

Chapter 9

Arts Education and Decolonization: Challenges and Opportunities for Cultural Sustainability in the Context of Migration



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Abstract Recent migration flows originating from conflict, violence, human rights violations, persecution and natural disasters pose new questions for cultural diversity and arts education. What is the role of arts education in sustainable development? And in the context of migration, is it possible to think of arts education as a practice that fosters the local, while at the same time embraces otherness? This paper reflects on some obstacles within the European Commission's understanding of the role of arts and arts education that hinders a way forward. This article starts by exploring some key issues in the understanding of migration and its relation to arts education and culture in Europe, suggesting a critical view of the regional efforts concerning UNESCO's sustainability goals. A second part of the paper offers a diagnosis of interculturality as managed by the European Commission. The conclusions suggest that a decolonial analysis could provide a perspective for embracing otherness, and in doing so offer new meanings of interculturality in arts and new opportunities for promoting cultural sustainability through arts education.

9.1 Migration and Arts Education

Migration presents challenges and opportunities for all regions of the world. The migrations of the last century, nevertheless, seem to be more problematic for Western countries, especially during the last five years, as they constituted an unprecedented displacement originating from conflict, violence, human rights violations, persecution and natural disasters (European Commission, 2016b). The international discussion of this process is mostly addressed from legal terms and consequences of the migratory process (International Organization for Migration, 2020). When it comes to culture and arts, the focus is usually on arts' mediation function and its contribution to resolving the culture clash arising from the people forcibly displaced through projects promoting intercultural dialogue and European values through culture, films and arts

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(European Commission, 2016a). But, should be fostering dialogue the primary function of arts and culture? This rather utilitarian and functionalist perspective on arts and arts education (European Network of Observatories in the Field of Arts and Cultural Education, 2020) calls for a need to rethink the transformative role of arts within the field of culture.

Cultural transformations resulting from contemporary migration flows are challenging our understandings of cultural sustainability and its goals. Addressing migration challenges poses significant tensions for arts educators. Some human and cultural changes magnified by migration engender the need not only to stimulate the learning of local culture and aesthetics but at the same time calls for pedagogical practices that embrace interculturality, that is, the recognition of diversity (otherness) for a multicultural democracy (Tubino, 2004; Walsh, 2010, 2018). As the tension between maintaining the culture of nation-states and attending to migrants' needs affects all countries around the world, it is worth asking: Is it possible to think of arts education as a practice that fosters the local, while at the same time embraces otherness?

The particular historical processes of different regions have led to diverse ways of dealing with the tension between the local and the new. Thus, looking into the distinct proposals of arts education in its relation to migration seems a good starting point to shed light on how cultural inclusions are attended to solve this tension. Further, this analysis calls into question the use of arts education for non-artistic goals, arguing that the transformative role of arts and culture needs to refocus its attention towards cultural sustainability.

Following the path proposed by Bolden et al. (2018) that examines the related phenomena of cultural diversity, sustainable development and arts education, this paper reflects on some obstacles within the European Commission's understanding of the role of arts and arts education that hinders a way forward. Accordingly, this article starts by exploring some key issues in the understanding of migration and its relation to arts education and culture in Europe, suggesting a critical view of the regional efforts concerning UNESCO's sustainability goals. A second part of the paper offers a diagnosis of interculturality as managed by the European Commission. This decolonial analysis could provide a perspective for embracing otherness, and in doing so offer new meanings of interculturality in arts and new opportunities for promoting cultural sustainability through arts education.

9.2 Migration and the European Commissions' Framework

It is important to begin by reviewing key issues that emerge from migration in relation to culture. Observing how immigration is perceived and experienced in Europe may offer explanations for how the European Commission action plan is addressing the matter, and help analyze the problems presented by these strategies of action from two main aspects: the cultural sustainability perspective and the perspective of understanding integration. As noted above—and stressing its relevance—it is necessary to bear in mind that migration is not a recent phenomenon. Multiple waves

of migration have taken place in diverse parts of the world, in several periods of history. A chief distinction of the diverse contemporary migrations is that they are not based on the exercise of power and exploitation—unlike the colonial migration and settlements of the eighteenth century, that were characterized by political and economic domination (as well as an imposition of an epistemological hegemony, as I will delve in later). Moreover, the migration was typically from the West towards the colonized South, Middle East and East (Emmer, 1992). Currently, the attention is set on migrations that have an opposite direction, that is, towards the West. Presently in Europe, dominant migration narratives and tensions are characterized by economic situations (e.g., work and development of human capital) and social situations (e.g., asylum-seeker and refugees) (King & Lulle, 2016). Factors such as power and domination are not the driving forces, and yet they are seen as a threat within the sectors of the European continent—even if the emigration flow from Europe is equal to or greater than immigration to the region (Cohen, 1994; Emmer, 1992). The social and political tensions that immigration produces in Europe are linked primarily to issues of belonging and identity, which reformulate the image of the ‘non-European Other’ (Rea, 2006). This distinction is widely reflected in the conception of culture and in a way of perceiving migration, and therefore on how to understand integration and cultural sustainability.

9.3 Functional Role of Art

The European Commission’s plan on the integration of third-country nationals states that participation in culture is important for non-Europeans to create a sense of belonging to the host society (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2017), and understanding of culture and values of the receiving society (European Commission, 2016a). Several cultural activities that intend to help migrants in different dimensions of integration have been mapped across Europe in recent years (McGregor & Ragab, 2016). However, these initiatives focus on using the arts and cultural practices as a tool for promoting integration. This shows a lack of a European plan on arts education that, as such, could be applied in intercultural contexts. When culture and arts are mentioned in connection to migration, they serve to fulfill purposes that are not aligned with cultural sustainability, but rather to support the aim of social integration of migrants. Under no circumstances does this insinuate that these goals are not important, nor that the efforts of the European Commission are not a contribution to deal with migration-related issues. However, this plan relegates the arts and arts education to a therapeutic and supportive role that serves the social adaptation process. In other words, the relationship between arts, culture and migration from an educational perspective is not understood and valued, but rather valued only as a tool for integration in the social field. The problem of this framework, then, is that its logic reduces culture and arts to toolkits to solve other problems that are not of an artistic-cultural nature, nullifying their faculty of being a field of action from which real transformations should be promoted.

UNESCO, however, has begun to question the fundamentals of this framework of the European Commission through the ‘*UNITWIN network on Arts Education Research for Cultural Diversity and Sustainable Development*’. The UNESCO UNITWIN network proposes that in order to achieve cultural sustainability, arts education should be considered for its transforming role and not under a functionalist use for the purposes of other sustainability goals—in this case, arts education at the service of (the integration for) migration. UNITWIN extends the question to cultural sustainability and prioritizes the role of art, culture and aesthetics as a goal of sustainability in itself. This shift in the locus of attention proposed by the *UNITWIN network on Arts Education Research for Cultural Diversity and Sustainable Development* allows us to focus on the *cultural dimension of sustainable development* (without, altogether, discarding the social, economic or environmental dimensions of sustainability) and thus promotes and protects cultural diversity through arts education and arts education research (Bolden et al., 2018). As it will be discussed later, one way to work in this dimension of cultural sustainability is through a decolonial perspective.

9.4 Intercultural Functionality

The second problem of this framework is the role of ‘the European’ in the initiatives previously reviewed. The integration plan is mostly unilateral: it is the ‘non-European Other’ that must change to belong to the territory, taking little account that European countries are also part of the process. This is somewhat alarming, considering that European social scientists have spent over 90 years discussing the processes of acculturation and assimilation, and the consequences of direction and domination on it (Teske Jr. & Nelson, 1974). Even so, the European Commission’s plan explicitly alludes to the fact that immigrants must adapt to the target society and adopt their values and culture, without making greater reference to the work that European citizens must carry out as well. Regarding this relation (or the lack thereof) of two cultures in the process of integration, Tubino (2004) characterizes Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism as a paradigmatic case of functional interculturalism. He emphasizes that multiculturalist programs are palliative to problems and paternalistic, and that they do not generate citizenship or promote equity but from above. Following Tubino’s approach, it is understood that, in order to solve the ethnic and cultural problems between immigrants and nationals, it is necessary to have an intense and systematic intercultural education not only within the migrant sectors but also within the hegemonic sectors of society. When this is not the case, and when instead the discourse on interculturality serves to make invisible the growing social asymmetries, internal cultural differences and problems derived from the exclusion of the subalternized sectors of our societies, we operate under a *functional concept of interculturality* (Tubino, 2004). This conception has been applied to arts education by Walsh (2010, 2018), who remarks that in the educational field, it is possible to establish a distinction between an interculturality that is functional to the dominant system,

and a critical interculturality that is conceived as a political project of decolonization, transformation and creation. Functional interculturality looks to promote ‘dialogue’, ‘coexistence’ and ‘tolerance’, and is therefore functional to the existing system since it does not tackle inequality, but seeks to include the ‘Other’ in the established social structure. For Walsh, this superficial recognition and respect for cultural diversity is a strategy of domination, that it is not in the quest for the creation of more equitable and egalitarian societies, but looks for the preservation of social stability and the control of conflict—only now including groups historically excluded in its speech.

9.5 Migration to Latin America and Decolonial Thought

Thinking from a decolonial perspective requires questioning distinctions made by hegemonic/universal narratives, and creating dialogues that include other/plural knowledges and experiences (Mignolo & Escobar, 2010; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). To this end, it is worth noting that Europe is not the only region that needs to address the consequences of migration. To think from alterity, it is essential to discard the binary notions of history under the ideas of development/underdevelopment (as explained by Cardoso & Faletto, 1979; Wallerstein, 2006) and of winners/losers (as questioned by Stuart Hall, 1999). It is timely to consider societies as a result of different historical processes, under the belief that it is beneficial to rescue experiences from ones that can contribute to formulating solutions for others, without assuming a ‘right’ or single trajectory. Consequently, this paper looks at how migration has been confronted in a different context from Europe, taking Latin America as an example and the decolonial perspective that stems from the region, to extract useful lessons from the decolonial thought for addressing cultural diversity.

In Latin America, migration’s impact on culture, art and arts education was very different from the current European migratory context. The colonial migrations and settlements that began in the eighteenth century brought with them aesthetics, artistic forms and canons of the Western episteme. The imposition of the foreign curriculum during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries still shows a predominance of European or ‘classical’ art in Latin American arts education. This ‘foreignization’ of arts education manifested in an acceptance of the European cultural values detached from indigenous roots. Specifically, this was materialized in the transfer of curricula of conservatories and art schools in Spain, France, Germany and Belgium, including the adoption of books and teaching methods of the arts (Barriga Monroy, 2013). As Tubino (2004) points out, while in Europe, speaking about intercultural education is to consider how to integrate migrants (that is, to incorporate them into the surrounding society respecting their differences); in Latin America, interculturality is about considering the issue of how to avoid that the people are subjected to processes of forced acculturation. The decolonial perspective raised the need to reposition the ‘local’ in arts education, allowing to challenge the model of culture naturalized from the West. Under this line of thinking, Lambuley (2018) invites us to reflect on the universality of the Western episteme of art, to unveil the power relations behind it that

structure culture, art and society. Lambuley argues that the philosophical-aesthetic-European discourse presents the canons of European modernity as ‘universal’ cultural categories and all different subjectivities as ‘Other’, where non-Western arts and aesthetics are exoticized, and their artistic expressions are devalued and presented as crafts. In this way, the Western episteme of art is not universal but ‘uni-versal’, directional and dominant, that stands as the official model under well-meaning idealistic, universalistic and the de facto hegemonic articulation (Jörissen & Unterberg, 2018). The decolonial perspective then calls for overcoming the ‘universal’ model of culture, to think in terms of the plural, allowing the confluence of ‘Others’ (Lambuley, 2018), a continuous exercise of granting space to all possible ‘Others’. Now, even when just ‘thinking’ about plurals is not an easy task, we need to ask something even more arduous: how is it possible to take this into practice? To answer this question, we can observe how the ‘uni-versal’ and plural thoughts are represented in pedagogical practice.

9.6 Towards a Critical Interculturality in Arts Education

Building upon critical pedagogy and decolonial thinking, *critical interculturality* questions the established social structure, as a political, social, ethical and epistemic project that raises the need not only to change relationships, but also the structures, conditions and devices of power that maintain inequality, internalization, racialization and discrimination. Critical interculturality is a pedagogical tool that encourages the creation of ‘Other’ ways of thinking, being, living, learning, teaching and living that cross borders (Walsh, 2010). In other words, thinking about pedagogical practice from the ‘plural’ requires a constant work of re-elaboration of the cultural and artistic contents that should be included in an egalitarian manner. It is important to understand then that the decolonial perspective is not an attempt to impose on Eurocentrism (or any other ism), but rather a challenge to the hegemony of thought. In principle, this fosters the negation of an inter-regional cultural hierarchy, but naturally, its logic allows us to reflect about intra-regional contexts. And as such, the adoption of a decolonial perspective can offer alternatives to rethink arts education considering (all) otherness.

So, is it possible to transfer the decolonial perspective to arts education in Europe? The adoption of a decolonial perspective has been useful in (post)colonial societies to think about cultural diversity and interculturality from an egalitarian position for *all* societies and their cultures. Hence, this analysis contends that a decolonial approach is applicable to different contexts, and that it would aid in fostering intercultural communication over a unilateral integration. Just as the persistence of coloniality (as a relation of power) is independent of colonialism (as the historical moment of territorial occupation), the option of adopting the decolonial perspective is independent of the historical position of the subject in the role of colonizer/colonized. Being an open perspective to all ‘Others’ equally, it accommodates both Asian, African, South and North American or European culture. In this way, adopting decolonial

thought to pose the educational practices of art is a feasible option for all—that is, all educators and contexts. It would be relevant therefore, when discussing cultural sustainability, to rethink the contents of arts education under the guidelines of the decolonial perspective when facing the challenge of migratory populations, regardless of their origin or destination. It should be repeated, to emphasize the notion of equality and consideration of all otherness, that the decolonial perspective does not oppose the European thought, but rather opposes the hegemony of thought and Eurocentrism (Quijano, 2000). The plurality of the decolonial perspective points to the consideration of the different ‘other’ projects, and by virtue of this, migration should not be seen only as a challenge of interculturality but also as the opportunity of its genesis. Walter Mignolo, a central figure of decolonial thought in modernity, points out that “the decolonial is an option being enacted in the sphere of the emerging global political society; that is, the thousands and thousands of decolonial projects” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, 198).

9.7 Challenges and Opportunities

The aim of this article was to review the obstacles faced by the European Commission to see if it is possible to evaluate if arts education can be proposed as a practice that fosters the ‘local’ while at the same time embrace ‘otherness’. The problem with the European plan regarding migration and culture is twofold. First, the role attributed to culture and arts education is functional to goals that are not related to cultural sustainability and the promotion of the arts in their transformative role. Second, the approach of thinking about the relationship between cultures (European and non-European Other) operates under a notion of functional interculturality, which conceals the path to achieve egalitarian approaches in arts education. Reviewing European initiatives for cultural sustainability, and how they relate to migration, helps clarify the challenges and opportunities from arts education as an agent of empowerment for anti-hegemonic cultural transformations. Although this diagnosis is complex, the lack of violence in this wave of migration opens the door to opportunities for equality in addressing interculturality.

With due humility, it is inevitable to recognize that the decolonial perspective is not, in any case, considered as something simple to apply. In fact, the best attempts to move forward along this line have presented it as a mechanism in development (Walsh, 2010). And even when in Latin America attempts have been made to integrate local cultural expressions into the school curriculum, it is still a challenge for arts education in the region to educate about traditional, indigenous arts and the folkloric manifestations of Latin American art (Errázuriz Larraín, 2001; Jiménez, 2009). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize how the decolonial perspective offers the possibility of a harmony between the particular identities and the plural, establishing itself as a practical and theoretical proposal that will allow both the revitalization of the local and Other’s arts education contents. One concrete example to start working down this road in the field of arts education is the Triangular Approach of Ana Mae

Barbosa (see Barbosa & da Cunha, 2010). It is also important to keep an eye on future developments of decolonial thought in the region, as Latin America is experiencing internal processes of inter-regional migration, which also pose the challenge of achieving a balance in the tension of promoting own culture and promoting interculturality. Thus, the possibility of thinking from a decolonial perspective in arts and arts education provide new opportunities in these fields, which will hopefully contribute when addressing the issues of cultural diversity and sustainable development in the context of migration.

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