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The Role of Literature in Intercultural Language Education: Designing a Higher Education Language Course to Challenge Sentimental Biopower

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Abstract

In this article we discuss how the design of a higher education language course can challenge the power of sentimentality in the classroom. In particular, the paper analyses the role of literature in intercultural language education through the lens of affect theory, while focusing on minimizing sentimentality in the classroom, especially when the literary texts used confront students with trauma-related content involving human rights abuse, death and suffering, and trigger discomforting emotions in students such as sadness, anguish, fear and more. We suggest that it is important for educators and students in higher education to recognize the affective and biopolitical dimensions of literature teaching in intercultural language education. This is illustrated through the design of an English language course syllabus in an Argentinian higher education setting. The paper concludes with a discussion of the curricular and pedagogical implications for intercultural language education.

Keywords: sentimental biopower, trauma, literature, syllabus design

Data Availability Statement: *All relevant data are within this paper.*

Introduction

Over the last few decades, the field of intercultural language education has focused on exploring how language teaching at various levels of education may contribute to cultivating intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes (Byram, 1997, 2021; Liddicoat, 2021). In particular, researchers have explored the role of texts and literature in intercultural language education (see Heggernes, 2021, for an overview), highlighting that literature has a powerful emotional impact on students as it often touches on "difficult" social issues such as human rights abuse, suffering and death. In our own work over the years, we have shown how language teaching can sensitise students about issues of human suffering and cultivate empathy, solidarity, hospitality and inclusion (Porto & Zembylas, 2020a).

However, this research has also emphasized that there are curricular and pedagogical risks in dealing with sensitive topics in the classroom—such as the risks of retraumatization for trauma survivors and vicarious or secondary trauma for nontraumatized students (Carello & Butler, 2014). A risk that has consistently emerged in our own pedagogical practice in the context of intercultural language education is the sentimentalization of traumatic content, i.e. the emergence of excessive and self-indulgent affects and emotions in trauma-informed teaching in ways that manipulate students into sympathetic yet superficial feelings (Zembylas, 2020a, 2020b, 2021). The dangers of sentimentalizing teaching and learning is that it often evokes pity for the sufferers rather than compassionate action (Boltanski, 1999), leading students to voyeurism and passivity (Zembylas, 2008). Hence, a central issue that arises is how to design courses that minimize the possibility of sentimentalization by using syllabi and teaching materials that take seriously into consideration the affective and biopolitical dimensions of curriculum and pedagogy.

This paper focuses on how to design a higher education language course that challenges "sentimental biopower" (Schuller, 2018) in the classroom, namely, the power of sentimentality exercised from emotionally demanding texts and learning activities. By focusing on this risk, we are also well aware of the acute danger emerging from retraumatization or secondary trauma of the students (Berman, 2001; Carello & Butler, 2014; Caruth, 1995; Dutro, 2011). Other related risks include the possibility that some students may respond with pity, guilt, vengeance, or disinterest as a result of desensitization (Zembylas, 2008). Although all of these risks are interrelated—they are all affect-based—we are particularly interested in how to minimize sentimentality in the classroom, because we have noticed from our previous research and teaching experience that this risk can easily set a course off and compromise the development of critical thinking skills in students. We, therefore, suggest that it is crucial for intercultural language education in higher education to not only recognize the affective and biopolitical dimensions of trauma-related literature, but also take measures to reduce the risk of sentimentality, as much as possible, in the design of a syllabus or a course. The central question we explore is: How can sentimental biopower be challenged productively in pedagogy through syllabus design and teaching materials in a foreign language course in higher education? To illustrate this, we provide as a case example the design of an English language course syllabus in an Argentinian higher education setting. The paper concludes with a discussion of the curricular and pedagogical implications for intercultural language education.

Relevant Literature and Theoretical Framework

Since the intercultural turn in language education in the early 1990s (Byram, 1997, 2021), researchers have recognized the important role of literature in foreign language education (Bredella, 2000, 2006; Burwitz Melzer, 2001, 2014; Matos, 2005, 2011; Hoff, 2016, 2017) to foster intercultural awareness. Literature offers students opportunities to imagine different worlds and engage emotionally with them (Hoff, 2016, 2017), to experience personal encounters with otherness, "to live other lives – by proxy"

(Kramsch, 1995, p. 85) and to reflect on the perspectivity of different cultural viewpoints (Bredella, 2006; Kramsch, 1993). With an interdisciplinary basis that draws on education, philosophy, psychology, history and ethics (among others), the value of literature to develop intercultural awareness, social imagination and moral understanding through emotional and ethical engagement is widely acknowledged.

For example, Nussbaum (2010) attributes a significant role to literature in a foreign language to foster "the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements (…) [i.e.] the ability to imagine the experience of another" (p. 7). Boler (1999), Bridges (2009), Bruner (2002), Kretz (2014) and Hållander (2015) highlight the power of literary reading to deal with difficult content such as human suffering. In language learning, the crucial role of emotions and affects has been emphasized over the years (Bigelow, 2019; Dewaele, 2013, 2014). This work underscores the transformative possibilities from engaging students emotionally with "difficult" social issues such as human rights abuse, suffering and death in the context of language learning. Researchers highlight that it is pedagogically important to not only help students navigate their discomforting emotions such as sadness, anguish, fear and more, but also cultivate feelings of empathy, sympathy, hope and solidarity with those who suffer (Porto & Zembylas, 2020a).

However, dealing with difficult and sensitive topics in the classroom is problematized by researchers who bring up various risks for students such as the risk of retraumatization for trauma survivors and vicarious or secondary trauma for nontraumatized students (Berman, 2001; Carello & Butler, 2014; Caruth, 1995; Dutro, 2011) or the risk of sentimentalization (Zembylas, 2008). These risks raise important questions concerning whether educators are equipped to handle the emotional reactions that trauma-related content may trigger in students such as the following: What is the ethical responsibility of the educator when exposing their students to possible psychological harm in the classroom? Will students be mentally and emotionally prepared to deal with suffering and death when enrolling in a language learning course? Although these questions are beyond the scope of this paper, it is sufficient to say that the educator has ethical responsibility to evaluate the emotional readiness of their students and minimize the possible psychological harm in the classroom through the design of pedagogically appropriate material. Here we also argue that ethical responsibility extends to cover the issue of minimizing the possible sentimentalization of trauma-related content, as this possibility risks superficializing difficult and sensitive issues.

Sentimentalism, according to Schuller (2018), "posits that the needs of the individuated subject can be reconciled to those of other individuated subjects through the guiding moral philosophy of sympathetic feeling" (p. 2). As Schuller explains, sentimentalism operates by stimulating the morality and feelings of the sympathizer to the sufferer, yet at the expense of the needs of sufferers, typically the impoverished, the racialized and the oppressed. In other words, the problem with sentimentalism is that it superficializes suffering by limiting complex social and political issues (e.g. oppression, colonialism etc.) to the feelings of the sympathizer who is "good" and "benevolent" to acknowledge the feelings of the sufferer. More importantly, this problem suggests that sentimentalism "operates as a fundamental mechanism of biopower" (Schuller, 2018, p. 2) which Schuller calls "sentimental biopower"; in other words, sentimentalism functions as a way to normalize particular ways of feeling towards sufferers.[1] Hence, to better understand the emotional impact of literature in intercultural language education, it is important to theorize the entanglement among these three concepts, namely, affect, biopower and sentimentality.

Generally speaking, affect has come to refer to the affective relations of bodies and their surroundings (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). To be affected, in the most straightforward sense, is to be moved in response to someone or something (Shouse, 2005). Hence, affect is first and foremost, the intensity that circulates between bodies (Massumi, 2002), which implies a relational understanding of affect, that is,

affect as a phenomenon that emerges in the relationality of bodies—be they individual or collective, human or non-human (Blackman & Venn, 2010). The dual capacity of bodies to affect and be affected suggests that affect and power are entangled—that is, affects need to be understood as forces of becoming rather than as governed by an overarching logic or regime (Schaefer, 2019). This understanding of affect, then, has to be accompanied by a theorization of biopower.

Biopower names how life becomes the object-target for specific techniques and technologies of power (Anderson, 2012). This concept draws on Foucault's (2003, 2008) theorization of biopolitics as being concerned with how individual bodies and populations are subjected to self-discipline through technologies of power like reporting, surveillance and other techniques that aim at submission and docility. In particular, the concept of "biopower" highlights how power technologies are governing the regulation of populations and the management of life. As Rainbow and Rose (2006) explain, Foucault's concept of biopower "serves to bring into view a field comprised of more or less rationalized attempts to intervene upon the vital characteristics of human existence" (p. 196). In this sense, biopower and affect help us examine how individual bodies and populations in various sectors of life come to govern their bodies on the basis of moral, social and political norms.

Using the concepts of affect and biopower, then, we can conceptualize how the teaching of literature operates as a biopolitical mechanism of controlling students' bodies and affects through sentimental discourses. For example, such sentimental discourses can be found in literary texts or learning activities in the classroom that present sensitive topics in excessively emotional ways. The primary goal of these discourses is to evoke particular moral emotions in readers that guide them to make moral judgments on the basis of their emotional responses (Kauppinen, 2021). The "negative" implications of sentimental discourses in the teaching of literature is that they produce superficial emotional responses towards others' suffering that would benefit the sympathizer. An important consequence of sentimentalism, then, is the depoliticization of issues and its replacement by a set of private sentiments. In particular, sentimentalism illuminates how affect and biopower go hand in hand, making sentimentalism an important instrument of governmentality (Berlant, 2008). In this sense, suggests Berlant (2008), sentimentality emerges as a crucial biopolitical technology through which the emotional needs of the individuated subject (e.g. sense of belonging) are linked to those of a larger collectivity (e.g. nation, state).

However, students learn not only to govern their bodies on the basis of the norms taught in the context of intercultural language education, but can also challenge these norms, opening up new ways of relating to others through which new potentialities for life and living may be witnessed, invented and acted on (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Anderson, 2012). For example, one of these norms governing bodies in the context of intercultural language education is the essentialised relation between self-other embedded in much interculturalism, namely, the often taken for granted assumptions that self and other "have" essentialist identities that can be understood and respected, if one learns how to exercise empathy. Critical literature in interculturalism challenges these norms (e.g., see Ouedraogo, 2021; Porto & Zembylas, 2020a; Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017), suggesting that the cultivation of empathy between self-other—especially if empathy is framed in passive, ahistorical and uncritical terms—is inadequate as a pedagogical framework in intercultural education, because it promotes self-indulgent, uncritical, and superficial sentimentality.

However, sentimentality in the context of intercultural language education cannot only be considered in negative terms but can also be reclaimed as a productive opportunity to make emerging emotions in the classroom the point of departure to recognize colonial histories, state racism, and contemporary geopolitical complicities producing suffering and death (Zembylas, 2021). Therefore, it is possible to challenge self-indulgent, uncritical and superficial sentimentality and reclaim it in intercultural

language education by cultivating critical hope and solidarity (e.g., see Bozalek et al., 2014; Freire, 1994; Zembylas, 2014). Rather than resorting to a sentimental discourse, the course syllabus and teaching materials in intercultural language education need to be understood in their affective and biopolitical dimensions and how they can produce, distribute and sustain alternative affective capacities such as hope, solidarity and compassionate action. Cultivating such affective capacities in a course requires recognizing how students' affects and emotions may reproduce or disrupt the status quo, enabling or preventing the prospects of a future that breaks with the past and imagines the world differently. Critical pedagogy and specifically the awakening of critical emotional consciousness is a valuable pedagogical approach to curriculum design for the development of critical emotional thinking (Zembylas, 2013). This means that critical pedagogy needs to pay attention to the strong affective investments of students when dealing with 'difficult' issues, making space for cultivating emotional skills that take a critical stance towards sentimentality.

The first step, then, in syllabus and course development in intercultural language education that breaks the normalizing power of sentimentality is for students and teachers to identify and challenge their personal and collective affective investments in certain ideologies that prevent them from 'seeing' the consequences of human rights abuse and suffering on other people's lives and communities. For example, one such ideology is nationalism, that is, the prioritization of one's national identity and affective belonging to a national community at the expense of acknowledging the responsibility of one's nation-state in others' suffering. At the same time, this step has to highlight the repositories of hope and solidarity of all those whose visions, mournings, memories, voices, and spaces have been silenced (Zembylas, 2020b). Art, literature and film can be particularly helpful in pedagogical efforts to engage with the sufferings and hopes of peoples in their communities (Snaza, 2019; Stoddard, Marcus & Hicks, 2017), just as action-oriented projects that make these hopes come alive, allowing collective transformative action (Zembylas, 2021). Needless to say, teaching literature in the context of intercultural language education takes different forms in different communities and requires continuous reinvention that tackles the risk of sentimentality, while keeping teaching grounded in larger battles for social justice. This is why it is extremely important to explore how these forms of intercultural language education are manifested in different contexts around the world; in our case, as shown next, this pedagogical effort takes place in a context that aims to cultivate a critical, anti-racist consciousness.

Affective and Biopolitical Dimensions of Literature in a Foreign Language Course in Higher Education

Our aim is to show how literature is featured in the syllabus and teaching materials of a foreign language course in Argentinian higher education. In particular, we are interested in revealing how the affective and biopolitical dimensions of literature discussed before can be realized pedagogically to foster alternative affective capacities such as hope, solidarity and compassionate action. As mentioned above, the focus of our analysis is on how sentimental biopower can be challenged productively in pedagogy through syllabus design and teaching materials in a foreign language course in higher education.

After a brief overview of the context, we describe the syllabus and teaching materials and close with implications for course design and pedagogy in intercultural language education.

Context: Legal and Policy Backgrounds

The last National Education Act in Argentina (Ley Nacional de Educación No 26.206) passed in 2007 establishes general principles for education, including language education, throughout the country. These principles are equality, inclusion, plurilingualism, interculturality, social cohesion and integra-

tion, and respect for and explicit acknowledgement of linguistic and cultural diversity (Chapter II, Article 11). The ultimate aim is humanistic (Aloni, 2011): to develop independent, conscientious, critical, responsible and civic-minded citizens. This legal framework is supported by the current national curriculum guidelines for languages designed in 2012. They delineate general principles for the teaching of English, French, German, Italian and Portuguese as foreign languages. The driving theoretical basis rests on intercultural and citizenship perspectives where language learning is not simply a question of mastering the foreign language at hand but is, crucially, a site of significant educational experience with long-term effects.

Intercultural Perspectives of Language Education in this Context

The annual course we focus upon here, taught by the first author every year from March to November, is an English as a foreign language course for undergraduate students in their 2nd year of an English teaching and/or translation five-year programme at a public national university in Argentina. The general student profile has these characteristics: students are Caucasian, Hispanic, Spanish-speaking, aged 18–22, middle class living in urban locations, with a B2/C1 level of English according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*.

Thirty years ago, the course (and the programme) had a strong instrumental orientation aimed at the development of students' linguistic competence. For instance, students completed grammar exercises, learned vocabulary lists of varied semantic fields, studied the uses of tenses and prepositions in isolation, wrote narrative texts judged on the basis of accuracy and correctness, and so on. This approach was rooted in language ideologies based on the native-speaker model, a static focus on language systems, and monolithic conceptions of English and of language proficiency (Hall, 2013).

The course has evolved significantly since then and in its current form involves process writing and genre-based pedagogies; intercultural perspectives; a multiliteracies, multimodal, arts-based and translingual approach; a CLIL orientation using literature as a basis to address citizenship and human rights concerns; and an intercultural citizenship perspective that articulates language learning in the here and now with students' community engagement in their social milieu (Byram, 2008). Literature is a key pillar not only because of its undisputed role in intercultural language education but also as a vehicle to sensitize students to issues of human suffering, human rights abuse and the building of ethical relations with others—human and non-human. This focus challenges the use of literature in language education and language teacher education with an otherwise literary and cultural orientation aimed at the acquisition of knowledge of the cultural products, practices, and perspectives dominant in the Anglo world. In this local context, this means almost exclusive attention to British and North American literatures and cultures and emphasis on literary traditions and expressions, stylistics, literary analysis, and cultural studies.[2]

The course purposefully combines linguistic, intercultural and citizenship aims. Linguistic and intercultural aims comprise acknowledging and valuing linguistic and cultural diversity; using English to address themes of social significance; exploring and reflecting upon varied experiences of suffering and injustice; developing curiosity about social themes by engaging research skills; challenging taken-for-granted representations of injustice and oppression in different settings; discovering and appreciating multiple and diverse means and resources available to make meaning (beyond the linguistic); addressing and challenging injustice through hope and solidarity using multimodal, creative and artistic means and resources for meaning making (in addition to the linguistic); and using and developing intercultural communication skills. Citizenship aims involve developing democratic attitudes and values that enable intercultural communication (curiosity and openness to otherness, respect, collaboration, willingness to engage in conflict resolution and mutual understanding); developing democratic values that enable self-transformation and the transformation of societies (hope, solidarity, communion, care,

love, hospitality, inclusion); developing democratic attitudes and habits of mind that enable self-transformation and the transformation of societies (intellectual and cultural humility, criticality); expressing emotions and affect associated with social themes using arts-based pedagogies and reflecting upon them; and transforming disturbing emotions and affect into healing through social or civic participation locally, regionally, or globally.

Several transnational projects carried out as part of this course between 2012 and 2014 are examples of how the syllabus has been designed to accommodate the theoretical and pedagogical perspectives upon which it is based, that is, intercultural and genre-based pedagogies, multiliteracies, and multimodality, creative arts, translanguaging, CLIL using literature with social themes, and intercultural citizenship perspectives. While the description that follows shows an apparently smooth and linear process despite the emotionally demanding content, there were aspects of student resistance, problematic interactions between the different groups, and instances where learning was made impossible—reported in Porto & Sauer Rosas (2017) and Porto, Zamuner, and Miguel (2019). In 2012 the Malvinas project involved Argentinian and UK-based language undergraduates (the intercultural perspective), who addressed the theme of the Malvinas/Falklands war fought between Argentina and Britain in 1982 over the islands at the time of a military dictatorship in Argentina (the CLIL focus). Britain won the war in two months and the defeat was one of the factors which led to the return to democracy in Argentina in 1983. The theme confronted students in both countries with difficult and discomforting content involving extreme human suffering. It also brought about stereotyping, suspicion of the other and hatred as the Argentinian students had been born and raised in a society that wholeheartedly embraces the motto that "las Malvinas son Argentinas" and where some sectors associate Britain with discourses of imperialism and neo-colonialism. Furthermore, the war is one significant historical event taught in schools, intended to create and shape "the Argentinian identity," and April 2nd is a national remembrance day in honour of the soldiers who fought the war. Within this broad framework comprising social, historical, political, cultural, ideological and other complexities, the project invited students to work through online collaboration using the foreign languages they were learning (English in Argentina and Spanish in the UK) in order to bring about peace and reconciliation among both countries and their peoples (the intercultural citizenship dimension). To achieve this aim, they created bilingual artistic artefacts (multiliteracies, multimodality, creative arts, translanguaging, genre-based orientation) intended to raise awareness in their social milieus regarding the importance of peace and reconciliation in connection with the conflict (intercultural citizenship).[3]

Finally, another project that explicitly connected the course syllabus with traumatic history or historical trauma in Argentina was carried out in 2013 (and replicated in 2014) between language undergraduates in Argentina and Britain (the intercultural perspective). It addressed the military 1976 dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983) in the context of the 1978 Football World Cup held in the country—another difficult theme involving histories of loss, death, suffering and human rights violations (the CLIL focus). During this period, the military junta, using the Football World Cup as cover up, committed crimes and human rights abuses (abductions, killings, torture and "disappearances") to eliminate political dissent. It is estimated that 30,000 people disappeared in these times, of which 9000 are verified cases (CONADEP, Argentine National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons). About 500 children, born in detention centres where the mothers were being tortured, had been stolen and illegally adopted by families. The kidnapped people became known as the "disappeared". The Argentinian and British students were asked to design awareness-raising bilingual artefacts (leaflets, posters, drawings, videos, street art, collage, etc.) in collaboration (multiliteracies, multimodality, creative arts, translanguaging, genre-based orientation) intended to raise consciousness in society about human rights violations in times of dictatorship (the intercultural citizenship dimension). The disappeared victims of the dictatorship became ghosts or spectres that "haunted" the classroom to make students' affective engagement with such histories of loss, death, suffering and human rights violations possible.

In this way, students communicated among themselves (the intercultural dimension) and importantly, they also interacted with the spectres of the disappeared through art, literature, and personal, familiar, communal and national stories[4] (see Porto, 2021; Porto and Byram, 2015; Porto and Zembylas, 2020b; Yulita & Porto, 2017). The possibility to interact with the ghosts of the disappeared in these ways challenged sentimentalism and was an opportunity to reclaim different affective forms of engagement with this traumatic past—such as, for example, a stance of witnessing (Felman & Laub, 1992), empathic unsettlement (LaCapra, 2001) or heteropathic identification (Hirsch, 1998).[5]

Affective and Biopolitical Dimensions of Literature in Syllabus Design and Teaching Materials

To answer our question on how sentimental biopower can be challenged productively in pedagogy, we have analysed the course syllabus and teaching materials qualitatively (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018) along two main dimensions:

a) Challenging and deconstructing sentimental biopower;
b) Re-envisioning intercultural language education through the cultivation of hope, solidarity and compassionate action.

a) Challenging and deconstructing sentimental biopower

The literary works students read in this course address issues of human suffering and human rights abuse. The literary (and other) materials and resources that students were invited to use in the Malvinas and dictatorship projects also addressed difficult and discomforting content (see endnotes 3 and 4). Over the last ten years, students have read two novels and three short stories, and have watched two films during the course. Some examples are: *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), *The Bell Jar* (Plath, 1963), *Sula* (Morrison, 1973), *Maus I: a survivor's tale. My father bleeds history* (Spiegelman, 1991), *Borderlands. La frontera. The New Meztiza* (Anzaldúa, 1997), *The Youngest Doll* (Ferré, 1972, 1980, 1986), *The Displaced Person* (O'Connor, 1955), *Harrison Bergeron* (Vonnegut, 1961), *A Drink in the Passage* (Paton, 1961), *Cry Freedom* (1987), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), *3 Generations* (2015), and *Hidden Figures* (2016). Our analysis of the course syllabus and teaching materials in this article is based on *Maus I: a survivor's tale. My father bleeds history* (Spiegelman, 1991).

The rationale for including this kind of content lies in the benefits of using literature to foster intercultural awareness, social imagination and ethical engagement – processes that develop "sympathetic understanding of *distant* cultures and of ethnic, racial and religious minorities within her own" as students encounter "stories about other lands and other peoples" (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 69, emphasis added). Furthermore, such content, considered difficult or discomforting, stimulates students' recognition of and engagement with the traumas, horrors and suffering of others, past and present.

The word "distant" is important because the realities and contexts portrayed in these literary works may be considered too "distant" in space, time, backgrounds, peoples and so on to be relevant at all, simply because the students in this course had been born *after* the historical traumas portrayed. This means they are not primary victims with first-hand experience of trauma in each case. As an example, let us focus on the Holocaust, which we use for illustration here on the basis of *Maus*, and also on the Malvinas war and the 1976 dictatorship, the themes of the previously described projects in the course syllabus. That students are not primary victims or direct witnesses means they are not the tortured, the dead, the injured, the killed, or the disappeared. However, does this mean they do not have, or cannot have, experience of this trauma through other means? Such experience can be gained through contact with their extended circles of relationships, their education, the media, national remembrance days, their upbringing, art, literature, and stories (personal, familiar, communal and national stories). Many of the students can in fact be secondary victims, i.e. families, friends or acquaintances of the tortured, dead, injured, killed, or

disappeared during the Holocaust, the Malvinas war or the 1976 dictatorship. Furthermore, they can all be considered tertiary victims, in other words, a community of people who have suffered a "collective loss" as a group that is "extended to community and society" (Govier & Verwoerd, 2002, p. 103).[6] In this sense, there is a close connection between the course syllabus and traumatic history in Argentina. The relevance of the tasks in the teaching materials we describe next is justified precisely because of the ways in which they have been designed to touch on historical trauma in profound ways.

But what kind of recognition and engagement with the traumas, horrors and suffering of others, past and present, are we considering? We have suggested that emotional engagement can lead to sentimentalism, for instance by evoking superficial emotional responses towards others' suffering such as pity, normalizing such superficial ways of feeling towards sufferers, remaining at the level of voyeurism and passivity (Zembylas, 2008), and converting such emotional engagement in private sentiments. In this course, these risks are first and foremost counterbalanced by some of the learning aims mentioned before, in particular those leading to discovery, exploration, research, awareness, reflection, and criticality in connection with the experiences and worlds of others, such as:

Learning aims leading to recognition and emotional engagement beyond superficial sentimentalism:

- explore, contextualise, historicise and reflect upon varied experiences of suffering and injustice;
- challenge taken-for-granted representations of injustice and hope in different settings;
- develop curiosity and openness to otherness;
- cultivate solidarity, care, love, hospitality, and inclusion;
- develop intellectual and cultural humility; and
- express emotions and affect and reflect upon them.

In the teaching materials, these aims are tackled with a variety of tasks. For instance, one task invites students to express and reflect upon emotions and affects through language, as *Maus* expresses lived horror in words. Of course, *Maus* is a graphic novel so visual literacy and multimodal literacy are also called upon and we shall address this dimension later. Because this is in essence a language course, students are asked to notice (pay attention to and discover) the language of emotions, with specific emphasis on message form, as an awareness-raising step in connection with historical trauma. This noticing is also directed at the exploration of multiple perspectives (characters' emotions, including victims and perpetrators, and the students' own emotions). In this way, a relational understanding of affect is fostered, that is, affect as emerging in the relationality of individual and collective experiences.

Task. Expressing emotions and affects through language: lived horror in words.

Go over the novel and record four extracts that bring about emotions related to the lived horror and trauma from the point of view of different characters. Which terms are used? Look for specific vocabulary and expressions, emotion words, particular terms of address, use of tenses, use of active and passive voice, indirect and direct speech, modality, hedging and other linguistic resources that call your attention. What do these linguistic expressions and resources convey about the emotions and affects of the different characters? What else, apart from the linguistic, do you need to consider to be able to imaginatively understand the characters' feelings and affects? What may have led the characters to feel the way they do? How are such feelings related to what other characters do and say?

Now focus on yourself. What feelings and emotions do your chosen extracts awaken in you? Why and how do these emotions arise? What linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions are at play?

Another way in which superficial emotional student responses to the suffering of others are avoided is through the conscious exploration of social identifications based on language. One task invites students to notice, analyse and reflect upon the use of translanguaging in the novel. As students identify specific uses of different languages and associate them with particular situations, contexts, backgrounds and motivations, language use emerges as a powerful dimension of a character's potential identification. The exploration and critical analysis of the use of particular languages and particular language forms *under certain circumstances* disarticulates banal, superficial and uniform emotional responses, as each student will identify with and respond emotionally to each character's specific situationality in different and idiosyncratic ways.

Task. Uses of the 'other' language.

Several languages are used in the novel apart from English, which the narrator, Artie, uses to tell the story. German words or short phrases are used to illustrate brutality whenever the enemy speaks and is associated with physical violence and victimization. Hebrew is cited for sacred prayers. Yiddish is the imagined community language used to communicate among the members of the Jewish diaspora. 'Broken' English, or 'survival' English, as used by Vladek, incorporates bits and pieces from other languages the character knows, such as his native tongue, Polish; his adopted language, Yiddish; and his perpetrators' language, German.

How does translanguaging operate in *Maus* in your opinion? What is its relevance? Why hasn't the writer used just English? What meanings beyond the linguistic are conveyed? What emotions? What would be lost and what would be gained if Standard English had been used instead? How do the characters feel when they use these languages? What are their motivations to use one language or another? What contextual factors and backgrounds beyond the immediate surroundings are at play? What feelings and reactions do these instances evoke in other characters? What feelings do these instances of translanguaging trigger in you?

Through analysis and reflection, noticing and awareness of different ways of feeling and being are encouraged and welcomed in the classroom.

Finally, sentimental biopower is a mechanism of control of students' emotional engagement that occurs through the normalization of expected feelings toward sufferers. For instance, pity is one possible trivialized and normalized response expected of any "good" and "kind" spectator of a particular suffering. When this happens, there is a depoliticization of themes (e.g., social injustice, human rights abuse) and the emergence of a set of private sentiments—or banal sentimentalism. In this course, the teaching materials explicitly challenge this superficiality, normalization and depoliticization of historical trauma by encouraging students to consider, research and critically analyse the complex social, cultural, historical, political and other relevant backgrounds in the novel. In other words, students engage with the teaching materials on the basis of contextualised and historicised criticality. After researching these aspects, students are asked to represent visually four key concepts of their choice (e.g., identity, race, culture, discrimination) as enacted in the novel, for instance by selecting quotes from the novel that would best capture their understanding of the concept and describing and explaining their choices.

b) Re-envisioning intercultural language education through the cultivation of hope, solidarity and compassionate action

Sentimentality and sentimental biopower can be challenged by encouraging emotional responses not tied to self-indulgence and superficiality as shown before. Such challenging is the door to making the

emotions that emerge in the classroom the starting point of processes of recognition of the histories behind suffering and death, and the complicities (individual, collective, global) that enable and produce such suffering in the first place (Zembylas, 2021). After students identify (notice and gain awareness of) their affective investments that allow them to, or prevent them from, seeing the causes and consequences of suffering on other people's lives and communities, they can begin to challenge those complicities in specific ways. The tasks in this section are a response to this question: How can this challenging and recognition open up new ways of relating to others and new potentialities for life, living and being?

For instance, with the aim that students engage in alternative affective capacities such as hope and solidarity, one task invites them to analyse the quote with which the novel opens, a citation of words attributed to Adolf Hitler: "The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human" (Spiegelman, 1991, p. 3). The quote serves as trigger for students to reflect on what it means to be human, not only in connection with other human beings but also in relation to the natural world and the environment. The task invites them to reflect on this issue in terms of the past and distant suffering and horrors portrayed in the novel. But, importantly, it also asks students to think about and reflect upon suffering in their immediate surroundings, i.e. as experienced by other people locally and closely in their communities, whether past or present (Zembylas, 2021). Specifically, they are asked to think about, relate to and reflect on other historical events in the country. In this way, the task is also relevant as an opportunity to focus upon traumatic history or historical trauma in Argentina (e.g., the dictatorship and the Malvinas war mentioned before but also other events, for example "the conquest of the desert" in the late 1800 by General Julio Argentino Roca intended to colonise the indigenous peoples living in Argentinian Patagonia—lands uninhabited by whites then).

Task. What does it mean to be 'human'?

Write a reflection on the "race-Jews-humans" connection in this quote in the context of the novel. Go back to the task in which you analysed key concepts such as identity, race, culture, and discrimination. What are the connections?

The notions of "victim" and "human" are particularly useful. For example, Wolfendale (2005, p.345) refers to the concept of 'dehumanizing evil' for cases in which victims are seen by perpetrators not only as objects but also as inferior and subhuman. In this framework, what does it mean to be "human"? What role do the natural world, the animal world, planet Earth, objects, places and spaces play in your understanding of "human"? What of all this does "human" encompass in your view?

Can you relate your reflection to any other historical (or other) events in our country? What happened? Were there victims and victimizers? Who were they? Can you relate your reflection to any current situation or event, locally or globally? What is this situation/event? Are there victims and victimizers? Who are they? How is your understanding of "victim" and "human" affected in light of these examples?[7]

This exploration of and reflection on "victim" and "human" is complemented by a task that asks students to recreate the original book cover of *Maus* artistically. The rationale is that literature in combination with art can be particularly helpful in pedagogical efforts to engage with the sufferings and hopes of peoples in their communities (Greene, 1984, 1987, 2013). The recreations become opportunities for students to channel suffering into hope and solidarity capturing particular visions, memories, voices, spaces, aspirations and more (Zembylas, 2020b).

Task. Alternative book cover.

Design an alternative book cover for *Maus*. Your creation can be digital, or you can draw, paint, make a collage, or any other option of your choice. You can think about these questions from your own perspective:

Do you find the original cover effective/moving/catching? Is anything missing in it? What ideas would you like to include in your new cover? Which instances of language, and which languages? Which visuals? Who would you like to focus upon and why? Whose sufferings would your cover portray? Whose visions, memories, voices, and desires? How do you plan to do so? Is there any place for hopes? Whose, where and how? What emotions do you intend your cover to trigger? How can you trigger them? What else?

Accompany your new cover with a written statement reflecting your creative process and the choices you made in terms of concepts, language, visuals, suffering, hope and other relevant aspects.

Finally, *Maus* deals with human rights abuse, horror and suffering that are emotionally and conceptually unsettling. Students' encounter with the trauma, horror, suffering and pain portrayed in the novel can lead to banal feelings such as pity, but also deep feelings such as grief, anger, anguish, hatred, sorrow and others, through uncertainty and disruption of their worlds. At the same time, with careful scaffolding as shown in these tasks, this troubling and difficult content can also create openings, i.e. opportunities for individual and social transformation as students channel those discomforting emotions productively and challenge social injustices, human rights violations and suffering using their own repositories of hope and solidarity. Critical hope and solidarity, however, are necessary but not sufficient. Critical hope and solidarity need to be complemented by compassionate action, in other words, action built on new affective relations with those who are suffering in different settings (Bozalek et al., 2014; Freire, 1994; Zembylas, 2014). Suffering and pain can then be reclaimed pedagogically by encouraging students to design and implement action-oriented projects that make their hopes and solidary imagined futures alive, leading to concrete transformative action (Zembylas, 2021).

Task. Action-oriented hope and solidarity.

First, think of one way in which you can use your newly created cover of *Maus* to engage in action-oriented hope and solidarity so that these feelings of suffering, horror and pain can be transformative in our context. This step may involve a link with your local community (university, school, squares, sports clubs, community centres, etc.) and/or with the community at a global level using technologies and social media (blogs, Internet campaigns, Instagram stories, etc.). What can you do with your cover? To achieve what aim(s)? To reach which audience(s)? Where and how?

Now design a new proposal for action. You need to think about and/or focus on:

- your purpose (e.g. raise awareness, develop values, improve the world, etc.)
- the content you want to convey (message)
- your audience (e.g. other students, teachers, children, teenagers, the parent generation, the Argentine society, the global society, etc.)
- your choice of language, comprising two levels: a) which language/s to include, and b) how to express your message linguistically (message form)
- your outcome (artefact): leaflet, poster, video, craft, poem, letter, collage, etc.

- your action: what will you do with your artefact and how? This action can be something as simple as creating an Instagram story or a blog.

You must submit:

- your final artefact
- a statement describing your process of creation including the elements above (purpose, content, audience, languages, outcome, action)
- evidence of your action (e.g. the Instagram story you create and responses from viewers)

The agency and empowerment components in this task are key aspects of critical pedagogy that cultivate the awakening of critical emotional consciousness and action-oriented hope and solidarity (Zembylas, 2013). For example, by urging students to reflect on how their action may have an affective and material effect on people's lives, students move a step beyond 'superficial' learning, because they are encouraged to consider the consequences of their choices.

Conclusions and Implications

In this paper, we have suggested that the use of literary texts that confront students with discomforting and traumatic content (human rights abuse, suffering, death, pain) triggers discomforting emotions that can be channelled productively to cultivate critical hope, solidarity and compassionate action. Pedagogically, this can happen when affective and biopolitical dimensions to the role of literature are acknowledged and purposefully embedded in course design. We have illustrated our approach with the syllabus and teaching materials of a foreign language course in higher education in an Argentinian context.

Specifically, we have proposed a set of tasks which can be used as a foundation for pedagogical practice. Of course, other pedagogical realizations are possible, and we claim no generalizability. We have made some claims about learning outcomes which might come about as a result of engaging with these tasks, with the caveat that there is not always correlation between task potentials and actual learning, and that the teacher's role in guiding students' engagement with the tasks may be crucial. However, we have not explored teaching and learning processes in the classroom in this article, but we have done so elsewhere. For instance, in related work, we have focused on students' responses to our approach in this context and have shown the curricular and pedagogical complexities emerging from such efforts (Porto & Sauer Rosas, 2017; Porto, Zamuner & Miguel, 2019; Porto & Zembylas, 2020a; Porto & Zembylas, forthcoming).

In the remaining discussion, we want to highlight some ethical risks and considerations in syllabus and course development for intercultural language education, and we conclude with suggesting some insights that could be helpful for curriculum and course designers in tackling sentimentality.

The ethical dilemmas emerging in intercultural language education concerning how to handle discomforting and traumatic content in the classroom raise two fundamental questions for consideration by course designers and instructors in higher education: What can be done at the level of course design and development so that teachers can be attentive to, and responsive to the ethical risks and considerations emerging from traumatic content? How can teachers and students create learning spaces that expose and critique cheap sentimentality, while also avoiding moralization? Such an aim, we acknowledge, is lofty. Yet, paying attention to the ethical risks of sentimentality in intercultural language education reorients syllabus and course development to require us, as course designers, to more thoughtfully consider the objectives of engaging our students with traumatic content, the teaching materials and

pedagogical practices attached to those objectives, and the ways that we engage affectively with our students. And so, when as teachers we attempt to engage in ethical approaches in curriculum and pedagogy, we often come up short because we are still operating within a framework that fails to consider the dire implications of sentimentality, namely, the exploitation of trauma stories and their commodification for moralizing purposes. To change this, it requires collectively grappling with the aims, purposes and consequences of our course design and teaching so that the intentions and purposes of our courses are truly serving the students we work with.

We, therefore, would like to suggest two insights based on our experiences from all of these years of designing and teaching courses in intercultural language education, when it comes to tackling the dangers of sentimentality and the practices that could challenge sentimental biopower. The first insight is about proactively acknowledging the embedded sentimentality to traumatic content in our course syllabus and teaching materials. When choosing teaching materials that have trauma-related content, it is important to recognize the already existing embedded risk of sentimentalizing and moralizing this content. This recognition enables us to consider more carefully how to lay out the pedagogical tasks and teaching materials so that they minimize the possibility of superficializing the traumatic content. In other words, this recognition is a curriculum and pedagogy orientation that includes both the analytic task of unveiling the logic of sentimentality and the prospective task of offering critical options to students. The way in which we design courses and talk about traumatic content in the classroom is often rooted in sentimentalizing the material because it is thought that students are going to be touched more powerfully (Zembylas, 2021). As a result, much of the language used in course design and pedagogical practice, particularly when referring to those who have lived through traumatic experiences, is "emotionalized" (Holmes, 2010). What this means is that we must make explicit how trauma-related content may be used in sentimental ways. For example, a trauma-related book or film is used sentimentally in the classroom when it is taught in ways that portray trauma in simplistic and ahistorical terms or highlights exaggerated or overindulged emotions or describes trauma-related events in a melodramatic way to evoke intense emotional reactions.

The second insight for shattering the strong grip of sentimentality is to develop pedagogical tasks and teaching materials that explicitly acknowledge the discomforting emotions caused by traumatic content and try to transform such feelings into "critical emotional praxis" (Zembylas, 2008, 2014). As previously argued, there are three important dimensions of critical emotional praxis. First, critical emotional praxis is grounded in a historical and political understanding of the role of emotions in power relations in the society. Second, critical emotional praxis consists in the ability to question emotionally charged, cherished beliefs, exposing how privileged positions and comfort zones inform the ways in which one recognizes what and how they have been taught to see/act (or not to see/act), and empowering different ways of being with/for the other. Finally, critical emotional praxis translates these emotional understandings into relationships, teaching/learning practices and enactments that benefit social justice. These three dimensions of critical emotional praxis can help us reorient the syllabus and course development in intercultural language education toward opening up spaces that delink from sentimental frameworks of understanding traumatic content.

In conclusion, embracing an approach that exposes and critiques cheap sentimentality in intercultural language education entails adopting an ethic that pays attention to the affective and biopolitical dimensions of curriculum and pedagogy. It is important that we reimagine the possibilities carried in our course design and teaching materials as we use literature with traumatic content. This can be done in ways that offer critical imagination as a mechanism inviting educators to begin rethinking the affective impact of their teaching materials, speculating about what affects and emotions *could* be there or *should* be there to cultivate hope, solidarity and compassionate action. As course designers and instructors in intercultural language education we must reckon with this process and the practical implications of changing our orientation. Let us have a conversation in the field about what this might look like.

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Notes

[1] While this could be a problem, it could also be seen as a defence mechanism protecting the student from becoming overwhelmed by feelings of sorrow. Hence, it is important, as we point out later in the paper, that the instructor takes some steps to secure student emotional safety as a necessary condition for learning trauma-related content—such as recognizing that many students bring with them trauma stories and experiences that make them vulnerable to emotional manipulation (see Carello & Butler, 2014). We are indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting this clarification.

[2] For instance, the English teaching programme includes the following compulsory courses: Contemporary English Literature, British Culture and Civilization, Medieval and Renaissance English Literature, Classic and Modern English Literature, Literature of the United States (https://www.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/facultad/secretarias-y-prosecretarias/academica/deptos/lenguas-y-literaturas-modernas/carreras/profesorado-en-lengua-y-literatura-inglesas)

[3] To prepare for their discussions and collaborative work, the students used varied materials such as documentaries, the film *Iluminados por el fuego* [Blessed by Fire] (2005), the song "Brothers in arms" by Dire Straits, the Time Magazine Cover of May 31st 1982, Malvinas war poems, and media resources from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/worldnews/9051902/The-Falklands-War-in-pictures.html https://www.google.com.ar/search?q=the+falklands+war+(newspapers+headlines+of+1982)&hl=es-419&prmd=imvns&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=F41gUIPiOKq00QH07IG4Bg&sqi=2&ved=0CGIQsAQ&biw=1366&bih=587#q=the+falklands+war+(newspapers+headlines+of+1982)&hl=es-(the literature orientation) (see Porto, 2014).

[4] Project tasks involved students researching the dictatorship using art and literature with sources from https://www.abuelas.org.ar/galeria-videos/english-subtituled-audiovisuals-9, which contains videos, films, books, short stories, censured literature at the time of the dictatorship, historic pictures, testimonies from grandmothers and grandchildren, media sources, audios, radio spots, music, tweets, conferences, didactic resources and more. Other materials were the World Cup Official March (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7n2PT1cX-Riw), films such as "Mundial de Fútbol 1978. La película official" and "Historia official" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU-JcRjGWFY), songs such as "Mothers of the Disappeared" by U2 and "They dance alone" by Sting, and websites (www.madres.org and www.desaparecidos.org) (the literature orientation in its broadest sense) (see Porto, 2021).

[5] *Witnessing*, in general, refers to the act of bearing witness and of experiencing an event (Felamn & Laub, 1992). By *empathic unsettlement*, LaCapra (2001) refers to how someone becomes unsettled as a result of witnessing someone's suffering, while never reaching a level of understanding that equals the victim's understanding of the experience. *Heteropathic identification* means being able to say "It could have been me in this traumatic event," and, at the same time, "but it was not me" (Hirsch, 1998).

[6] As we focus our analysis on *Maus*, it is important to note that there is a significant Jewish community in Argentina, the largest in Latin America and sixth in the world outside Israel. The country suffered two terrorist attacks against this community: a car bomb on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires on 17 March 1992 with 29 casualties and a suicide van bomb attack on the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association building in Buenos Aires on 18 July 1994, with 87 casualties and hundreds of injured people. Remembrance days gather the Argentine people in communion irrespective of faith.

[7] As we are writing this article, a war broke up in Europe, after Russia's invasion in Ukraine. We believe this task is particularly relevant in connection with this war, as it encourages the exploration of "difficult" questions about victims/perpetrators and the contested terminologies used by each side.