, there are no distinctions between metaphors, analogies and allegories.

homogeneous future of rational, consensual harmony. Thus, the project of modernity depends both on the fact of its violent shadow and on the foreclosure of this fact.

This foreclosure is reproduced by the ‘ontoepistemological’ modern grammar (Silva, 2013, p. 50). This modern grammar is rooted in taken-for-granted metaphysical principles and supports deep investments in the ‘shine’ of progress, autonomy, innocence, and engineered futures (Ahenakew, Andreotti, Cooper & Hireme, 2014). For those enchanted with modernity’s shine, the shadow is interpreted as a lack of modernity and as something that can be fixed with more modernity. Hence, when exposed to critiques that implicate modernity’s shine in the creation of its shadow, those enchanted with the shine tend to resist and deny their complicity in harm.

The pedagogical challenge is also formidable given the interdependence of the various violent social relations that constitute modernity’s shadow. Grosfoguel (2012) captures many of these in his description of a “Modern/Colonial Capitalist/Patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric World-System” (p. 82). Many other scholars have examined how nation-states in North America are made possible through Indigenous genocide and dispossession, Black slavery and subjection, as well as exploited labour, ecocide, white supremacist and heteropatriarchal immigration policies, compulsory heterosexuality, gendered violence, and war and imperialism abroad (Alexander, 2005; Coulthard, 2014; King, 2013; Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Sharma & Wright, 2008; Smith, 2006; Spade, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Walcott, 2011; Walia, 2013; Wilderson, 2010; Wynter, 2003).

The cumulative effect of these and other violences has been what Wynter (2003) describes as the overrepresentation of the White, bourgeois, male, who rationalizes his dominion over those he deems to be irrational, affectable, and inferior (Silva, 2007). Thus, with the advent and continued maintenance of the modern/colonial system, Othered ways of knowing and being are “disavowed (displaced, negated, and engulfed)” (Silva, 2009, p. 42). For Alfred (2004), colonialism is therefore “a total relation of power”, and must be understood in “consideration of how we as Indigenous peoples have lost the freedom to exist as Indigenous peoples in almost every single sphere of our existence” (p. 91). Meanwhile, Alexander (2005) emphasizes the ways “colonization has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both the material and psychic levels” (p. 281).

While we do not mean to suggest that the modern grammar is totalizing in the sense that it forestalls resistance, we emphasize that it affects nearly all realms of life for those inhabiting both its shine and its shadow. Discussing modernity’s violence with those whose existence and imaginaries have been framed by modernity is therefore a challenging task both in terms of intelligibility and in terms of affective resistance. This is exacerbated in neoliberal educational contexts driven by the desires of educational consumers to feel good, to look good and to be affirmed as ‘doing good’ (see Andreotti, 2014a). Social cartography is one approach that has allowed us to begin these challenging conversations with audiences that have varied investments in modernity’s “shine.”

## Mapping spaces of enunciation in response to modernity's shadow

The initial iteration of our social cartography emerged in a conversation about the difficulties of engaging different audiences in discussions about historical and systemic patterns that reproduce the violence of modernity's shadow. We identified four discursive spaces of enunciation. These spaces are distinct with different commitments, analyses, and orientations. The first identified space singularly affirmed modernity's shine, grounding humanity in the advancements in science and technology achieved within a linear notion of time, and a seamless notion of progress. Enunciation within this space upholds the maxim that 'we' have never been happier, healthier, or wealthier; hence, any problems are minor and can be addressed by expanding the existing system or making it more efficient. From this space, critical analyses are perceived to be distracting and damaging obstacles to the improvement of underdeveloped subjects and collectives, and to the project of engineering an ideal society. We represent this space in the cartography as the 'everything is awesome' space. The three other broad spaces of enunciation contrast with the first, offering critiques based on different analyses and commitments. These are: the 'soft-reform' space, the 'radical-reform' space and the 'beyond-reform' space. In the second iteration of our cartography we sought to further distinguish between the different analyses and commitments within each discursive space of enunciation. It is this version of the social cartography that is described in more detail in this article (see figure 1).

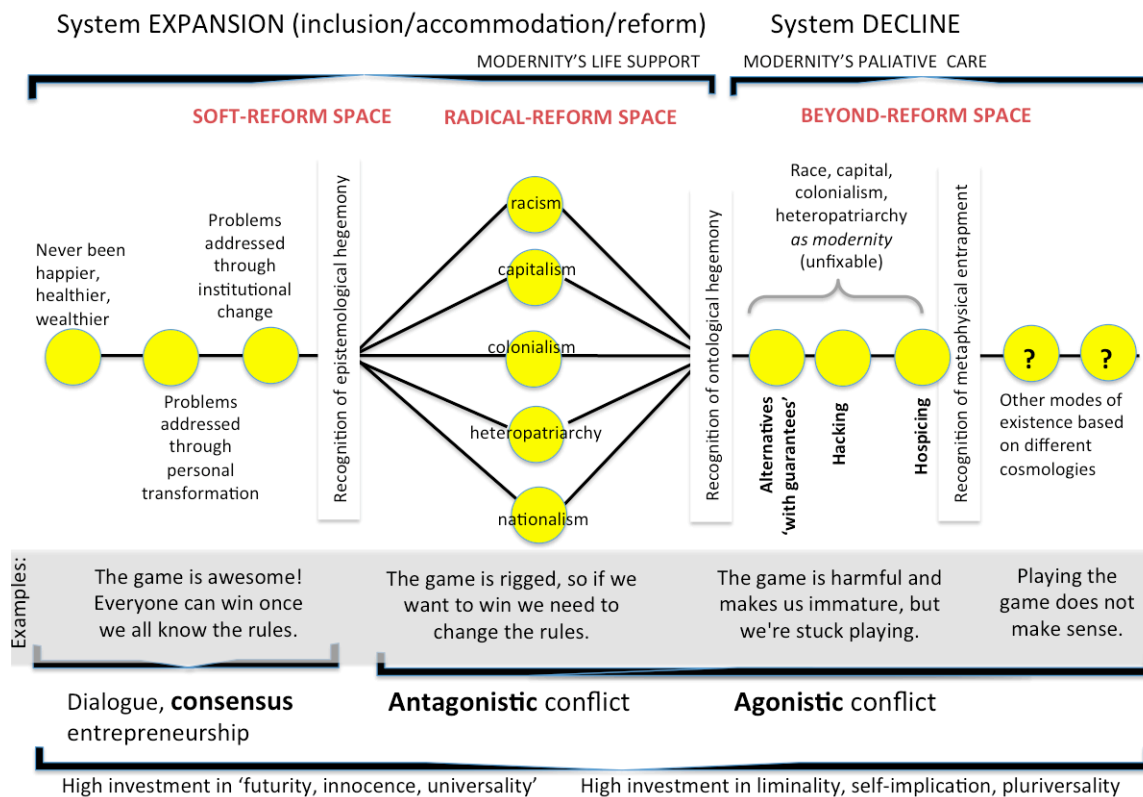


Figure 1: Social cartography of general responses to modernity's violence

We characterize the soft-reform space as one focusing on inclusion, mobilized through personal or institutional transformation. The critique grounding these two transformative positions perceives inequalities as resulting from the failure of people or institutions to identify and integrate diverse individual needs and perspectives within a naturalized and normalized modern framework that itself is beyond critique or visibility. Like the ‘everything is awesome,’ space, the soft-reform space emphasizes the rights and responsibilities of individuals to determine their own success or failure, as measured by the values of the existing (and taken for granted) system, with little or no reference to structural power relations or alternative measures of success or modes of knowing and being. In contrast to the ‘everything is awesome space,’ in this position there is provisional acceptance of difference. However, it is presumed that difference can and should be neatly incorporated on the terms of those doing the including, without any social conflict or significant change in structure, subjectivities, or power relations. It is also assumed that any disagreements that do arise can be addressed through rational dialogue oriented towards (a predefined) consensus. No acknowledgement is given that debate is skewed from the outset on the side of those who determine the terms of the conversation: who speaks, when, and what is intelligible, comfortable, and desirable. Efforts to disrupt these structures of power through more open conflict and alternative approaches are dismissed as violent, unproductive, and uncivil. Hence, in this space there is a strong emphasis on dialogue, consensus and entrepreneurialism, which is further emphasized in the neoliberal context.

What distinguishes soft-reform from radical-reform spaces is a recognition of epistemological dominance (largely absent in the soft reform space). This recognition of epistemological dominance is tied to systemic analyses that highlight the historical, discursive, and affective dynamics that ground hegemonic and ethnocentric practices. The radical-reform space also allows for the recognition of how unequal relations of knowledge production result in severely uneven distribution of resources, labour, and symbolic value. Modernity’s violence is recognized as something systemic to be addressed by re-structuring social relations at multiple levels. Critiques from this space tend to disarticulate and prioritize one dimension of modernity’s interconnected violences (e.g. capitalism, racism, colonialism, hetero-normativity, patriarchy, ableism, the nation-state form), and have a strong normative position that seeks to ‘fix’ the mechanisms that produce inequalities. These solutions often entail strategies of empowerment, ‘giving voice’, recognition, representation, redistribution, reconciliation, affirmative action, re-centering of marginalized subjects and/or ‘transformation’ of the borders of the dominant system.

Analyses within the soft-reform space call for a form of inclusion or access that does not require major shifts, whereas systemic analyses within the radical-reform space demand a more drastic interruption of business-as-usual. This interruption entails transforming the way power and resources are accumulated by current beneficiaries, in order to make space for difference and for the redistribution of resources, opportunities, and symbolic value. Thus, radical-reform critiques are often characterized by a fragmentation in the analyses of oppression (single-issue politics) and a strong normative stance focused on ‘fixing’ an aspect of the system (to make it

work for marginalised subjects), which ultimately leads to an expansion of the existing, modern system, rather than enabling alternatives to it.

What distinguishes beyond-reform spaces from radical-reform spaces is the recognition of ontological dominance (largely absent in the radical-reform space). Analyses in this space connect different dimensions of oppression and reject the idea that the mere addition of other ways of knowing (through a critique of epistemological dominance) will ultimately change the system, as dominance is exercised primarily through the conditioning of particular ways of being that, in turn, prescribe particular ways of knowing. In other words, the incorporation of multiple ways of knowing (grafted onto the same hegemonic ontological foundation that is left unexamined) through strategies of equity, access, voice, recognition, representation, or redistribution, does not change ontological dominance (see also Coulthard, 2014).

Within the 'beyond-reform' space, the modern system itself is perceived as inherently violent, exploitative, and unsustainable. Modernity's myriad oppressions are understood to be interlinked. Critiques made from within this space recognize modernity as irrecoverable; that is, they recognize the limits of even the most radical transformations that do not disrupt the underlying modern system and its grammars and logics. This does not preclude 'beyond-reform' advocates from valuing the importance of non-ontological transformations as necessary and important in the short-term, but merely advocating for expansion or radical transformation of the system (e.g. through equity, access, voice, recognition, representation, or redistribution) is insufficient. This form of critique tends to lead to one of three primary responses: system walk out, hacking, or 'hospicing'.

System walk out (alternatives 'with guarantees') enunciates a commitment to develop alternatives to modernity that will not reproduce its violences. Alternative communities and epistemologies are developed or reclaimed in spaces that may be external or marginal to mainstream institutions, either as supplementary, transitional, or wholesale alternatives. While 'walking out' often leads to remarkably creative and generative spaces, these spaces may nonetheless reproduce at least some of the same problems as modernity, as they are still broadly situated within its teleological grammar, particularly in its dialectically structured desire for an uncontaminated 'outside'. This focus on alternatives 'with guarantees' tends to support the same affective investments (e.g. in fixed teleologies, normativity, consensus, and innocence) and can lead to the foreclosure of the complexities and complicities that arise in the making of alternatives.

System hacking involves creating spaces within the system, using its resources, where people can be educated about the violences of the system and have their desires re-oriented away from it. This requires 'playing the game' of institutions at the same time that rules are bent to generate alternative outcomes. This strategy can also be remarkably creative and generative; however, it can be difficult to recognize when one is 'hacking' the system or 'being hacked' by it. In addition, like system walk outs, the risk of reproducing modernity's violence precisely when one is trying to move beyond it remains high as the success of initiatives is measured in

identifiable outcomes, and identities may become scripted around vanguardist heroism that inadvertently recentres individuals.

In contrast to system walk out, system ‘hospicing’ recognizes that although ultimately new systems are necessary, alternatives articulated from within modernity’s frames will tend to reproduce it. In identifying modernity’s metaphysical enclosures, hospicing problematizes the desire to embrace or reject modernity as a form of desire where modern subjects demand the world conform to our will (Silva, 2014). Instead, hospicing would entail sitting with a system in decline, learning from its history, offering palliative care, seeing oneself in that which is dying, attending to the integrity of the process, dealing with tantrums, incontinence, anger and hopelessness, ‘cleaning up’, and clearing the space for something new. This is unlikely to be a glamorous process; it will entail many frustrations, an uncertain timeline, and unforeseeable outcomes without guarantees.

Our definition of hospicing entails three different insights. One, that the modern global capitalist system is unsustainable, and that it is already collapsing. Two, that our current languages, identities and sense-making are inescapably historically connected to it. Three, that we need to be properly taught by the system’s successes and failures by facing its death and attending to its affliction rather than turning our back or attempting to murder it before it is ready to go. Hospicing enacts a willingness to learn enough from the (re)current mistakes of the current system in order to make different mistakes in caring for the arrival of something new. Going through the pains of this death, and recognizing we have been both bewildered and enchanted by the mythology of the Enlightenment, may be the only way we can really understand the depth of modernity’s limits (within us) and recognize its real gifts.

Hospicing demands a critique that is self-implicated rather than heroic, vanguardist or ‘innocent’. It demands a kind of courage that is un-neurotic (not invested in self-affirmation): a kind of courage that helps us to look the bull in the eye, to recognize ourselves in the bull, and to see the bull as a teacher, precisely when it is trying to kill us. In practice, this means that experimenting with alternatives is perceived as important not for generating predetermined solutions, but rather as a means to be taught by the successes and failures of the experimentation process. These teachings are indispensable for exploring the depths of the existing system, and for learning to discern between its poisons and its medicines. In this space, the effects of violence and pain are attended to; at the same time that there is also an acute attention to the roots and mechanisms of the disease so that its death leaves a legacy of prudence that grounds the emergence of something radically new and potentially wiser. We represent this possibility as a question mark in our forth space where other modes of existence grounded on different cosmologies operate. The question mark indicates that these are unintelligible to those entrapped in the metaphysics of modernity (which does not mean they are separate from our experience, or beyond meaning and understanding).



## **Four pedagogical narratives about this pedagogy**

In our pedagogical work, we have tried to represent this cartography with different visuals in order to disrupt the tendency to interpret it as a normative representation of reality rather than as a limited pedagogical tool. As we used this cartography to prompt discussions in different groups, we noticed four common ways of reading the cartography that resulted in very different pedagogical analyses and strategies. This generative potential displaces the usual normative pedagogical orientation that focuses on pre-defined (moral) scripts for thinking and action. Instead, it mobilizes efforts towards a grounded pluralisation of signification that makes visible the dynamics of interpretation, the edges of reasoning and the limits of the cartography itself. We believe this de-centering of the subject is what makes cartographies useful as pedagogical strategies.

The first and most common reading of our cartography (also influenced by the linearity of the version represented here) interprets the relationship between the different spaces as a cognitive progression based on more awareness, formal knowledge or experience. In this reading, soft-reform spaces are less informed than radical-reform spaces and radical-reform spaces are less informed than beyond-reform spaces. The pedagogical implication of this reading is that more knowledge would be necessary and sufficient to move people to better informed spaces. In this sense, the pedagogical effort would focus on cognition alone, and ‘progress’ would be achieved in movement from left to right of the map.

The second reading interprets the beyond-reform space as a repressed and foreclosed space. In other words, it proposes that people are aware of the depth of the problem and the irrecoverability of the system at a sub-conscious level (i.e. it is not solely an issue of cognition). However, most people are afraid of inhabiting this space for a fear of loss (of privilege, grounds, meaning, or identity), or of not knowing what to do once there. There is much at stake when the costs of the disenchantment with modernity outweigh the costs of being complicit in its violence. People will deny the violence and keep holding on to modern promises even though they know they are impossible promises (e.g. the idea that current levels of consumption in rich countries are sustainable or that distribution is based on merit rather than exploitation). People, then, will look for certainty, control, comfort and the re-affirmation of their self-images by holding on to institutions and relationships that offer a tangible exit from the discomfort and frustration of facing inconvenient concrete realities (e.g. of complicity in ongoing violence, exploitation, and unsustainable consumption). The pedagogical implication of this narrative is that people will only be open to selective knowledge that makes them feel good, look good and be seen as doing good. The pedagogical challenge then is how to address the combination of seductive desires and fear of loss (of privilege/status/security), as opposed to the challenge how to impart more knowledge.

The third reading is one where we all inhabit the four spaces at once, as we have to address incommensurable demands of a system in crisis. This reading emphasises the frustrations, contradictions and incoherences that emerge when one has to identify and address multiple needs and sensitivities of audiences in different spaces as we communicate socially or

intervene pedagogically. The pedagogical task, in this case, feels exhausting and disjointed as it recognizes that in each space only certain things are intelligible and desirable. For example, in one setting one may need to use the words diversity, multiculturalism and interculturality to address deficit views of difference. In another setting this loses currency and one needs to use the words equity, recognition and representation to be intelligible. In yet another setting, equity, recognition and representation lose currency and one needs to demonstrate a critical awareness of how the success of radical-reform is dependent on a healthy capitalist economy subsidised by exploitation somewhere else, and so on. Therefore, the pedagogical challenge focuses on equipping people to face the incoherence (and frustration) of the juxtaposed, incommensurable contexts they will have to inhabit, navigate and negotiate in.

The fourth narrative asks whether that the placement of question marks at the right end of the map is deceptive as it suggests that other ways of being are *outside* of our current experience. In contrast, this narrative affirms that although our cognitive understanding is conditioned by social and historical frames of reference, our existence is not limited by cognition alone. Other ways of being are already interwoven in our experiences of the world, although they may be invisible to our cognitive frames. In this sense the modern presumption that our being is primarily defined through rational thinking limits our capacity to recognize and affirm our entanglement with the world.

These four readings/narratives demonstrate the potential of the cartography to clarify and expand imaginaries and educational possibilities. Yet no one image can be comprehensive and we emphasize that this is only one of many possible mappings of modernity and decolonization. There are also several caveats to this map. First, the map does not capture the fluidity and simultaneity of the spaces, and the fact that it is common for people to toggle back and forth between them, depending on context. Second, social cartographies such as this are neither timeless nor fixed; they are intended to serve as a point of departure for new research and new maps (Paulson & Liebman, 1994). Indeed, our efforts to share this map have already resulted in several new representations. Third, because this map provides a meta-view, it captures heterogeneous perspectives under a single space; therefore, it does not capture the full nuance or detail *within* each space. Finally, we did not include all possible spaces. For instance, we exclude what might be termed the conservative space that actively opposes decolonization and advocates for modernity's violence. We now turn to the context of higher education to illustrate how decolonization might be thought through within each of the four spaces.

## **Decolonization in the context of higher education**

Institutions of higher education have played a central role in perpetuating the violences of modernity (Harding, 2011; Said, 1979; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Wilder, 2013; Wynter, 2003). Over the past several decades, there have nonetheless been many transformations in Western institutions of higher education, thanks to the tireless counter-hegemonic efforts of scholars, students, and activists. At the same time, some have questioned to what extent these changes

have ‘decolonized’ higher education, and whether such decolonization is even possible (e.g. Grosfoguel, 2012; Hill, 2012; Kuokkanen, 2008; Rodríguez, 2012; Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012; Smith, 2009). These discussions may be all the more pressing in a context of declining public support for higher education, and increasing repression of academic dissent in some places (Chatterjee & Maira, 2014; Marez, 2014; Melamed, 2014; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

If the various critiques of how modernity’s violence manifests in higher education are often complementary, their normative positions regarding what might (or must) be done to dismantle or otherwise resist it are enunciated from different spaces, which may be contradictory. In this section, we use the social cartography of responses to modernity’s violence that we have outlined above to offer just one of many possible efforts to represent the range of varied and overlapping commitments to decolonization in higher education (see Table 1).

Table 1: Different articulations of decolonization in HE

Space	Meaning of decolonization	Practice
Everything is awesome	no recognition of decolonization as a desirable project	no decolonizing practices required
Soft-reform	(no recognition of decolonization as a desirable project, but) increased access / conditional inclusion into mainstream	providing additional resources to Indigenous, racialized, low-income, and first-generation students, so as to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and cultural capital to excel according to existing institutional standards
Radical-reform ( <i>recognition of epistemological dominance</i> )	recognition, representation, redistribution, voice, reconciliation	centre and empower marginalized groups, and redistribute and re-appropriate material resources
Beyond-reform ( <i>recognition of ontological and metaphysical enclosures</i> )	dismantling of modernity’s systematic violences (capitalism, colonialism, racism, heteropatriarchy, nation-state formation)	subversive educational use of spaces and resources, hacking, hospicing

***Everything is awesome***

From the space that presumes ‘we have never been happier, healthier, or wealthier’, decolonization likely does not register as a project of concern in the context of higher education.

In this space it is understood that students and faculty have equal opportunity to compete for positions within a university and to succeed (or fail) according to its logics. This position may be captured in the notions that we now live in ‘post-racial’ or harmoniously multicultural societies (e.g. the assumptions that whoever talks about race is a racist), which in turn presumes that injustice has been overcome through the progress of history in formal civil rights gains and reconciliation efforts (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). Foreclosure of modernity’s shadow and emphasis on its shine are strongest here. Thus, calls for even minor institutional change articulated from other spaces (let alone radical calls for decolonization) may be met with confusion, dismissal, or reprimand.

### ***Soft-reform***

Soft-reform critiques of modernity’s violence in higher education likely frame the issue as one of greater inclusion based on the liberal understanding of inequality. In this space, like the ‘everything is awesome space’, the term ‘decolonization’ is unlikely to be used or understood as having a place in higher education. Inclusion through institutional change may, for example, be understood as providing additional resources to Indigenous, racialized, low-income, and first-generation students, so as to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and cultural capital to excel according to existing institutional standards.

It is not only assumed that previously excluded groups desire to be a part of mainstream institutions, it is also assumed that they will benefit from this inclusion, framing them as otherwise having a deficit of valuable knowledge, skills, and experiences (Harper, 2010; Pidgeon, 2008; Yosso, 2005). The knowledge, skills, and experiences that they bring to the institution are rarely valued, except perhaps through tokenistic ‘recognitions’ of cultural diversity that make the institution appear to be welcoming, but otherwise do not threaten the status-quo of their operations (Bunda, Zipin, & Brennan, 2012; Urciuoli, 2003). Critiques and reforms based on inclusion therefore tend not to significantly disrupt existing distributions or structures of power, as regards both knowledge and resources.

Increased access here is the emphasis, rather than a questioning of what is being accessed, to what end, and for whose benefit. In fact, expanding inclusion is often presumed to benefit everyone, not just those who are being included. For instance, Mendelson (2006) suggests Indigenous peoples’ increased educational attainment in Canada will not only be to their benefit but will also be “a big ‘win’ for all of society, which will be better off with more prosperous citizens and no doubt will also enjoy the continuing benefits of cultural and economic innovation arising from the Aboriginal community” (p. 9). Although it may be acknowledged that not everyone enters the system on the same footing, it is thought that transformation of institutions and individuals can lead to a more ‘level-playing’ field for competition. There is no questioning the integrity of the system itself.

Both the ‘everything is awesome’ position and soft-reform critiques do not recognize the shadow of modernity as derivative from modernity itself (i.e. something that subsidises modernity’s shine), but as something to be addressed by the expansion of modernity. In this

logic, ontological and epistemological dominance are perceived to be benevolent in the sense that progress and knowledge only alleviate (rather than also generate) poverty (perceived as a lack of the possibility to accumulate wealth).

### ***Radical-reform***

Enunciations of decolonization articulated from the radical-reform space tend to argue that the changes made within soft-reform spaces are tokenistic, incomplete, insufficient, and/or inadequate. In contrast, critiques made from this space emphasize the decolonization of higher education as a commitment to centre and empower marginalized groups, address epistemological dominance (i.e. Eurocentrism), and redistribute and re-appropriate material resources. The normative stance of this position values and sees modernity as ‘fixable’, mobilizing strategies to make it work for marginalized people within a local polity. Little attention is paid to whether the modern system itself is sustainable or how it is complicit with and subsidized/maintained by violences elsewhere.

Decolonization efforts enunciated from within this space may critique that the Western university was constituted through the negation and suppression of other ways of knowing and being, and that institutions of higher education have produced scholarship legitimizing and capacitating racial, colonial, and other forms of subjugation (Harding, 2011; Said, 1979; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Wilder, 2013; Wynter, 2003). This space seeks to broaden recognition of this constitutive violence, increase representation of marginalised voices, and expand access to higher education for subjugated groups. Numerous non-curricular campus activities also fall under the radical-reform space, including the demand for universities to: divest their endowments from fossil fuel companies or companies complicit in the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank; apologize and enact redress for their participation in Black chattel slavery, Indigenous genocide, and Japanese internment; and acknowledge the territory of the Indigenous peoples’ where the university is located.

Radical-reform efforts have contributed to the transformation of higher education over the past forty years, including (formal) desegregation, the creation of Indigenous-controlled secondary institutions in Canada, New Zealand, the U.S. and Australia, and the institutionalization of previously excluded knowledges, in large part through what Ferguson (2012) calls “interdisciplines,” including Black, African American, Asian American, Asian Canadian, Native American, First Nations, Indigenous, Latinx, Chicanx, Ethnic, Queer, and Women’s Studies. Although this has provided important spaces for the protection, recovery, and production of marginalized knowledges, the academy maintains a tokenistic and selective commitment to these fields; for instance, Walcott (2014) notes that not a single Canadian university houses a Black Studies department.

Similarly, while broadened access to education has equipped many marginalized faculty and students with the ability to “speak back” to modernity’s violence (Grande, 2008; Newhouse, 2008), universities often treat Indigenous and racialized faculty and students tokenistically, and in ways that reassert the conditionality of their inclusion (Ahmed, 2012). Kuokkanen (2008)

argues that this is evident in demands that Indigenous faculty and students make themselves intelligible to the Eurocentric institution or risk not being understood, while Pidgeon (2008) critiques institutional narratives that devalue “forms of Indigenous capital and habitus valued by the family and community that are brought to mainstream institutions by Aboriginal students (e.g., Indigenous epistemologies, languages, and cultures)” (p. 343).

From this space, epistemological plurality and institutional re-structuring are sought, but naturalized ontological and meta-physical possibilities remain the same. As long as success, autonomy, and sovereignty are scripted as participation in the existing system, even if transformation of the system is sought, the core business of the university as a credentializing institution for ‘emancipated’ socially mobile subjects will remain intact. Radical-reform cannot, in practice, take account of ontological and metaphysical difference as it cannot promote non-capitalist futurities without shooting itself in the foot.

### ***Beyond-reform***

In the last space of enunciation, modernity is understood to be irrecoverable, as are universities, at least in their current form. The difference between ‘beyond-reform’ and ‘radical-reform’ spaces is a focus on ontological and metaphysical enclosures that characterize institutions and forms of existence framed by participation in global capital exchange. There is recognition that neoliberalism (as an advanced form of capitalism) is not something new, but a logical unfolding of something that was an integral part of the historical conditions of Empire that subsidized and created the possibility for the university as we know it (Roy, 2006). For a few, this manifests in a desire to exit the university entirely and construct alternatives (with guarantees); for many others, that exit would be pre-emptive, as spaces of creativity and dissent are still possible within the university, even as they come without guarantees (Rodríguez, 2012). Therefore, universities are perceived to be ‘beyond repair’, but potentially useful if inhabited and navigated strategically, i.e. hacked. Hacking the university implies disenchantment with modernity and the usual perks and rewards that the system itself offers, in favour of diverting its resources towards other ends, as the examples below demonstrate.

Smith (2009) argues “racism and sexism...are endemic to the [academic] system itself” (p. 82), therefore we must “think about providing education outside the academic walls” (p. 85). She does not advocate abandoning struggles for tenure, recruitment, and representation, but suggests they are short-term solutions rather than long-term visions, and that we must also experiment with extra-institutional alternatives. Like Smith, Alfred (2004) frames universities as “part of the larger institutional system serving imperial objectives” (p. 93), but nonetheless suggests universities are important spaces of contention from which to organize resistance to and subversion of colonialism. Corntassel (2011) also suggests the academy may be a space of contestation in which “anti-colonial struggle and pedagogies of decolonization” are enacted (n.p.).

Others express scepticism about the possibility for decolonization within higher education, while at the same time noting their potential uses as spaces to denaturalize settler

presence (De Leeuw, Greenwood, & Lindsay, 2013; Hill, 2012). Moten and Harney (2004) take a different approach to space in their concept of the “undercommons” of the university as a “nonplace” of refuge for those fleeing modernity and its violences. The undercommons engages in their own, proudly undisciplined “outcast mass intellectuality” (p. 107), and are committed not to critique and improvement of the university, but rather to “abolition as the founding of a new society” (p. 114).

In this space, decolonization of education is not a neat, linear process. For example, Grosfoguel (2012) suggests that although the introduction of the interdisciplines, “opened up the *potential* for the decolonization of knowledge...this decolonial process is not complete and faces several obstacles” (p. 82, emphasis in the original). In their efforts to create an extra-institutional, decolonial educational alternative, Dyke and Meyerhoff (2013) found that they both created valuable new spaces and reproduced many of the issues they initially sought to avoid. In the process of experimentation, and of reflecting on that experimentation, they learned from their successes and mistakes, and applied this learning to restructuring their approaches.

Many others have elaborated beyond-reform ideas, for example Santos’ (2007) post-abysal thinking, Mignolo’s (2000) border thinking and learning to unlearn (Tiostanova and Mignolo 2012), and Bodin, Cohen and Grosfoguel’s (2012) pluriversity. While affirming the importance of both radical-reform and beyond-reform qua hacking critiques, we note the risk of vanguardist heroism that some of these critiques potentially inspire. If we approach decolonization through Cartesian, self-, logo-, and anthropo-centric forms of agency, we may unintentionally enact precisely the dominance we seek to address. In the concluding section, we explore challenges of decolonization by considering modernity’s metaphysical entrapments. While not forgoing the need for resistance through strategic action (including hacking), and through revitalization of those ways of knowing and being that modernity has sought to destroy or disavow (regrettably largely untouched upon in this piece, but which we have explored elsewhere, e.g. Ahenakew et al., 2014), we consider whether we might also have the “humility to ask questions that do not have easy answers” (Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012, p. XI).

## **Conclusion and potential implications**

Incisive critiques of the violences of modernity are indispensable for deepening our understanding of its seemingly infinite ability to reformulate and reconstitute itself in the face of varied and vigorous resistance. However, if even our relationship to reality is mediated through modernity’s grammar (Andreotti, Ahenakew, & Cooper, 2011), and our categorical ideas of what constitute justice are articulated from within the same ontoepistemological registers and regimes of knowledge that have produced great *injustice* (Silva, 2013), then it may not be possible to articulate a different relationship to modernity from within its frames of reference. At the limit-space of the modern grammar within and outside of ourselves, we sit with the difficult lessons of modernity and its violences as our guide, and seek to take account of the *unknown* and *unknowable* that modernity has unsuccessfully tried to eliminate. In so doing, we dispense with

what Scott (2004) described as “the confident hubris of teleologies that extract the future seamlessly from the past” (p. 210). Indeed, to propose a singular, or even a preferred vision of a decolonized future would be to ignore “how future-directed notions of progress, betterment and modernity have been and remain so foundational to colonial ontology” (Baldwin, 2012, p. 181; see also: Tuck & Yang, 2012).

However, we are nonetheless highly aware of our ongoing pedagogical obligations to address modernity’s violence and its unsustainability. As Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) suggests, “educators are called upon to play a central role in constructing the conditions for a different kind of encounter, an encounter that both opposes ongoing colonization and that seeks to heal the social, cultural, and spiritual ravages of colonial history” (p. 42). Given this, we would like to conclude by offering the following open-ended questions:

What would an approach to education look like that takes seriously the pedagogical task of addressing the foreclosures that hide how modernity’s shadow is produced in order to subsidize its shine? As students both face the depths of this violence, and participate in its reproduction, how can we ethically address their affective responses, such as fear, anger, guilt, and resentment about the loss of certainty, innocence, status, and security? Is Spivak’s (2004) notion of education as an “uncoercive rearrangement of desires” (p. 526) really feasible?

What would academic writing look like that acknowledges but goes beyond, or does not rely solely on, modern representation, its supremacy of universal reason, and the explanations it produces according to our “dear social categories” (Silva, 2013, p. 44)? What other vocabularies, media, and collective spaces might enable us to change our relationship to modern modes of signification (e.g. logocentrism, anthropocentrism, allochronism)? How do we balance this with the demand to make ourselves intelligible to the institutions and social relations within which we operate?

We agree with Sium, Desai and Ritskes (2012) that, “There is power in questions and questioning, in being able to live in the understanding that not everything is known or knowable” (p. XI). Yet, in education, the righting of wrongs is often understood as dependent on more knowledge and better analyses. The assumption may be that, with more and better information, we will be able to engineer something to right the wrongs we have identified. But what if these wrongs are not a result of ignorance but of something more collective and much deeper that we are all implicated in? What if the ‘righting of wrongs’ requires some wronging of perceived rights, like: displacing ourselves from the center of the world; interrupting our desires to look, feel and 'do' good; exposing the source and connections between our fears, desires, and denials; letting go of our fantasies of certainty, comfort, security, and control; recognizing and affirming (rather than disavowing) that we are already “entangled, vulnerable, open, non-full, more than



and less than” ourselves (Moten, 2014); and reaching the edge of our knowing and being - and jumping with our eyes closed. What would decolonization look like, then?

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