H.arta
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(Eds.)

ARE YOU TALKING TO ME?

Discussions on
Knowledge Production
Gender Politics
and Feminist Strategies

Löcker
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The pagan drums are playing and recall the remote nights of The Drum of the Abolition. Fires are ignited at night and the Afro descendants offer sacrifices to their stolen Orishas, those who today have been translated into names of Catholic saints, the religion that was borrowed, that was imposed, and which they adapted to their forms and rituals. Spain came with the right tools: God to appease us and the devil to scare us – if we don’t administrate God’s will.

Here we are, the children of Indians, of black people, of white people, children of God, and of sin. We are those children, supposedly free, those who are beginning to structure our new families, our new societies, we are the children who entail the same rules upon us that are obvious replicas of the violence and the abuse that we have been objected to, we are those who opened their eyes and their mouth in order to make an attempt to change our history, so that our children can write another one: different, more, equitable and less painful.

Notes
1 Luis Fernando Ramírez López. Poem »Eviction«
2 Inhabitants of The Valley of Patía (Colombia) and African descendants.
3 Old African gods
4 »Tears, songs, dance, and something else...in the magic Valley of Patía«. Pg.7 Editorial FERIVA. Santiago de Cali.
5 The slave women became professional in abortive tools in order not to get killed by their masters for being pregnant.
6 Ranajit Guha. Essay »The Prose of Counter »Insurgency«. Guha and Spivak. Pg.77
7 Jesus Martin Barbero. »Inheriting the Future. Think about education from communication«. Nomads. Pg.12
8 Name given to the 15 days of the African party, after the king of Spain banned re-enslavement after the colonial time.
»Learning« and »unlearning« infuse each other, produce antagonisms and paradoxes. For the analysis of »processes of education« as well as »processes of autonomous production of knowledge«, it is crucial to look more closely at the points of interplay between »learning« and »unlearning« and explore, for example, why only specific forms of knowledge are acquired and the reasons for motivations for education at specific points of time. I am interested in who is »kept dumb« or »made dumb«, and what forms of »knowledge« are qualified or dis-qualified as »knowledge«, and by whom?

V.Y. How are power relations – racist or gender specific – being reflected in the dominant institutions of education?

M.C.V.: The public institutions of education are always suspected of reifying existing relations of power and domination, which is arguably true. For me, the pedagogical debates from the 1970s about the »secret curricula« seem to be relevant here. If we look at who profits from the dominant institutions of power, it quickly becomes obvious that it has always been — and still is — the children of the educated elites who are »successful«. Here, by the way, there is minimal difference between the diasporic elites and members of the bourgeoisie majority. Please note the class differentiation between the migrant elites and the migrant guest workers. Those who have had the privilege to learn at home how to learn, how to present their skills or, to refer to Bourdieu, who know the habitus that is needed in order to establish oneself will succeed in the field of pedagogy. This is why the frequently discussed PISA-results show a significant discrepancy between members of the working class and the bourgeois classes. Racism does play a role insofar as a non-dominant background always goes along with discrimination — independent from class and gender.

Statistics show that migrants whose parents are from academic background have better possibilities in their countries of residence. However, the »secret curricula« possesses not only a disciplinary, repressive side but is also of a clearly racist and Eurocentric character. A »good learner« quickly learns which forms of social inequalities and violence are »legitimate« and why it is not a crime to use one’s own privileged position to have a »good life«.

For that, you have to learn how to actively »look away«. This functions quite well in schools. Althusser notes that the education apparatuses can indeed communicate skills, but in forms which secure submission to the dominant ideology or the governance of the practices of the apparatuses. While some learn to submit themselves, others learn the practice of governance. In contrast, Spivak, describes pedagogy as the »uncoring rearrangement of desires«. An impossibility that is worth trying.

V.Y. What does self-organized, autonomous education mean especially in a feminist and migrant context?

M.C.V.: I feel that resistance is not possible without forms of autonomous education. It is precisely the field of collective autonomous learning, where we are confronted with and can confront the socially acquired and rewarded ignorances. Insofar, I observe with dismay the disappearing of spaces of alternative knowledge production which are located outside the university campuses, schools, as well as outside spaces of employment. I think it is necessary to make possible spaces that are more open and as well spaces which are closed. This may sound paradoxical, so let me explain. The former do not demand for formal qualifications, while the latter are necessary to initiate an open, 'uncensored' discourse about one's vulnerabilities and traumatic experiences, which can widen the potential and pluralize the strategies of resistance.
A pedagogy inspired by post-colonial theory puts into question what is often taken for granted in the educational and cultural machineries, whereby its practice can be an irritating experience for all those who participate in it. bell hooks describes that she came to theory because the pain that had been inflicted upon her was so intense that she had the feeling that she could not survive it. For her, theory was a way to understand and a possibility to get a hold on the unbearable pain. hooks rejects the crude anti-intellectualism that denounces theory as just another source of violence and not as a practice of liberation. Self-organized, collective spaces of education can be spaces where theory and practice can be seen in their interplay with each other, and where theory can be reinvented as urgently relevant.

V.Y.: Is there something like »resisting« knowledge? How does it change while being institutionalized?

M.C.V.: Every knowledge is »resisting« to an extent, insofar as it takes a stand against another form of knowledge. The question remains, which »knowledge« can be produced in what way? Where and how can spaces be established, where thinking can be tested not in the sense of innovation, but of experimentation and in the sense of a theory of non-violence? How can we learn to think and to speak about this thinking? Where is this non-hegemonic thinking going to be listened to? This is not a question of »institutionalization«, but of micropolitics à la Foucault, which cannot sneak outside of institutions. A »pedagogy« that is inspired by postcolonial theory, especially looks at the »sanctioned ignorances«, at the actively produced amnesias and their complicity with the imperialist project. In universities, as well as in Catholic kindergartens, »knowledge« can always turn against »institutions« in a way of resistance. How else could it be possible that many »revolutions« had their starting point in conservative institutions of education?

V.Y.: In connection with migration, the topics of education and knowledge are generally being discussed in relation to »language deficiencies« of migrants and required qualifications for the local labor market. Which perspectives can be opened by an alternative notion of education/knowledge?

M.C.V.: Currently, the so-called debate on integration in a way leads the variety of attempts to silence migrants. It is remarkable, how it is »language«, not »speech« that is talked about: migrants should learn the dominant language, but they should not speak, meaning participate politically. Insofar, the debate on »language deficiencies« is a crucial one, and is basically a legitimation for the »non-listening« of the hegemonic majorities. Again and again, it is said that one cannot understand migrants, because they are not able to articulate themselves. The fact is that one’s own monolingualism is seldom put into question and it is terrifying how quickly the point of impatience is reached: a couple of grammatical errors, a ‘strong’ accent, two sentences too much...and immediately it is declared that it would be impossible to understand a person. What is actually missing is mostly the »will to understand« and more importantly the »will to listen«. This obviously has to do with the fact that listening to the others is seldom profitable if it is not a matter of »information retrieval«. On the other side, the refusal of »language appropriation« is dangerous politics. However, and we have known that since Paulo Freire, the process of »language appropriation« offers an excellent terrain for learning how to think in terms of resistance. As Spivak says, the most important task is to learn to break the rules. The one who is breaking the rules makes new spaces possible, spaces that are less violent because they paradoxically make possible talking about the
issue of violence and produce a critical inquiry, which dares to question the »this-is-how-it-is«.

Translation: Katharina Morawek
A german version of this interview was also printed in viennese magazine frauensolidarität #103, 1/2008