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# Debunking Critical Theory's 'Indoctrination' Charge: Provisional Notes on Critical Diversity Literacy Pedagogy

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**ABSTRACT**

Several decades after the abolishment of the formal slave trade, the administrative colonisation of Africa by Europe, and the adoption of progressive international human rights laws for equality, there is no doubt that pro-social justice education is facing a massive backlash from the far right globally. As critical diversity studies teaching and learning practitioners and facilitators, we address how the normative order seeks to legitimise anti-social justice discourses using invalidated assumptions, including the myth that critical theoretical education employs indoctrination. We show how our work is about making visible the baseless and groundless nature of arguments made by the far right in their dismissal of critical theory (CT). Using experiences from teaching and learning in the Theories of Diversity, Otherness & Difference postgraduate course at the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS), we show how CT is a pivotal pedagogical banister for the 21st century. A banister is a support structure along the rails of a staircase. CT in critical diversity studies (CDS) incorporates anti-foundational thinking, which assumes no fixed theoretical resting place as this simplifies the complexity of diversity issues. Overall, this article concludes that far from being a form of 'indoctrination', as is argued by the far right, CT is a useful pedagogical banister for our existence in the 21st century.

**KEYWORDS**
Critical thinking; pedagogy; indoctrination; critical diversity studies, teaching; learning; social justice.

## INTRODUCTION

We are teaching and learning practitioners based at the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS) at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa (Wits). We live in post-apartheid South Africa, where critical theory (CT), critical race theory (CRT), and critical diversity literacy (CDL) are core elements of our practice. Post-apartheid South Africa faces many challenges, and WiCDS aims to meet those challenges through interdisciplinary postgraduate education and research for honours, master's, and PhD students. WiCDS employs the framework of CDL to read power relations in the world like one would read a text (see Steyn, 2015). CDL contains 10 criteria applicable differently to read and interpret social, economic, and political dynamics (Dankwa et al., 2021; Klingovsky & Pfruender, 2017; Steyn, 2015; Steyn et al., 2018, 2021; Steyn & Vanyoro, 2023). CDL is a pedagogy that allows one to challenge norms, powerful positionalities, and individual complicity in relationships of domination.

The master's course that both the authors have been a part of is on Theories of Diversity, Otherness and Difference. The first author has been teaching the class for nearly a decade. The second author was one of the first author's students in the 2018 Theories of Diversity, Otherness and Difference course. He also started teaching the course in 2022 and had taken two different classes at the time of writing. Both authors have therefore been involved in the course in varying capacities. Drawing on our experience, we show how we adopt CDL as a CT pedagogical banister, and not as an indoctrination device. We will show how our critical thinking course encourages independent thinking and collegial exchange.

According to Brian Williams a black American educator:

"Critical thinking encourages students to appreciate objectivity, extract knowledge from their own lived experiences, and value relativism by considering other people's perspectives. It teaches logical reasoning and how to identify biases that can distort our perceptions of reality. Most importantly, critical thinking results in students having greater empathy by reducing their ability to feel completely certain about… well… everything" (2022, p. online).

The critical thinker is, therefore, constantly questioning norms, hegemonic identities, and institutions. This questioning accounts for why CT is conflated with indoctrination by those who want their positionalities to go unscrutinised. This is in a context where we currently witness global resistance toward democratic institutions (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Backed by disinformation, the far right continues to frame CT and CRT as indoctrination (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Hameleers, 2022; Krafft & Donovan, 2020; Mahzam, 2020; Rone, 2022), a threat to the normative order.

We argue that those accusing CT and CRT of indoctrination seek to maintain the hegemony of ideas. Hegemony refers to rule by consent (Gramsci, 1971, 2009). Seiler (2008) posits that the upper classes achieve hegemony when they add "intellectual and moral leadership" to their economic power. In hegemony, events or texts are interpreted to promote one group's interests over another's. For example, advertisers used the 'women's lib' theme during the 1980s to appear to support women's rights while this represented a moment where

women's rights were being reinterpreted to promote the interests of the capital economy (Seiler, 2008). Through co-option, capitalist hegemony acculturates opposing ideas into forms compatible with its core ideologies, absorbing conflicting definitions of reality and domesticating them (Seiler, 2008). We continue to see this today in far-right discourses globally. Below we provide a brief historical account of CT to show why we think it is under attack.

**A brief historical account of CT**

Both CRT and CDL are offshoots of CT. Seiler (2008) opines that critical approaches uncover social conditions and how they conceal hidden structures. CT makes visible how those belonging to the dominant social order conceal power. Further, CT seeks to understand how competing interests collide and how conflict resolution maintains the advantage of one group or another (Seiler, 2008). CT has its foundations in classic Marxism and neo-Marxism. Classic Marxism considers the economic and labour determinants of social structure, institutions, and ideas (Marx, 2000, 2009). Marx examined how the working class is oppressed by those who own the means of production and how the latter also own the ideas that dominate everyday life (Marx, 2000, 2009).

After Marx, critical thinking emerged in the wake of Gramsci and the Frankfurt School in opposition to conservative 'realistic' thinking that denied progressive change (Drolet & Williams, 2022). Adorno and Horkheimer developed a structuralist perspective grounded in Marx's theory of exchange value and focused on the negative effects of universalising exchange values on society and culture (Fuchs, 2018). Compared to Marxism, contemporary CT holds that social processes are overdetermined, and social structure is an interconnected system of elements (Seiler, 2008). Unlike classic Marxism's economic determinism, modern CT holds individuals and structures as crucial in determining social, economic and political outcomes. The neo-Marxist Frankfurt school of thought, led by Adorno and Horkheimer, advocated a holistic approach, a synthesis of philosophy and social science called CT. CT involves combining theory and practice to refute and refine the great philosophical questions of the time while developing new methods without losing sight of the universal (Seiler, 2008). These studies were intended to be situated in a direct historical context, in specific periods and places, considering economic processes, individual psychic structures, and the totality of systems that affect and produce their psyches (Seiler, 2008). Other CT scholars developed the field further. Lefebvre began rethinking the relationship between humanism and structuralism, agency and structure, and the relationship between space and lived experiences (Fuchs, 2018). Marcuse added an analysis of the role of social struggle in establishing new alternatives to capitalism, the logic of exchange-value, and the structural limitations faced by activism in capitalism (Fuchs, 2018).

Cognisant of race's centrality in hegemonic discourse, CT developed into CRT. Race's position as one of the foundational differences that determine which lives matter more than others is irrefutable (Ahmed, 2000; Gandhi, 2019; Grosfoguel, 2002, 2007; Grosfoguel et al., 2015; Mignolo, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012; Steyn, 2000). Derrick Bell (1988) and Richard Delgado (1989) argued that in CRT, racism must be considered more than simply an individual

prejudice but as a structural one too. A more direct connection to CRT can be made by the 1960s black liberation movement and the critical legal studies movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Peller, 2013). CRT arose from the observation that critical legal studies scholars failed to address problems of racial inequality directly and underplayed and overlooked the role that race played in the construction of the legal foundations that support our society (Crenshaw, 1988). Scholars of critical legal studies criticise conventional legal ideology for portraying American society as meritocratic while failing to take racism into account (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). Cornel West (1993) asserts that:

"…critical legal theorists fundamentally question the dominant liberal paradigms prevalent and pervasive in American culture and society. This thorough questioning is not primarily a constructive attempt to put forward a conception of a new legal and social order. Rather, it is a pronounced disclosure of inconsistencies, incoherences, silences, and blindness of legal formalists, legal positivists, and legal realists in the liberal tradition" (p. 196).

A central goal of CRT is to expose the historical, ideological, psychological, and social contexts in which racism has been declared virtually eradicated. At the same time, racially subordinated people have been castigated for over-relying on racial 'victimology' (McWhorter, 2000). According to Parker and Lynn (2002, p. 10), through storytelling and narrative, CRT examines race and racism in society and law, argues for the eradication of racial subjugation while also acknowledging that racism is a social construct, and emphasises the significance of the relationship between race and other forms of dominance. Those in positions of power have often described teaching in CT and CRT as indoctrination (Williams, 2022). We now turn to the various definitions of indoctrination.

**Indoctrination**

Indoctrination is often considered a negative word (Garrison, 1986). In Latin, *doctrina* means knowledge, science, and doctrine, all of which can on occasion be substituted for each other (Momanu, 2012). Indoctrination is a derivative of the word 'doctrine', which means 'a belief which, if not false, is at least not known to be true' (Flew, 1972, pp. 75–76). Robert (1957; 1964 cited in Momanu, 2012) defined doctrine as *savoir*, or acquired knowledge, whereas the verb 'indoctrinate' was defined as instructing, supplying knowledge to someone, or teaching science. Puolimatka (1996) maintains that "Both educative teaching and indoctrination are involved with teaching certain beliefs. The difference is that education fosters the individual process of normative disclosure" (p. 111). Normative disclosure embraces the student's ability to act and think within the given classroom structure.

Indoctrination is viewed with suspicion, and sometimes seen as one person trying to instil doctrine into another person. One example is in the 'training' of young Nazis, where indoctrination describes how children were cultured to strengthen the totalitarian regime (Momanu, 2012). Dewey (1903) saw indoctrination as the imposition of one's ideas on a passive mind. According to one writer, indoctrination is similar to foot binding, a Chinese practice in which young girls' feet are broken and tightly bound to change their shape and size. Foot binding

impedes growth by the imposition of arbitrary limitations (Gatchel, 1959). A significant stage of efficient indoctrination is removing children from their families at a young age so they can be transformed into state-owned objects (Momanu, 2012). According to Cathala (1986), some uprooted children must integrate into an environment that represses their innate personalities with conditioned behaviour. Indeed, indoctrination is not limited to discourse but is accompanied by acts of coercion. In the English language, indoctrination initially had a neutral meaning almost equivalent to educative teaching. Gradually, indoctrination became associated with coercive teaching and disconnected from democratic education concepts (Puolimatka, 1996, p. 109).

Some consider indoctrination in education as inevitable (Macmillan, 1983). This is captured in the indoctrination paradox by Macmillan (1983), who posits that educating a student should lead to developing a coherent set of rational, open-minded beliefs that can change through challenge from a more rational set of beliefs in a modern democratic society. However, for this type of student to develop, they must acquire a belief in rational methods of knowing that is beyond challenge (Macmillan, 1983). Thus, students must be indoctrinated not to be indoctrinated: a pedagogical dilemma or paradox (Macmillan, 1983, p. 270). For Garrison (1986), "this paradox is neither vicious nor inescapable" (p. 264), a phenomenon captured in the example of the linguistics student who must be indoctrinated to be admitted into the linguistic community (Macmillan, 1983, p. 268). Counts (1978), therefore, defends the thesis that:

"…all education contains a large element of imposition, that in the very nature of the case this is inevitable, that the existence and evolution of society depend upon it, that it is consequently eminently desirable, and that the frank acceptance of this fact by the educator is a major professional obligation" (p. 9).

Cognisant of these scholars' (Counts, 1978; Garrison, 1986; Macmillan, 1983) admissions, we propose a definition of indoctrination as exhibited in the teaching style and delivery rather than in the content. Indoctrination may also take place in the absence of intent. For example, when a teacher uses passive and authoritarian methods and does not accept any ideas but their own, they may accidentally indoctrinate without realising it (Momanu, 2012, pp. 98–99). Therefore, indoctrination is more likely to be influenced by 'style' than by the content of the doctrine (Momanu, 2012). We also propose that indoctrination be framed contingent on whether the content is delivered to encourage independent thinking to critique that very content. This is because in Copp's (2016) definition:

To induce people to believe something *uncritically* – or to *indoctrinate* them in this thing – is to induce people to believe it, where, given its nature, there are or could be epistemic reasons for believing it, but to do so (1) without providing epistemic reasons for believing it, [a] to the extent that presenting such reasons would be pedagogically appropriate, reasons that are [b] epistemically fairly balanced and [c] epistemically cogent, or (2) without addressing any

local controversy about it by acknowledging and, to the extent that is appropriate, evaluating the different sides of the controversy (p. 154, emphasis in original).

It is our understanding that indoctrination involves requiring that students believe specific ideas without being offered alternative reasons. In the sections that follow we will highlight our teaching style, which follows on from what we have outlined here as characteristics of indoctrination.

**Indoctrination via education: a backlash aimed at CT and CRT**

Despite their importance, CT and CRT education have faced a significant backlash from populist and far-right movements which consider them to be indoctrination (Drolet & Williams, 2022; Wallace-Wells, 2021) via education. This has particularly been felt in the USA, South Africa, and Scotland. The quote below elucidates the scope of the problem:

"The schools should be educating our children, not indoctrinating them. This precept is widely shared among educators and citizens, at least in liberal societies. Indeed, the word 'indoctrination' is often understood as a pejorative, and where it is so understood, no-one would condone indoctrination in the schools – it would be strange to do so" (Copp, 2016, p. 149).

The charge of indoctrination has become a major rallying point for the far right's backlash aimed at CT. One of the reasons used to justify why CT and CRT may be indoctrinating discourses is the instrumentalised approach found in human rights teaching. Todd (2003) warns against one of the greatest dangers of human rights education: becoming instrumentalised as a set of rules defining how to live. Todd (2003) warns against the potential of human rights education becoming rhetorical violence. A teacher may try to teach abstract principles and relationships, such as empathy, to make students act more appropriately. In the end, such education is a form of rhetorical violence, a technique of persuasion that presumes those subjected to it do not know what they should be doing to behave morally (Todd, 2003). Therefore, the CT facilitator must provide a balance between abstract principles and freedom. The role of the critical educator is to undo imposing teaching methods to create a reflective environment. Thinking without a banister (Arendt, 2018) is an approach we adopt in CT as it allows the student the freedom to critique and read situations as one would a text (Steyn, 2015) without restraint. This will be covered later in the article.

Leaders like former US president Donald Trump are open about their criticism of CT and CRT in education. To combat woke indoctrination in the US, Trump established the 1776 Commission, also called the 1776 Project, in September 2020 to support "patriotic education". On 16 November 2022, one of the stories in the *DC Enquirer,* a new and rapidly growing conservative news organization, focused on politics in Washington DC was headlined: "Donald Trump ROASTS Biden for pushing critical race theory and woke indoctrination during presidential announcement". The article highlights how as part of his presidential candidacy campaign, Trump stated that:

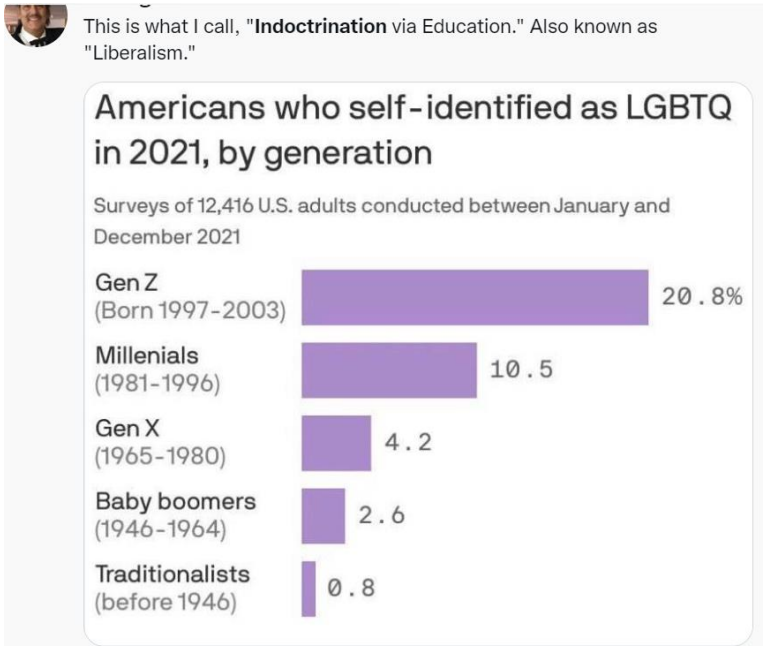
"When I am in the White House, our schools will cease pushing Critical Race Theory as they were, radical civics…or, if they do that, they will lose all federal funding. But we will get them to stop[1]."

CRT was labelled as 'divisive, anti-American propaganda' by the Trump administration, which during its tenure instructed federal agencies to cease providing racial sensitivity training.

Some members of the general public refer to human rights education on gender and sexual diversity as indoctrination. This has become a prominent theme on X, formerly Twitter. Referring to the rising stats of self-identified US-based LGBTQ people in 2021 among Gen Z, an X user wrote: "This is what I call 'Indoctrination via Education'. Also known as 'Liberalism'."

***Figure 1.***

*A tweet criticising gender and sexuality diversity in the USA*




Recently, Scotland's government has been accused of indoctrinating children by means of a curriculum full of "regressive ideas" about everything from sex to gender[2]. In a recent article, a spokeswoman from Hands Up Scotland, a survey that looks at how pupils across Scotland travel to school and nursery was quoted as having said to the *Scottish Express*:

"Government and teachers should not be indoctrinating our kids with the latest political fads; schools should strive for some sense of objectivity and provide our children with a range

[1] DC Enquirer. (2022, November 16) Donald Trump ROASTS Biden for Pushing Critical Race Theory and Woke Indoctrination During Presidential Announcement. https://dcenquirer.com/trump-roasts-crt-put-a-stop/

[2] *Scottish Daily Express*. (2022, November 11). Scottish Government 'indoctrinating schoolchildren' with regressive ideas, claims academic conference. https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/politics/scottish-government-indoctrinating-schoolchildren-regressive-28457288

of differing views. Meanwhile the quality of Scottish education, from primary, secondary, and even higher education, appears to be declining and attainment gaps are widening.[3]"

There are growing calls to stop indoctrination that are based on unsubstantiated claims about CT, CRT, and in some instances, queer theory (QT).

We believe that QT is not a form of indoctrination but makes power operations visible in forming differences that make a difference (Steyn, 2015). By dismissing individual and collective experiences, CT backlash seeks to evade the question of why racial, class, gender, and sexual differences affect positionalities. An example of this kind of backlash is from Gareth Cliff, a white male South African radio and television personality. In 2001 Mudzuli Rakhivane, a member of and advocate for the One South Africa Movement, criticised the racial undertones in a Democratic Alliance (DA) poster that said: "The ANC called you racists. The DA calls you heroes." Responding to Rakhivane, Cliff stated that her "personal experience is completely anecdotal and unimportant to all of us" (Eyaaz, 2021, p. online). Below is an extract from the article:

"In response to Mudzuli Rakhivane, a member and advocate of the One South Africa Movement, who questioned whether the DA had fed racial tensions by erecting its controversial election posters in Phoenix, Cliff asserted that racism was not a priority in the 1 November local elections and claimed that no one was interested in identity politics (Eyaaz, 2021, p. online)."

Cliff's dismissal of the relevance of Rakhivane's identity and personal experience in the debate demonstrates how a backlash against identity politics keeps white privilege in place. We are persuaded to believe that Cliff's statement borrows from Pyle's template for an anti-CRT stance, which states that: "Instead of civil discourse, race-crits substitute subjective, personal and even fictitious 'narratives' as evidence of the permanence and prevalence of racism" (1998, p. 795). This is even though personal experience is legitimate evidence that informs the basis of human life and its conditions.

**Revisiting Hannah Arendt's life as a text for thinking with(out) a banister**

Contrary to these accounts, CT, CRT, and QT are not indoctrinating discourse but essential pedagogical banisters for the 21st century. We will now visit Hannah Arendt's concept of "thinking without a banister", which we alternate with "thinking with a banister" to show the importance of adopting CT and CRT social justice tools that guide the conduct and ethics of individuals and collectives. While we encourage free thinking, we also employ an educational approach that grounds individuals on fundamental empathetic social justice sensibilities for CDL in the 21st century.

Hannah Arendt and Adolf Eichmann were two self-contradictory figures whose lives can provide us with some provisional notes on what it means for one to be 'thinking' in our current historical moment. Arendt wrote:

[3] *Scottish Daily Express*. (2022, November 11). Scottish Government 'indoctrinating schoolchildren' with regressive ideas, claims academic conference. https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/politics/scottish-government-indoctrinating-schoolchildren-regressive-28457288

"There's this other thing, which Draenos brought up… 'groundless thinking'. I have a metaphor which is not quite that cruel, and which I have never published but kept for myself. I call it thinking without a banister – in German, *Denken ohne Geländer*. That is, as you go up and down the stairs you can always hold on to the banister so that you don't fall down, but we have lost this banister. That is the way I tell it to myself. And this is indeed what I try to do" (2018, p. 473).

In the above quotation, Arendt introduces the concept of groundless thinking. She suggests that in an ideal situation, a safe walk up and down the stairs, ought to be facilitated by a banister. She concludes that we have lost this banister. During the 1960s, Arendt observed how Europe was experiencing the establishment of fundamentalist thought in the social sciences. In response to how the social sciences were using fundamental ideas like Marxism to explain the social phenomenon, which we interpret as a concern over the rise of totalitarianism of educational and political thought, Arendt called for the recognition of freedom of thought [without a banister]. Arendt called for thinking without a banister because the conditions for life and thought are constantly changing (Arendt, 2018). This idea is an immense contribution to pedagogy.

A philosopher herself, it was widely reported that Arendt was the lover of Martin Heidegger, a German Nazi member and philosopher specialising in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism (Boym, 2009; Maier-Katkin, 2010). Apart from her proximity to a Nazi, Arendt was a close observer during the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi leader who was charged with overseeing the 'Final Plan' that led to the death of nearly six million Jews (see Arendt & Kroh, 1964). Using the term "the banality of evil", Arendt and Kroh (1964) described the ordinariness of Eichmann's personality. Eichman was not a man Arendt experienced as obviously genocidal. Despite his apparent lack of morality, Eichmann seemed to believe he had only done his duty as a German citizen (Brinkmann, 2022).

For Arendt, Eichmann was not a thinking man. Instead, "Eichmann lacked the *daimon,* the ability to think conscientiously and visit the lives of others through imagination" (Brinkmann, 2022, p. 196). Thinking and *daimon* are important in confronting social evils. As Arendt argues in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the incapacity to think enables someone to do evil (Arendt, 2006; Arendt & Kroh, 1964). It is not out of demonic possession or diabolical depth that one commits evil but a thoughtlessness, a superficiality, and a "remoteness from reality" (Arendt, 2006; Arendt & Kroh, 1964). Arendt observed that Eichmann used language detachedly, unreflectively regurgitating stock phrases without understanding what they entirely meant.

While Arendt confidently interprets Eichmann, the man poses a puzzle for our work and Arendt's concept of groundless thinking. One of the puzzling questions is regarding the parameters of groundless thinking, i.e., to what extent can one be groundless and towards which orientation? In other words, Eichmann presents the paradox of a groundless radical and conservative human who committed genocide. In the book *Politics without Vision: Thinking*

*without a Banister in the 21st Century,* Tracy Strong states that Arendt rejects the need and possibility of a vision.

"A vision is the 'banister' — to adopt Arendt's famous metaphor — without which these thinkers thought" (Smulewicz-Zucker & Thompson, 2015, p. 460). Strong (2012) contemplates the dangers of a politician with no vision. A Weberian politician, like the social scientist, faces a world without authoritative grounds, but she is also responsible for making decisions pertaining to society (Smulewicz-Zucker & Thompson, 2015, p. 460). As considerations of what it means to practise politics without a banister, Lenin and Schmitt are used as extreme examples (Smulewicz-Zucker & Thompson, 2015, p. 460). Therefore Strong (2012) encourages us to rethink how groundlessness can affect political outcomes. Strong also allows us to formulate the following question: "Where is the groundless extremist thinker of today to be found? Which conditions can facilitate their thriving?"

**The need for a banister: A dialectic to embracing guided thinking**

In our work on CDL, we are always aware of the possibility of moving in the wrong direction without a moral compass or banister. At the same time, we also encourage students to think as freely as possible. Using CT and CRT for thinking liminally with(out) a banister is not indoctrination but a pedagogy oscillating between groundless and grounded thinking, so facilitators and learners do not slip into extremism. Below is an account of one such scenario where we witnessed the fine line between free thinking and extremism crossed in a recent facilitation experience:

"While facilitating a session on pan-Africanism and democracy in the 21st century, we had spent the whole day sharing how a 21st-century pan-Africanism must be conscious of differences in sexuality, gender, age and class. When we asked the students to share what their recommendations for 21st century pan-Africanism were, a black female student made a shocking intervention: she stated that democracy allows the 'weak and foolish' to make decisions on important matters of the day. To our surprise, she went so far as to suggest that the world needed another Adolf Hitler to make the tough decisions despotically on behalf of the majority" (Facilitation observation notes, 2022).

While we allowed the student the space to air her views, our pedagogical banister will never:

1. Justify the use of Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany as a model for governance.
2. Excuse a genocidal regime regardless of whatsoever 'good' it is believed to have produced.
3. Neglect the power and identity issues at play. These include the racist, classist and ageist nature of Nazism and all its offshoots.

Another example comes from a classroom engagement between male and female students on the validity of the 'Men are trash' hashtag and movement. One of the male students expressed that he was totally against this movement because he does not believe that all men are implicated in gender-based harm. The female students on the other hand expressed their support for the movement because they believe that all men occupy positions of relative

advantage over women. Despite this student's insistence and suspicion about the movement, our pedagogical banister reminds us that positionalities are important in sustaining social, political and economic disparities. Therefore, the facilitator's role was to remind him that regardless of whether he as a man has never beat up a woman, he is implicated in gendered oppression by virtue of being a man. Authors who have written on privileged positionality as complicity and the question of the implicated subject support this position (Rothberg, 2019; Steyn & Vanyoro, 2021).

That said, it is critical to admit that the facilitator's role is not ideologically neutral. According to Miller:

"Another reason some might accuse educators of indoctrination is because we are not entirely neutral on all subjects. I, for example, do not teach that racism and bigotry are OK. I do not teach that in this modern era there are two sides to whether or not Nazis and slave owners were good people. While I have no problem sharing their justifications for their actions, I don't present perspectives that downplay or whitewash what they did because doing so would not align with objective reality" (Miller, 2022, p. online).

While we may encourage free thought, a form of groundlessness, we also believe that grounding (not indoctrination!) is an essential attribute of CT that provides students with engagement parameters. Understanding what power does and who it serves is a good grounding for responsible citizenship today. This brings one to an appreciation of Arendt's (2018) words: *"*As you go up and down the stairs you can always hold on to the banister so that you don't fall down." Pedagogical banisters therefore guide our individual and collective orientations in a world where interactions between agency and structure shape discourse. Between the banister is a liminal space of praxis that is anti-fundamentalist yet still mindful of the founding principles of morality and humanity.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Arendt (1973) wrote that totalitarian rule's ideal subject is not the dogmatic Nazi or the committed communist; it is the people for whom fact, fiction, truth, and falsehood have become meaningless. These are people for whom the banister has been completely discarded. The ambiguity of our work is it embraces democratic values and freedom of expression, but not at the expense of tolerance for marginalised identities. We adopt an intolerance towards intolerant beliefs. According to Karl Popper, the intolerance of intolerant beliefs, a necessity for tolerant societies, should not be confused with a lack of objectivity. Instead there is a way of avoiding what Popper terms a tolerance paradox, where tolerance of the intolerant becomes a self-contradictory act which results in the abolition of tolerance by the intolerant (Popper, 2012). Overall, tolerance or marginalised identity experiences and lives are important considerations in the CT facilitator's conduct.

**Embracing Martin Buber and Paulo Freire's listening, dialogue, and critical pedagogy in our teaching practice**

Tolerance, dialogue, and listening work hand in glove. In our space, we embrace Martin Buber and Paulo Freire's listening and critical pedagogy ideas. In his seminal text, *Pedagogy of the*

*Oppressed*, Freire (1970) critiqued the hierarchised relationship between the teacher and the student. In this relationship, "the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (Freire, 1970, p. 72). According to Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy:

"the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (p. 72).

Buber (1988), like Freire (1970), argues that listening is a way of embracing the other. According to Buber, real listening involves responding to the other as a whole person and creating a space where the other can speak their own words. According to Buber:

"Genuine conversation, and therefore every actual fulfilment and relation between men, means acceptance of otherness... Everything depends, as far as human life is concerned, on whether each think of the other as the one he is, whether each, that is, with all his desire to influence the other, nevertheless unreservedly accepts and confirms him in his being this man and in his being made in this particular way" (1964, p. 59).

Listening and mutual respect are the two critical attributes that foster dialogical communication (Dagron & Tufte, 2006; Freire, 1970; Rahim, 1994). Listening implies that all participants should attend to one another to realise each other's reality and point of view. Mutual respect means that all participants should treat one another as equals (Kloppers & Fourie, 2018). This is not to say that different identity positionalities become treated as equal.
Dialogue describes the deliberate and conscious decision to listen without prejudice and bracket one's previous positions from the conversation (Burchell & Cook, 2008). Dialogue involves the right for everyone to be heard and the absence of anyone or any group dictating the dialogue (Freire, 1970; Rahim, 1994). Dialogue in Schellhammer's (2017) description in education also involves tension. This tension is captured in the agonistic approach to dialogue (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012). According to Kloppers and Fourie (2018):

"In an agonistic approach, the focus is on shifting power relationships and identifying vulnerability, while also paying attention to justice, conflict and material needs. The agonistic perspective thus recognises conflict as part of dialogue, in contrast to consensus approaches, which view dialogue as collaboration or co-option. In a situation where it is assumed that dialogue needs common ground, the stronger partner could dictate the consensus, but agonistic approaches focus on the potential of 'subverting' power relations" (2018, p. 93).

By taking up an agonistic approach, we are embracing a learning pedagogy in which the facilitator and the students can all learn during the process.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, we have tried to show how CT, CRT, and CDL are not ways of indoctrinating but critical pedagogical banisters for the social justice problems we face in the 21st century. Using Arendt's concept of thinking without a banister, which we reformulated to thinking with(out) a banister,

we stressed the importance of both groundedness and groundlessness to engage with the social, economic, and political problems of our times. We do not dismiss Arendt's concept but reveal the nuances and ambiguities of thinking for social justice outcomes. Using our facilitations and teaching experiences as reference points, we showed why our work is not a form of indoctrination. We also showed how, if anything, far-right anti-CT/CRT individuals and groups employ indoctrination by dismissing race, class, nationality, age, gender, and sexuality as identity markers that shape people's position in society. Anti-CRT represents those altogether without a banister. We call for further work that looks at this phenomenon in South Africa. We also believe more work is needed in early childhood education research on what it means to indoctrinate children with social justice-conscious education.

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