

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## The #shitholes Syllabus: Undoing His(Story)

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## About This Course

The genesis of this hypothetical higher learning syllabus is to get down to lower terrains where a) geography reads like the anatomy of dissected cadavers, b) politics smells like forgotten infected pus, and c) history is blended eternally with the same DNA. It is an outline towards an ocean that is far from the Pacific as it makes unpleasant bodily contact with the feet of learners coming from the privileged North. The ubiquitous nature of poetry makes this curriculum one that stretches more than 100,000 miles, exceeding the average length of an adult's blood vessels. It is a program that is expected to be destroyed the very first day of class. Last but not least, it is a review to undo viewing based on regulated teachings of what #1 to #45 have proclaimed as notions of Truth as opposed to eradicated stories. The couple to honor our journey is: imperialism and racism. Other guests who have confirmed their presence so far are: violence and culture.

The making of this syllabus crawled out from a wounded fetus. One that was alerted before it came out that shit was real out in the world. Its delivery dates back to broken moons waiting to be repaired. The latest one, as a case study, results from a toxic explosion marked under the radar of #45 under the red-blue-white banner that has to do with making something "great" again. The implication of #shitholes in relationship to immigrants and non-first-world-countries by #45 begs for a critical look at the mirroring effect required by those seeking democracy. The explosive effect of his words triggered transgenerational flows of anger marked by layers of overt violence inscribed in ink by citizens of the free world. The level of absurdity, convenient amnesia, and casual forgetfulness showcased by #45 in his language derives from decades of regulated and military violence seeking to construct the optical illusion of greatness, choosing to ignore the #shitholes underneath their soles.

## Course Description

There is a pressing tick in my soul to allow my fingertips to ink an agonizing yet crucial lesson. It is an intuition weaved with yarn under the constellation of radical love. It is a course aligned with three water-based ingredients: tears, sweat and blood. When the trio is combined in a clay pot, what I witness through touch is a one-of-a-kind text that continues to be obscured and censored. How do I, as a survivor of a civil war in El Salvador, tainted by each of those ingredients, integrate them as part of what I do as educator in the Humanities in higher learning spaces in the North?

My grandfather used to speak of a strange love after looking at cadavers of innocent people outside of the house or whenever we attended funerals of assassinated peasants as we crawled into the holes of darkness. His guidance embodied what some speak of these days: decolonial love. So how does one grasp teaching decolonial love in hateful times? And these thoughts come to my rescue as I pause to reflect on the question:

"La madre tierra nos da de comer. Hay que respetarla y cuidarla como a los seres que viven en ella." -- My grandfather

"I am talking of millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement." -- Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le Colonialisme*

"You have to learn to love yourself before you can love me or accept my loving." -- Audre Lorde, "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*

So I guess decolonial love cannot be defined, conceptualized, described... it's like the first smile that's drawn in my mother's face when she hears her favorite bolero after waking up from a recurring nightmare caused by trauma, it's the rain that washes away remnants of deadly encounters remembered by an invisible rainbow, it's the illusion of maracas dismantling endless silence, it's the memory of my fingers tapping my legs as I imagine happy drums making their way from a nearby beach, it's the possibility of forgiving those who uprooted us from our homes after being censored from saying goodbye, it's adapting the beat of my wings to capture a balanced take-off during a storm, it's caressing gently the religious markers without wanting to break them, it's finding joy in anger, it's breathing hope when others see danger in my skin color, it's pollinating forgiveness as a remedy to heal colonial wounds, it's washing toxic tongues with the power of fire guarded by ancestral wisdom, it's saluting the sun inside me, it's a snail playing hide-and-seek without ever being found by predators, it's running freely without dragging the weight of fear, it's letting my sorrow take a deserving break in the weaving power of my grandfather's *petate*, it's taking a leap of faith in the currents of a clean river knowing I'm surrounded by creatures whose spirits protect me, it's letting my lungs scream my thirst for living unregistered... it's delving into the affirmation of an "I do" as I uncover colonial layers of violent baggage, it's integrating the complexities of my bodily textualities without footing them, it's praying for the tiniest creatures living under the mantle of earth, it's vibrating when the clouds carry life to the desserts, it's knitting untranslatable words only known to my heart, it's crawling backwards to empower other women, it's letting my fingers stand in an altar made of *maiz*... It is the act of loving radically the spirit of the person whose ruling continues to colonize me while resisting their violence.

Despite the sounds of broken bones, horrendous cries, and agonizing words, our ears contemplated the possibility of seeking refuge in hope that was always passed on to us through my grandfather's schooling. The first text he handed to me came from the belly of a Douglas AC-47 Spooky as it flew over our homes, nicknamed "Puff, the Magic Dragon," as I learned later on in life, manufactured by the Douglas Aircraft Company in Santa Monica,

California. The grotesque-like images printed in that text evoked fear and anger. Years later, as a student of E.S.L., I learned about the compound word "shithole." It embodied a distant yet raw memory and thought of the place where the planes that bombarded thousands of innocent civilians in El Salvador had been made. "What a shithole!" I wrote down in a journal.

My grandfather taught me lessons about propaganda. "Language," he would say, "is like the undercurrent masking an accelerated and dangerous speed. When the time comes, you'll be able to plant seeds where you now see burnt bushes." What strikes me the most, like lighting on a sunny day, about the violence we, as people of color, face on a 24-7 basis are the lessons of resilience our ancestors are constantly sending us: the full moon caressing the sleep of birds, the lakes housing flames of hope, the mountains crawling underneath the universe, and the humility to let our veins do the talking during inquisitorial times. For these reasons, engaging with "shitholes" requires a compass whose needle points towards the "great" north.

I have engaged in a thinking process about the politics of #shitholes. My proposed questions to students are: How are they made? Who has created them? Do you know where they are located? If you looked at a map, can you point them out? What are they? When do they appear? If you sign-up for this hypothetical course, you are expected to engage c-r-i-t-i-c-a-l-l-y with discourses of power from 1492 to the present in the United States (if I was teaching it there, for instance). The stories and narratives we read everywhere seem to fit more in a novel taking place during the Spanish Inquisition. Know this: This ambitious unlearning plan will take a lifetime and that's exactly what we're up against: A lifelong battle. We also know that pretending that the tentacles of racism, classism and gender-based discrimination haven't touched us is simply to live in one of those castles built-in for optical illusion seekers in the orange state where the sun is always gracious.

***When dirt becomes the canvas for one's ideas, the hypothetical then turns into certainty. And those are the bones of unlearning.***

And this is what I mean by unlearning: Civil wars shrink playgrounds leaving children to sketch their imagination on dirt. When dirt becomes the canvas for one's ideas, the hypothetical then turns into certainty. And those are the bones of unlearning. As a toddler, I learnt rapidly to remain within limited spaces in order to continue breathing because stepping outside of the box meant encountering the deafening sounds of foreign landmines made in some shithole place. And that's the beginning of a long-term relationship with lines and time. Until death do us apart.

The journey starts unpacking what Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw teaches us regarding i-n-t-e-r-s-e-c-t-i-o-n-a-l-i-t-y. You are invited to sit in a front row seat in order to

repeat the word several times letting the resonance of gender, class, race, ethnicity, religions, etc., grow roots into air we can actually breathe without getting choked under policing bodies. No #shithole will be discussed without that framework. The tunnel vision of #45 & Co. happens to be one-dimensional and unilateral, grounded on the mucky nuisance of quicksand patched by bricks fabricated in a Magic Kingdom. In order to critically engage with the opposite of this loose linearity, there is a type of multi-purpose gear made up of core elements to help you stay afloat: Race, Gender, Class, Ethnicity, among others, which you will all slowly identify as you crawl out of your privileged unchecked zones. The essence of their existence lies precisely in this connection. Whether they come in contact in an obscure corner of a nameless street or they intersect in a public arena populated by people of the same skin color, the strings carry an active connective. It is going to be our duty, yours and mine, to acknowledge these sections through the act of introspection. Why? Because nothing in criticism is passive; nothing in engaging is static. Jumping these ropes simultaneously will test our endurance for the taste of hot peppers as we chant: "All oppression is connected!" Yarn of different colors will teach us visually how intersectionality works. So, for #45 & Co., basic lessons on tolerance and patience never really made it to their table due, perhaps, to brief attention gaps filled with one hundred and forty twitter-like characters? When one spends their life run by the Politics of Quick Books, it results in processing human beings as cartoon and chewable gummy bear figures.

The luggage to bring to class will be your own historical relationships to the making of #shitholes and how your families and their ancestors have benefitted for generations from their fabrication, how they have built comfortable lives by simply ignoring the violence and social injustice taking place in your own backyard as you turn up the volume on football and basketball and hockey and wrestling and baseball and soccer weekends and how you have actively gotten rid of innocent people to continue sustaining structures of power because it fits your notion of safety, security and economic agenda.

I, as a woman of color, do not care about white tears. Everyone is accountable for bringing Kleenex to class because providing emotional labor is too expensive and my tears know no currency value. We will attempt to unpack how we have been indoctrinated to perceive aggressions. Ever since Christopher Columbus and his crew spotted land, we have been taught to believe we are the aggressors. It is often more efficient and cost-effective to insert concepts like "safe space" into curricula mainly because universities are worried about their clients. In this course, we will swim with linguistic sharks who will once again try to make us look like aggressors. We will peel the layers of the sheep whose beautiful skin hides what real aggression looks and feels like. In times when the client is always right, the student has been catered to feel entitled to everything not realizing that the chosen material excludes non-conventional texts found in the natural environment.

Learning to use our bodies in the course is not only pivotal but mandatory: We will stare at the color of our

skin, read the swimming textuality of our hair and vision other worlds looking at what's behind our eyes to unload the burdens of violence we sustain to get us an inch closer to understanding how notions of displacement, citizenship rights, lack of autonomy and passports operate in the #shitholes in relation to bananas, coffee, oil, gold, uranium, copper, cacao, tea, lithium, among other goodies.

Because I have always been an exemplary citizen of El Salvador to the eyes of people who feed racism to hungry lions, the academic narrative goes like this: "Oh, wow! You have a PhD? Look at you! You're doing well for your people. Good for you!" My humanity has been approved, sealed, proven, and fully accepted as per academic requirements.

Also, we will be holding ourselves accountable for (HIS)story. There is no such thing as an ideal student to unlearn. Lawyers, politicians, hippies, educators, doctors, nurses, therapists, lab technicians, carpenters, nuns, janitors, judges, administrators, soldiers, domestic workers, flight attendants, UN coordinators, strippers, policy makers, journalists, stay-home dads, cardinals, activists, grandmothers, painters, knitters, bloggers, correctional officers, TV personalities, sex workers, butchers, hygienists, and even those who speak of alternative facts are welcome.

## Organization of the Course

There is no one single methodology to this unlearning journey because the narratives of #shithole spaces vary. Here are just a few examples of what could be included: visiting the School of the Americas in Columbus, Georgia, shining to the pace of the World Diamond Council in New York City, transforming radiant energy at the Caracol Industrial Park in Haiti, making some form of sense of the United States leadership in mass incarceration, following the Chicago Boys and their Chilean tales (not peppers, the country), daydreaming of the endless camps of U.S. Marines in the Dominican Republic, peeling ripe bananas inspired by the Monroe doctrine, sipping fresh coffee as you taste fresh blood from American-owned land in Guatemala courtesy of the American United Fruit Company, washing one's hands with bleach to remove the 'dirt' from Argentina, undoing the words "barbaric" and "uncivilized" as we tip-toe through the Reagan years in El Salvador, pacifying thirst with poisoned-flavored water packaged carefully in Flint, Michigan, freezing very slowly in elementary schools in Baltimore because there are no heaters, handing out used clothing at the Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego, knocking doors in the Mid-West to speak of why Muslim is not a synonym to terrorist, explaining to elders why wheelchairs are not a necessity but an affordable luxury item, thinking of unrestricted clear skies as we write down "Back the Blue Act," daydreaming of what it would be like to not be dependent on Opioid, planning a semi-decent parenthood life sketched around Title X, etc., etc., etc. As the course advances (if it does), it is expected that students contribute their own methodological approaches. Note: It's important to identify the birthplace of torture methods in the #shitholes. This can be quite illuminating. Google maps will come in handy.

## What you will need

Patience, reliable insurance for self-care purposes, and lots of clean water! (If your preference is chocolate, make sure to trace the #shithole place that enslaves children to satisfy any Halloween trick-or-treating festivity). You may have gone backpacking there during your Summer Abroad experience.

The Politics of Assessments (fill-in the blanks as per your own experience)

A is for \_\_\_\_\_

B is for \_\_\_\_\_

C is for \_\_\_\_\_

D is for \_\_\_\_\_

E is for \_\_\_\_\_

F is for Ferguson

In my experience teaching under capitalist-driven higher learning institutions in North America, students pay A LOT of money to get an education. Receiving an "A" in this course is up for grabs. #45 & Co. measure everyone in terms of monetary value getting to decide who is worth it and who is not. You paid for the course. You get an A if you want. As we wrap up the institutional hours allotted to us, however, you will have an opportunity to reflect on your unlearning. You will then choose what you have earned after unlearning a thing or two about the politics of competition in the rat race caves. This in itself can be interpreted as an assignment as we re-think on how some of our personal histories have been downgraded to minus "0."

## Assignment(s)

Noun, late 14c., "an order, request, directive," from Old French *assignement* "(legal) assignment (of dower, etc.)," from Late Latin *assignamentum*, noun of action from Latin *assignare/adsignare* "to allot, assign, award" (see [assign](#)). Meaning "appointment to office" is mid-15c.; that of "a task assigned (to someone), commission" is by 1848.

### Questions to ponder:

- Who orders? Whose requests matter? Whose direction are we following? Where does the word come from? What's the concept got to do with colonialism? What are the legal implications in the making of shitholes? Who gets the awards? What's behind the history of awards? Who gets to appoint #45 to office?
- To expose existing shitholes in places where race determines assigned seats, we are encouraged to create our own tasks as per our own distinct abilities.
- Note: No assignment will ever capture the impact of the violent legacy of colonialism and other -

isms. It's important to acknowledge that whatever tangible piece of reflection you turn in, it resembles a glimpse into beautiful minds. And that's okay. Let's remember that part of learning, teaching, unlearning and unteaching under #45 is that creativity is being killed slowly. And we will create activities that reflect other ways of reading, writing, walking, breathing, speaking, and unpacking, among other gerund-like sounding actions.

## My expectations

I expect you to: a) be present through the senses: seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling and tasting, b) identify in a Eurocentric map by the end of the course where the #shitholes in your own backyard are, c) who operates them, d) how you continue to benefit from the system that fabricates false notions of #shitholes and e) be aware of the space you take up in class. If you, for example, are a male who is doing all the talking, you will learn how to listen. You can bring your own masking tape if the latter becomes challenging to do.

You are responsible for your own unlearning. No one will be checking if you have done the academic work. Capitalism has taught us that everything is for sale, including human beings. Remember, #WeAreNotEquals

This introductory course is that, an introduction. You will never be an expert nor should you call yourself that. Even if you visited the invented version of #shitholes for two weeks to build a school or something, you don't get to call yourself an expert. Last but not least, this is a life-long unlearning project nourished by the sacred beauty of questions, deep reflection, undoing (HIS)story and the commitment to the liberation of ourselves and others, as pointed out by Paulo Freire.

## Readings

You don't get to "possess" them. You are encouraged, instead, to start pondering the concept of "censorship" by staring at a black page instead to begin the course. Decolonial love in the pedagogy I learned from my grandfather and my relationship with the land requires us to let go of deadlines, time, scholarly notions of productivity and the feeling to compete for grades. The readings that often stay lingering around our heart are those that are not often published but that have been cared for by the hands of elders. Contemplating the dance of a bee or the march of an ant will teach us, for instance, endless lessons of what aggression is not. I am not your babysitter. You are not my babies. Let's leave the patronizing to #45 & Co.

In this course we will experience decolonial love through transformative lessons to teach us how to liberate ourselves from colonial notions of what violence is and who is violent. You won't get to see readings from the start because it is what you're expecting as a customer. Instead, we will dive into a journey of feeling them. We will connect, intersect and encounter with different elements utilizing metaphors like yarn and strings, just to name some. Reconfiguring personal cartographies utilizing an intersectional approach will be messy at first yet it will allow us to learn ways to be joyful. As unlearners-in-the-making, we will uplift each other when undoing the personal histories of violence we have inherited as we map out the #shitholes we have missed, ignored and erased in the name of "greatness" and progress.



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