



Affective Atmospheres of Coloniality and the Decolonisation of Peace Education: Theoretical Insights and Political Possibilities

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Abstract

Two recent lines of inquiry that have emerged in educational philosophy and research are the turn to affect theory and the call for decolonising education. Although there have been some efforts to bring these two lines of inquiry together and inform educational philosophy and research, there is still important conceptual work to be done, especially in the context of peace education, our focus in this paper. To initiate this work, we consider the concepts of *affective atmospheres* and *atmospheric attunements* that have been discussed within the context of affect theory. Drawing on these two concepts, we argue that fundamental to any attempts to decolonising peace education is elucidating the coloniality of affects. This is a necessary step towards dismantling the colonial affects that permeate peace education praxis and are maintained through perceptions of peace and conflict embedded within a Western, Eurocentric frame. The paper analyses the theoretical insights emerging from bringing these concepts together to bear on the decolonisation of peace education and discusses some political possibilities that are also enabled.

Keywords Affect · Affective atmospheres · Atmospheric attunements · Affective decolonisation · Peace education · Decolonial peace

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Introduction

This paper arises from two recent lines of inquiry that have emerged in educational philosophy and research. The first concerns the turn to affect theory (see for example Ahmed 2012; Zembylas 2021a; McKenzie 2017; Mulcahy 2022; O'Donnell 2018; Todd et al. 2016), and the second to the calls for the decolonisation of education (see for example Kruger 2020, 2021; Zembylas 2020, 2023, 2024; Mbembe 2016; Stein 2019, 2022). Although there have been some efforts to bring these two lines of inquiry together and inform educational philosophy and research (e.g. Zembylas 2023), there is still important conceptual work to be done, especially in the context of peace education, our focus in this paper. Peace education is a fascinating field for exploring the entanglement between affectivity and decolonisation because it is perceived as a political and pedagogical project through which decolonial praxis can be nurtured (Hajir & Kester 2020). Although we understand peace education through the lens of Bar-Tal and Rosen's (2009) classic definition—i.e. as an area of social education and field of study concerned with the socialization of both schools and the society in the peace process, especially in areas of war and conflict—we broaden this definition to entail all sorts of social and political conflict, including those lingering from social injustice, oppression, and coloniality. This paper, then, aims to expand theorisation of the decolonial possibilities of peace education by focusing on how these possibilities may be enriched through paying attention to the affective dimensions of decolonisation.

Affect theory has increasingly come to inform research in the humanities and social sciences in the aftermath of the affective turn. In general, affect theory can broadly be said to bring together psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity, theories of embodiment, and political theory to consider “the intersections of the social, cultural, and political with the psychic and the unconscious” (Zembylas 2021a, p.1). Affect theory has also been taken up in educational research with a growing body of work exploring the entanglement of affect and emotion with education in such contexts as practice, curriculum, and policy. Notwithstanding the different ways in which the relationship between emotions and affects is conceptualised, the affective turn signals a recognition in educational research that “the political, the social, and the psychic aspects of our bodies and subjectivities” are constituted through “the multiple complexities of affects and emotions” and that these “cannot be thought of outside the complexities, reconfigurations, and rearticulations of power, history, and politics” (Zembylas 2021a, p.3). A further consequence of affect theory has been a marked shift from epistemological concerns to material and ontological concerns (Ahmed 2012; Kruger 2015; Zembylas, 2021a; Greco & Stenner 2008; Gregg & Seigworth 2010).

In a limited number of instances, affect theory has been considered in relation to discussions and debates on the importance of decolonising education and what this might entail (Zembylas 2023). If one understands decolonisation in an expansive sense to refer “to the ongoing and multifaceted process of undoing colonisation in various realms of social, political, economic and cultural life” (Zembylas 2023, p.302), then affective decolonisation entails recognising that decolonisation also has an affective dimension, and that any work towards decolonisation should necessarily also take place on an affective level (Khanna 2020). Affective decolonisation would then consist of exploring the affective contours of coloniality, and undoing “the deeply affective structures and sensibilities of colonisation” (Zembylas 2023, p.302) to redo and reconstruct different and more affirmative postcolonial affective structures and sensibilities (see Bignall 2010).

In our paper we draw on these two lines of inquiry, affect theory and decolonisation, to explore a neglected area of research in peace education, namely the affective dimensions of decolonising peace education. Although decolonisation has been discussed in relation to peace education (Kruger & Zembylas 2023; Zembylas 2018, 2020; Bajaj 2015; Cremin et al. 2018; Hajir & Kester 2020; Kester 2019; Kester et al. 2021; Williams 2016), to our knowledge there has not yet been adequate consideration thereof in terms of affect and affect theory. To address this lacuna, we consider an overlooked aspect of the way that affect theory has informed educational philosophy and research more generally, namely the presence and effects of *affective atmospheres* and *atmospheric attunements*.

Affective atmospheres, a concept proposed by Anderson (2009), foregrounds the active role that the embodied, relational, and non-representational dimensions of space play in shaping social interactions and subjective perceptions. In this proposal atmospheres are understood to be “something distributed yet palpable...that registers in and through sensing bodies whilst also remaining defuse” (McCormack 2008, p.413). Affective atmospheres are dynamic configurations that emerge from embodied encounters and socio-cultural contexts, understood to being both internal and external to living, that encapsulate collective emotions and shared meaning *and* as these manifest in subjective experience (Ahmed 2004; Anderson 2009).

For Stewart (2011) this means that affective atmospheres are not inert contexts but dynamic and lived affects. Following from this, atmospheric attunements entail the “attunement of the senses, of labors, and imaginaries to potential ways of living” (Stewart 2011, p.452), or as put by Kenner (2021, p.1115), “knowing the environment through its affects”. Attunement thus entails gathering things into meaning through “chronicling how incommensurate elements hang together” (Stewart 2011, p.452) and allowing for worldings—“compositional process of dwelling in spaces that bears, gestures, gestates, worlds” (p. 445)—to occur. Bringing analytic attention, through attunement, to bear on the atmospheres in and through which peace education is enacted within a particular setting, thus allows for the present to become composed as a sense of potentiality and of being open to being transformed, that is, to being decolonised.

In this paper, we argue that the concepts of affective atmospheres and atmospheric attunements are productive in helping education scholars theorise how the decolonisation of peace education might be felt, engaged with, and embodied in response to the lingering affects and atmospheres of coloniality. Central to the decolonial project in the context of peace education would be to foreground the constitutive role that affects and affective atmospheres of coloniality play in how peace education is conceptualised and practiced, and through attunement generate theoretical and political openings for transformation. To pursue this argument, the paper is divided into four sections. We start by considering how affect and affect theory has informed educational philosophy and research in recent years. We focus, in particular, on the few instances where this has specifically been in relation to peace education. This is followed in the second section by a discussion of the concepts of affective atmospheres and atmospheric attunements before we turn our attention in the third section to the affects and affective atmospheres of coloniality in peace education; in this latter section we discuss specific examples to show the potentiality of these concepts. We conclude by considering the theoretical and political openings generated for decolonising peace education through drawing on the concepts of affective atmospheres and atmospheric attunements.

Affect Theory in Educational Philosophy and Research

In recent years, both ‘affect’ and ‘emotion’ have been used in the context of theorizing the affective turn in the field of education. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge from the outset of this paper that there are different ways of understanding both affect and emotion, hence their conceptual clarity is of the essence. Some approaches, for example, see affect and emotion as structurally distinct, defining affect in terms of bodily intensity, that is, in relation to the capacity to act and be acted upon and what a body can do when it encounters other bodies. Other approaches conceive affects and emotions as essentially interchangeable, invoking affect as an analogue of the emotional and the embodied. Whether used to discuss bodily capacity or bodies in relation, these notions of affect encompass emotion, hence a distinction line between affect and emotion can only be done for analytic purposes rather than in real life (Ahmed 2004, 2010).

In this paper, then, we understand affect as not “simply a personal feeling” or “emotion in the everyday sense” (Massumi 2015, p. 3), but rather as “the power/capacity ‘to affect and be affected’” (Massumi 2015, p. ix). In this sense, affects constitute ‘forces’ that are manifested in the capacities that circulate from one body to another (Seigworth & Gregg 2010). Hence, affects are understood as relational forces rather than as individual mental states because they connect bodies (Zembylas 2021a); or, in Massumi’s (2015) terms, affects are ‘transversal’, that is, they cut through traditional binaries of body/mind, subjective/objective, cognition/emotion. In other words, affect is a social rather than a psychological construct, and it is used to refer to intensities and forces that produce new affective and embodied connections. As intensities and forces that connect bodies, affects make it possible to identify their traces on space, objects, and the environment (Thrift 2008).

The entanglement of affect with space, objects and the environment has been expressed in the combined concept of ‘affective assemblage’ (e.g. see Zembylas 2021c; Hickey-Moody 2019; Morley et al. 2021; Mulcahy 2012; Ringrose 2011). This concept remains variously defined and, in some cases, lacks conceptual or methodological specificity (Zembylas 2021b, 2021c). Importantly, the theoretical construct of assemblage is not reducible to a single logic, as there are many ways of theorizing the emergence and entanglement among heterogeneous elements of space and the environment to account for their inter-relationships (Savage 2020). This relational way of understanding affects—namely, as relations between bodies, objects, and spaces—makes affects vital forces in holding assemblages together. By ‘affective assemblages’, then, we refer to the ways that affects and emotions, bodies, discourses, practices, spaces, and materialities are assembled in specific contexts and at specific moments in time to comprise an intensive entanglement of the corporeal and incorporeal that is constantly ‘becoming’ (Zembylas 2021c).

Generally speaking, an assemblage is an arrangement of heterogeneous elements—e.g. structures, practices, materials, affects, discourses etc.—which form connections held together by flows of desire (Deleuze & Guattari 1983, 1986, 1987). A fundamental characteristic of assemblages is that they are relational entities, defined by multiplicities, processes, and flows rather than by essences, forms, or hierarchies (Rutzou & Elder-Vass 2019). What defines assemblages, then, is the relations and connections between the elements that constitute an assemblage. In ontological terms, explain Rutzou and Elder-Vass, the concept of assemblage challenges and critiques traditional accounts of structure, totality, and causation by reconstructing an ontology around multiplicity, dynamic change, and contingency. What is important is that the components of an assemblage are not fused

together in a static formulation that can be detached and attached to other assemblages. Rather, it is the relational interactions between component parts that form the assemblage; if these components stop interacting or are no longer connected, the assemblage falls apart.

The theoretical and political promise of affective assemblage lies precisely in its recognition of the role of affects in forging assemblages (Ghoddousi & Page 2020). Thus, paying attention to how affects informs and manifest in certain contexts, such as peace education efforts, allows for analysing the flows of affects to gain understanding of the emergent political agency of certain assemblages (e.g., see Zembylas 2021c). The conceptual toolbox of analysis, then, is enriched by enabling us to examine how and why affects are mobilised in a peace education policy or praxis, holding promises of successes or failures.

All in all, then, affects and emotions constitute a crucial element of the political forces and historical materialities of decolonisation efforts in peace education (Zembylas 2018). In this sense, decolonisation projects in peace education inevitably demand the disruption of the ways that perceptions of peace/conflict and coloniality are inscribed affectively to the ‘body’—the individual, social and political body (Khanna 2020). “If our political and scholarly practices aim to dismantle colonial habits” of thinking, feeling and being, writes Khanna (*ibid.*, p. 2), we must be able to engage the multiple sites in which these enduring colonial habits continue to operate. One of these sites is undoubtedly peace education as an educational intervention in particular socio-political context (e.g. postcolonial settings). Hence, an approach that takes into consideration affects and emotions to the study and practice of decolonising peace education invites attention to the ways that these affects/emotions come together to consolidate peace/conflict and coloniality or are dis/re-assembled to dismantle its norms. In the next part of the essay, we turn our attention to the notion of affective atmospheres to explain how these atmospheres have implications for peace education.

Affective Atmospheres and Atmospheric Attunement

First, we would like to begin with an important distinction between affective assemblages and affective atmospheres. As noted earlier, affective assemblages encompass the ways in which affects and emotions, bodies, discourses, practices, spaces, and materialities come together in specific contexts and at specific moments in time to comprise an intensive entanglement of the corporeal and incorporeal. Affective atmospheres, in contrast, refer to the overall mood that is produced by a particular place, the fluid and constantly changing affective assemblages circulating in it, and how this encompasses the collective affective qualities that are perceived, felt, and inscribed on bodies (individual, social, political) in that place. To our knowledge, there has not been a discussion yet of the concepts of affective atmospheres and atmospheric attunements in the field of peace education in general, and the decolonisation of peace education in particular. We argue that these concepts allow for a productive exploration of peace education, how the affects of coloniality continue to permeate efforts to engage in peace education efforts, and how foregrounding the collective and individualised affects and affective atmospheres generate productive openings to consider the theoretical and political implications of the affective decolonisation of peace education. In this section, we first discuss how affective atmospheres have been conceptualised before turning our attention to the notion of atmospheric attunement as a “feeling the relational possibilities within an atmosphere” (Brown et al. 2019, p.14). Based

on our discussion of these concepts, we propose that exploring peace education efforts in a given context through the lens of affective atmospheres allows for understanding how the affects of coloniality might continue to inform the conceptualisation, theorisation, and practice thereof.

We take up the concept of affective atmospheres as proposed by Anderson (2009) to consider the active role that the embodied, relational, and non-representational dimensions of space play in shaping social interactions and subjective perceptions. This understanding of affective atmospheres is developed out of the work of Gernot Böhme (1993) who foregrounds the affective powers of feelings and moods associated with engagements in social and material contexts. For Böhme (2017), the creation and properties of atmospheres can neither be ascribed solely to either subjective experiences or objective environment but needs to be understood through the co-presence of subject and object. For Zembylas (2022a) and Bille et al., (2015) this means that there exists the possibility for affective atmospheres to be staged and ‘engineered; a position that holds much potential (and risks) for the affective decolonisation of peace education and to which we return later in the paper. Anderson’s concept, and how this has subsequently been employed and developed by others (see for example Zembylas 2022a; Fregonese 2017; McCormack 2008; Riedel 2019), builds on Böhme’s proposition by considering the transpersonal dimensions of affects that press upon and envelope everyday existence. In other words, it invites us to explore how the atmospheres in which we live “constitute a fundamental aspect of how we experience the world, and more specifically, how our activities and social relations are entangled with the spaces in which we act or dwell” (Zembylas 2022a, p.557). Framing affective atmospheres in this manner, as felt spaces that are both spatialised and an ensemble of human and non-human bodies, thus allow for foregrounding the entanglement of material and social contexts with affective practices and the unfolding relations that such entanglements enable.

For Anderson (2009, 2014), affective atmospheres are ambiguous in that they are both present and absent, material, and immaterial, finished, and unfinished. Yet, it is precisely this ambiguity that allows one to reflect on how affective qualities create places, encounters, and events to have a particular ‘feel,’ notwithstanding that these may involve forms of feeling that remain ineffable and cannot be captured as discrete emotions. In drawing on Dufrenne, Anderson (2014) posits that atmospheres remain unfinished and indeterminate because of their “constitutive openness to being expressed and qualified in specific encounters” and given that “[t]hey are resources that must be attuned to by bodies” (p.145). Importantly this means that atmospheres are “always in the process of emerging and transforming” (p.145) as they are worked and reworked, both by individuals and collectives, as part of lived experience. Furthermore, although affective atmospheres, as collective affects, shape our capacities to affect and be affected, they do not necessarily determine this (Anderson 2014) since they are experienced from a particular point, in a specific time, by a situated body with an existing capacity to act and be acted upon (Ahmed 2004).

Affective atmospheres, then, are neither reducible to sense experience nor the ensembled parts, human and non-human, through which they are composed since these are experienced and produced simultaneously. For Anderson (2014) this means that “atmospheres are a kind of indeterminate affective excess through which intensive space-times are created and come to envelop specific bodies; sites, objects, people, and so on, all may be atmospheric or may feel and be moved by atmospheres” (p.160). In this sense one can think about affective atmospheres in terms of emergent causality (Connolly 2011 in Anderson 2014), as emerging from a gathering of elements, whilst at the same time

actively conditioning the elements through which it emerges. Furthermore, one can argue that although affective atmospheres pre-exist sense experience, they nonetheless become ‘real’ through individuals and collectives attuning to them whilst at the same time being changed through engaging in such attunements. In short, then, a central aspect of affective atmospheres is that in “emanating and enveloping particular things, sites or people, [they] are endlessly being formed and reformed through encounters as they are attuned to and become part of life” (Anderson 2014, p.145). Affective atmospheres can thus be understood as felt spaces that individuals and collectives are engaged with, and that are experienced through the affective changes in a body’s capacity to act or be acted upon as it enters in and out of social and material relations in space (Zembylas 2022a). Given this, attunements to affective atmospheres are important to consider.

The concept of atmospheric attunements is discussed by Stewart (2011) as an analytic attention to the complex and emergent worlds that one moves through in everyday life. By proposing atmospheric attunements as a “compositional process of dwelling in spaces” (Stewart 2011, p.445), the plasticity of lived composition and the transformative potential that is immanent to the act of attending is hinted to. In drawing on Berlant (2010 in Stewart 2011), Stewart proposes that analytic attention demands “absorptive awareness” and hypervigilance. Atmospheric attunement, then, can be thought of as a “tricky alignment with the amazing, sometimes eventful, sometimes buoyant, sometimes endured, sometimes so sad, always commonplace labor of becoming sentient to a world’s work, bodies, rhythms, and ways of being in noise and light and space” (Stewart 2011, p.445).

Vannini and Vannini (2020) argue that since affective atmospheres are not something ‘out there’ they can be considered as ‘half-entities’; as “always located between experiences and environments,” as a “constellation of people and things” (Bille et al. 2015, p.32). As half-entities affective atmospheres “come to life not through representation but through attunement” (Vannini & Vannini 2020, p.5). Brown et al. (2019) point out that atmospheric attunements could be understood as a propensity, a practiced sensibility that involves “feeling the relational possibilities within an atmosphere” (p.14). It is by becoming sentient to the world and its affective atmospheres through material and sensory labour, then, that moments of pause “in the regular flow of daily life” (Vannini & Vannini 2020, p.6) are affected. Whereas Brown et al (2019) refer to these moments of pause as being able to tune-in to the opportunities afforded within a particular atmosphere, Paiva and Cachinho, (2018) understand attunement as a process of becoming in relation to one’s environment, of being-there and being-in-the-world. It is in moments of pause, of tuning in and being-in-the-world, then that imaginaries of different ways of doing and living are generated.

In summarising the shift from affect to affective atmospheres in the literature, Zembylas (2022a) identifies three broad themes we also engage with in developing our argument. Firstly, affective atmospheres involve dynamic processes that “combine[s] both affective and spatio-temporal elements” (Zembylas 2022a, p.559), whilst neither can be reduced to the other. Secondly, specific agency cannot be ascribed to affective atmospheres as they are relational and are produced through the attunement of affective practices and socio-material contexts. And thirdly, affective atmospheres constitute their own space–time that is produced through the entanglement of human and non-human bodies. Exploring peace education through the lens of affective atmospheres thus allows for considering and theorising how the affects of coloniality may still inform the conceptualisation, theorisation, and practice of peace education efforts. It is to this that we next turn our attention. This is a crucial step, we believe, towards reflecting on the theoretical and political implications that engaging with affective atmospheres hold for decolonising peace education.

Unsettling the Affective Atmospheres of Coloniality in Peace Education

Before we discuss how to engage with the notion of affective atmospheres in the context of decolonising peace education, it is important to briefly outline some manifestations of coloniality at the affective level and its link to peace education. For example, affective atmospheres within a university located in a colonized setting (e.g. United States, Canada) repeatedly circulate certain affects through the peace education curriculum, policies, and practices. Ignoring, for instance, racially minoritized groups' feelings (e.g. anger, injustice), while prioritizing white feelings (e.g. fragility, benevolence) creates affective atmospheres that naturalize power relations through affects (Zembylas 2023). Even what constitutes 'conflict' or 'peacebuilding' within such as context (e.g. liberal peace), marginalizing or ignoring the affective experiences of Black, Indigenous and Peoples of Colour (BIPOC), frames affective atmospheres in universities that are steeped in coloniality. This can perpetuate Western ways of thinking and feeling about liberal peace over BIPOC perspectives and affective experiences.

Zembylas (2018, 2022a) has alluded to how such affective atmospheres enable the affective circulation of ideas among well-meaning white liberals (e.g. empathy) that perpetuate superficial approaches to peace and conflict that have no effect at the structural level. For instance, pedagogical practices in a US or Canadian university that encourage students to feel empathy towards distant 'others' in a conflict-affected society (e.g. Israel/Palestine) without paying attention to the challenges of peace and conflict emerging from coloniality within their own context risk reproducing coloniality at the affective level. It is crucial to explore, then, how affective atmospheres are created and sustained through peace education curriculum and practice within a given context. In this regard, it might be productive to make a distinction between liberal peace and decolonial peace. We understand liberal peace as a normative and teleological project informed by humanist notions of 'the human' as an autonomous, rational, and sovereign 'individual' (Donnelly 2003). It is furthermore based on universal conceptions of peace and human rights that either ignore or undermine cultural, structural, and economic inequalities. Liberal peace then has as danger "masking power relations embedded in complex historical relations and undermining local understandings of how participants might cultivate their sense of transformative agency" (Zakharia, 2017, p.48). In contrast, decolonial peace is based on the premise that "there are several ways to understand and live the reality of violence, conflict and the construction of peace in everyday spaces and in school" (Sandoval in Cruz 2021, p.281). This means that decolonial peace offers a plurality of pathways for conceptualising peace and ways of enacting it that, on the one hand, is informed by local ontologies and epistemologies, and on the other hand, draws on "different ways of being and knowing that reject the stifling, violence-laden lifeworlds made available by colonial modernity and its liberal undercurrents" (Day et al 2023) that informs normative and universal understandings of peace.

In particular, the following questions may help education scholars engage in the exploration of how affective atmospheres are created and sustained through peace education efforts: What do affective atmospheres in a given socio-political context enable students to do or not to do to promote alternative understandings of peace and peace education that are decolonising? What do these affective atmospheres entail in order to nurture 'decolonial peace' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015), that is, peace in a decolonized world rather than merely 'liberal peace'? In which ways do these atmospheres unsettle the coloniality of the affects promoted by liberal forms of peace and peace education, which

remain largely indifferent to coloniality as an analytic tool in the conception of peace and conflict? These questions, which provide the impetus for a thorough empirical investigation of the affective atmospheres of coloniality in peace education, draw attention to the ways in which liberal and decolonial forms of peace and peace education differ, enabling educators and researchers to examine how the affective atmospheres created and sustained in Western/Global North universities matter politically.

Our reading of the literature suggests that the theorization of affective atmospheres of coloniality in peace education, which harnesses the historicizing and politicizing potentialities of affect, has received only marginal attention. Accordingly, we employ the concepts of affective atmospheres and atmospheric attunements as an affective-political frame through which to consider how decolonising peace education may be enacted in educational settings. A classroom affective atmosphere that promotes decolonial peace, for example, generates elements that frame discussions and enactments of peace in ways that move beyond the limits of liberal peace; rather, decolonial peace must be constantly felt and practiced in atmospheres that are created to orient (attune) students towards decolonisation.

In particular, unsettling the affective atmospheres of coloniality in peace education taking place at a university within a post-colonial context entails careful attention to numerous elements such as: the socio-material appearances of peace at this university, as those are manifested in discourses and on walls, computers, textbooks, silences, noises and bodies of students and educators, as they stand, sit, move around in learning activities. All of these constitute elements of affective atmospheres of peace education in that they combine affective potentials and forces that might be attuned with liberal or decolonial peace. Unsettling affective atmospheres that promote liberal peace, then, requires that educators become aware of the colonial dimensions of the taken for granted arrangements operative in many Western liberal societies. A hegemony of liberal peace and its embedded, dominant ways of thinking and feeling is being perpetuated by imposing liberal understandings of peace and by dismissing the affective and embodied realities of oppressed or marginalized groups.

To refer to an affective atmosphere of decolonising peace education in a university setting, then, is to circulate feelings for/about decolonial peace, which invariably includes educational material and pedagogical practices that legitimate the importance of decolonial peace. In this way, an affective atmosphere of decolonising peace education is not only something students feel, but it also simultaneously positions the felt space as something students *do* (Zembylas 2022a). In other words, how an educator nurtures an affective attunement to decolonial peace in a classroom is inevitably linked to both procedures (e.g. practices) and substance (e.g. subject matter; materiality of classroom). It is not enough to *talk* about peace; decolonial peace has to be enacted—e.g. by incorporating Indigenous peace practices in conflict resolution; by examining the complexities around land rights and restitution initiatives. These examples highlight a key point about the importance of dismantling the colonial affects that permeate liberal peace education: colonial affects are maintained through perceptions of peace and conflict embedded within a Western, Eurocentric frame.

Hence, it is pivotal to highlight that racialized colonized educators and students can agentively name, unpack and unsettle such colonial affects and ideologies about/for liberal peace. The idea that new affective atmospheres can be created raises some challenging questions about the possibilities to ‘engineer’ or ‘stage’ atmospheres (Bille et al. 2015) towards one or another direction. Following this conceptualisation, there is a dilemma as to whether staging atmospheres of decolonising peace education can be ethically or politically

problematic. On the one hand, one may argue that any sort of staging of atmospheres should not even be taking place in education, as this would amount to manipulation or indoctrination (Zembylas 2022b). On the other hand, can we really ignore that some sort of staging takes place anyway, if we consider that there is some kind of planning involved in curriculum and instruction?

Bille et al. (2015) ask: “[W]hat does an atmosphere make it possible to do, to perceive and to share?” (p. 33). This is a fundamental question that raises further questions about the transformative potential of staging atmospheres for the decolonisation of peace education: What are the effects of educators’ attempts to teach for/about peace through staging affective atmospheres that are conducive to decolonial peace? Under which circumstances may educators be blamed for propaganda or affective indoctrination, if they design affective atmospheres that purposely cultivate feelings for/about decolonial peace? What are the affective consequences of these efforts for students? There is, then, a transformative potential in designing new affective atmospheres through the realignment of bodies and affects in ways that nurture decolonial peace. As Bille et al. (2015) reminds us, affective atmospheres inevitably constitute a space of political contestation, although they “cannot be completely controlled in any simple and unambiguous way by political agents” (p. 34).

Gandy (2017) highlights the nuanced complexity of atmospheres, noting that their creation goes beyond simple matters of scale or the manipulation of certain socio-material elements, such as what might be found in a classroom setting. Instead, this complexity presents a vital opportunity to deeply engage with how decolonial peace is experienced in an embodied and affective way. While introducing the concept of deliberately creating affective atmospheres in the context of decolonising peace education carries the risk of these efforts being perceived as mere attempts at indoctrination, there is no certainty that the emotions or affects elicited will naturally attune with decolonial peace ideals. Therefore, the idea of curating affective atmospheres within decolonising peace education should not be simplistically assumed or dismissed as propaganda. Rather, it should be seen as an opportunity for educational and political exploration, encouraging a reconsideration of how affective relations and practices are cultivated and what impact they have within peace education efforts.

Theoretical and Political Implications of Affective Atmospheres and Atmospheric Attunement for Decolonising Peace Education

In the last section of the paper, we consider the theoretical and political openings generated by the concepts of affective atmospheres and atmospheric attunements for the decolonisation of peace education. In aiming to contribute to peace education scholarship that problematises and work towards dismantling the Eurocentric foundation that has marked and continues to mark the field of peace education (e.g., Kruger and Zembylas 2023; Zembylas 2020; Bajaj 2015; Cremin et al. 2018; Hajir 2023; Kester 2019; Williams 2016), and drawing on the emerging work on affect and affect theory in education (e.g. Ahmed 2012; Zembylas 2021a; McKenzie 2017; Mulcahy 2022; O’Donnell 2018; Savage 2020; Thompson et al. 2022; Todd et al. 2016), we argue that paying attention to the colonality of affects circulating in the field of peace education is productive in theoretical and political terms. In theoretical terms these concepts allow for foregrounding the primary role that affects play in maintaining the colonial matrix of hierarchies and exclusions and how these manifest in the dominant discourses and practices of peace education. In political terms these concepts create openings for challenging and transforming the colonial

economies of affect (Agathangelou 2019) that still circulate in discourses and practices of peace education in particular settings. We consider these implications in turn.

The continued dominance of a Eurocentric modernist framework informed by liberalism and liberal peace in peace education theorisation and practice has been acknowledged and problematised over the past decade (see for example Kruger and Zembylas 2023; Zembylas 2018; Zembylas and Bekerman 2013; Bajaj 2015; Hajir 2023; Kester 2019; Williams 2016). As it relates to the decolonisation of peace education, these critiques have highlighted how Eurocentric knowledge traditions continue to promote hegemonic norms and values based on liberal notions of what it means to be ‘human’ that inform the theorisation and practice of peace education (Kruger and Zembylas 2023). We draw on Shirazi’s (2011, p.280) call to be vigilant against “ascribing [to] a universal emancipatory promise... [of] educational interventions that disembodify the subject from his/her social and political settings”, by arguing for recognising the importance of affects in the decolonising project and the need for radical affective reconstitution (Khanna 2020). This is necessary for two reasons.

Firstly, affects are mobilized within the context of peace education efforts to mark that which is considered significant (i.e. values, dispositions, knowledge, practices) and the relations emerge from and enacted through this (see Anderson 2014; Zembylas 2022a). Thus, if the coloniality of affects is not acknowledged within the context of peace education theory and practice it means that any efforts towards challenging and dismantling the Eurocentric modernist framework undergirding peace education efforts would be hampered. For example, Cremin et al. (2018) argued that three crises are currently faced by peace educators. One of the crises concerns the fact that peace education programmes often become closely aligned with nationalism. In building on these insights, we argue that paying attention to the coloniality of affects would allow to further foreground the ways in which the affective economies of nationalism (see Antonsich et al. 2020; Merriman & Jones 2017; Militz & Schurr 2016) become imbricated with peace education programmes and how these come to inform policy, curricula, and pedagogical practices. Furthermore, paying attention to the affective atmospheres of nationalism (see Closs Stephens 2016), allows exploring how certain values, dispositions, and ways of being become normalised and endure within nationalist discourse, how these manifest in peace education efforts, and why these become difficult to critique or challenge within particular social and political settings (e.g. peace education in Israel within the current culture of war).

Secondly, affect functions both in the micro and macro spheres (Hynes 2013) and allows for the larger discourses and structures of the macropolitical to be connected with the micropolitics of everyday experiences of individuals. This implies that by paying attention to the feelings and experiences of students and teachers, the ‘moods’ that circulate in classrooms and schools, and how these are in turn informed by particular pedagogical practices, curricula, and educational policies, allow for mapping the ways in which the affective structures and atmospheres of the macropolitical become rescaled to the micropolitical level of everyday experiences (Zembylas 2022a). For example, paying attention to the ‘affective assemblages’ of a peace education policy—that is, the multiplicity of contingent events, processes, actions, affects/emotions emerging from this policy—helps us to better understand how peace education is positioned vis-à-vis the desires and practices of peace and conflict within this society. In this regard, what is assembled is not only the material, discursive or political elements of peace and peace education within this setting, but rather the assembling of subjects and objects is done through affects that constitute the ‘glue’ of these assemblages (cf. Ghoddousi & Page 2020). In particular, consider the political potential of reconciliation advanced through a peace education policy and the ambivalent feelings of hope and fear involved in a process

of peace education policy (e.g., see Zembylas et al. 2016). Affective assemblages in this process bring into relations several components that turn attention to how and why a peace education policy may invoke ambivalent affective atmospheres vis-à-vis peace and education. We argue that in both these instances, acknowledging (1) how affect is mobilised and circulated in peace education settings and, (2) how micro- and macropolitical dimensions are entangled, drawing on affective atmospheres as analytic frame, allows for generating critical insights towards new understandings of decolonising peace education.

Earlier in the paper we argued that affective atmospheres are the collective affective qualities that are produced within a given place. This means that employing affective atmospheres as an analytic frame offers a means through which to foreground and theorise the continuing presence of coloniality of affects in peace education efforts, how this manifests in the macropolitical dimension as socio-material structures and relations and are inscribed on bodies and felt on the micropolitical level in everyday experiences. In taking into account the affective dimensions of peace education efforts means that decolonisation would then consist of exploring the affective contours of coloniality, and undoing “the deeply affective structures and sensibilities of colonisation” (Zembylas 2023, p.302). This would entail, for example, considering how the affective economies of the coloniality of knowledge and power continue to inform the theorisation of and research in peace education (macropolitical dimension), and how these are rescaled to the micropolitical dimension in the ways that (liberal) peace becomes normalised and informs the affective spaces (e.g. institutional, curricular, etc.) and relations (interpersonal, pedagogical, etc.) that compose everyday experiences. In terms of the latter, we agree with Khanna (2020; see also Zembylas 2023) that decolonisation should thus entail efforts towards identifying the ways in which embodied experiences of peace education efforts could inform generating openings for challenging and interrupting the inscription and reproduction of the coloniality of affects. In terms of the theorisation of peace education, this foregrounds the need to explore the affects and affective assemblages that are produced and sustained by peace education efforts, and how within different contexts, these affects either reinscribe or challenge coloniality.

The ambiguity of affective atmospheres and how they constantly emerge and transform as different affects and affective assemblages form, transform, and dissipate (Anderson 2014), allow for positioning it as a resource through which decolonial affects could be generated. ‘Engineering’ affective atmospheres (Bille et al. 2015) in peace education contexts that allow for cultivating opportunities for “attunement of the senses, of labors, and imaginaries to potential ways of living” (Stewart 2011, p.452) could be productively employed in working towards decolonising peace education. The means, for example, that efforts towards decolonising peace education should necessarily entail curating atmospheres that allow for engaging in new affective relationalities that seek to “undo the emotive lessons in the habits of mind and memory that continue to sustain the legacies of empire in various sites” (Zembylas 2023, p.309). Activating the concept of atmospheric attunement would furthermore allow for exploring the relational possibilities within an atmosphere (Brown et al. 2019) and how these might be reworked and reconfigured to generate practices and relations that contribute to dismantling coloniality. These are significant both in terms of theorising decolonised peace education, but also in terms of the political in how decolonising peace education becomes enacted.

Atmospheric attunement firstly allows for being able to gather incommensurate elements into meaning (Stewart 2011) by becoming sensitive to the entanglement of macro (structural) and micro (existential) dimensions of everyday existence and the consequences such entanglements hold in modulating one’s capacity to act or be acted

upon within any given situation or in particular contexts. Becoming sensitive to such entanglements furthermore makes possible engaging with the “compositional process of dwelling in spaces” (Stewart 2011, p. 445); that is, experimenting both in theorisations and in practice with different affective-political configurations that do not subscribe to the logic of coloniality and the coloniality of affects. Compositional experimentation is important precisely because it allows for the realignment of decolonial peace to be felt and practiced in atmospheres that orient students towards decolonisation.

The “absorptive awareness” (Stewart 2011, p. 445) atmospheric attunement demands, furthermore, makes possible creating opportunities for practiced sensibility (Brown et al. 2019). In practical terms this might, for example, entail creating instances for students to engage, individually and collectively, in practiced sensibility towards how affects become inscribed in institutions, traditions, bodies, and so on, how these affects in turn come together as affective assemblages in different socio-political contexts and at specific moments in time, and the consequences of this for how ‘peace’ is felt, experienced, and enacted. It is in moments of pause and analytic attention—of tuning in and being-in-the-world—those imaginaries of different ways of feeling, doing, and living are generated. Affective decolonisation of peace education is thus both a form of politics and of praxis that engages, through atmospheric attunement, with how the coloniality of affects manifest in peace education theorisation, research, and practice, and how this might be challenged and dismantled on a macro- and micropolitical level to create different affective economies that fosters decolonial peace. That is, peace that fosters solidarity across difference by accentuating the importance of any theorisation of peace to founded on grassroot experiences, aspirations and practices based on contextually grounded initiatives.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper we have argued that turning to affect theory in relation to the decolonisation of peace education, holds much potential for counteracting and dismantling the affective structures and sensibilities of coloniality that continue to pervade the field. We have shown how employing the concepts of affective atmospheres and atmospheric attunements as analytic framing, enables to explore the ways in which the enactment of peace and practice of peace education might be felt, engaged with, and embodied in different socio-political contexts and at particular times. This is important, we aver, both in terms of theorising decolonising peace education and identifying the political consequences in enacting it. In terms of the former, theorising the lingering affects and atmospheres of coloniality in peace education efforts allows for making evident the affective dimensions of a Eurocentric modernist framework of liberal peace and peace education, and how, through the circulation of colonial economies of affect, certain values, norms, and practices continue to mark the field of peace education. In terms of the latter, making evident the coloniality of affects generates openings for centring decolonial peace and decolonised peace education efforts and the ways in which these could be theorised and enacted on both the macro- and micropolitical level. Critically, working with and through the affects circulating in the field of peace education thus facilitates connecting epistemological and ontological concerns in the decolonial project, and in so doing, experimenting both in theorisations and in practice with

different affective-political configurations in peace education that do not subscribe to the logic of coloniality and the coloniality of affects. It is our hope that the proposed affective-political framework will provide valuable insights for future empirical research towards the decolonisation of peace education.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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