

Constructing Decolonizing Methodologies:

Theories and Praxes of Difference

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The United States government's post 9/11 domestic and international policies are important reasons to revisit the work of Edward Said. The implications of his writing for those most culturally and politically marginalized are extremely salient. In this essay we see that the critique of racism parallels the ideas of Said's *Orientalism* (1979). We engage these ideas comparatively, and as our title suggests, explore the process of constructing decolonizing methodologies.

Today, many members of the community at the University of Massachusetts Boston are engaged in the struggle to create a difference. It is not only this institution, but virtually all universities in this society are designed to perpetuate the status quo. Who or what determines this status quo? How does that relate to those most marginalized, particularly African Americans who at one time were considered non-persons? Have those African Americans who have gained middle class status fully received the privileges of their position? Are they no longer subject to the politics of difference within academic halls or institutions of power throughout America?

In 1967 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., challenged all people of good conscience in the United States to reconsider their faith. "We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values."¹ Dr. King's statement was within the context of identifying "the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism."² In this "age of new globalization," have African-Americans eluded "racism, materialism, and militarism?" Is Dr. King's 1967 call for a societal transformation still relevant in 2005?

Was Africa's underdevelopment a result of collaboration with or colonization by European military forces? How does the quest for Africa's natural and human resources impact the development process?

RACISM AND ORIENTALISM

In explaining or partially defining Orientalism, Edward Said points out one of his meanings of this concept:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point, Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authoring views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling it; in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.³

1. James M. Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991) p. 240.

2. Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, p. 240.

In *Black Power: the Politics of Liberation*, Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton present a definition of racism. They stated that it is “the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group.”¹ Further, Ture and Hamilton call for “the process of political modernization”² in order to rid society of racism.³ The authors illustrate three concepts:

(1) question old values and institutions of the society; (2) searching for new and different forms of political structure to solve political and economic problems; and (3) broadening the base of political participation to include more people in the decision-making process.⁴

Ture and Hamilton’s definition of racism has obvious and strong parallels to Said’s meaning of Orientalism. From this parallel we can see that the “Occident,” (Western European and American) all have been involved in “the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group” (Ture and Hamilton) and “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over” (Said) African people within a period expanding over six centuries.

Four centuries is a long time to dominate a people politically, economically, culturally, militarily and spiritually. Then to attempt to “integrate” them into a society without any reconciliation or reparations is reprehensible. While the mode of production has certainly changed during this period, the social relations have remained largely the same. What structural or institutional power do African Americans have to make decisions in their own interest?

RACE AND THE ORIENT WITHIN

The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond is an anti-racism training institute, based in New Orleans, Louisiana, that facilitates the empowerment of individuals and communities to fight racism. From their experiences in working with those most impacted “destructively and negatively”⁵ by race and racism, they define racism as “race prejudice plus power.”⁶ They agree that one cannot fully understand race “without knowing what race is.”⁷ In the Peoples Institute’s understanding,

...race is a specious classification of human beings created by Europeans (white men) which assigns human worth and social status by using themselves as the model of humanity, for the purpose of establishing legitimate (legal, as defined by them) sources of power and white skin privilege. Prejudice is to prejudge. And power is the legitimate (legal) ability to access and/or control those systems and institutions sanctioned by the state. It is important to understand that it is all three components of this equation that equal racism, not just one.⁸

The idea of Orientalism is very similar to the idea of racism. The sharing of ideas about the Orient by the Occident, particularly the British and French, is based on a similar premise. As Said illustrates:

In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behavior of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics.⁹

3. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979/2003) p. 3

1. Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) p.3.

2. Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, p. 39

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. Jemadari Kamara and Tony Menelik Van Der Meer, *State of the Race: Creating Our 21st Century: Where Do We Go From Here?* (Boston: Diaspora Press, 2004) p. 376.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. Jemadari Kamara and Tony Menelik Van Der Meer, *State of the Race*, p. 376-377.

9. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 41-42.

The concept of “the other,” in relation to the internal contradictions within Western society, marginalizes and creates systemic structures of oppression. The institutionalization of these relationships becomes manifest in the marginalization of groups based upon race, religion, gender, etc. As a residual impact of colonial relationships, the indigenous national groups become constrained. This requires that we “take an inventory” of the toll colonialism has taken on our sense of identity, concept of knowledge, intellectual production, cultural integrity and powerlessness. Said suggests that,

“Today, the standard view of the Orient is a vestige of the nineteenth-century European colonialism, when anti-Eastern prejudice reached its zenith. They see it in Islam so they won’t have to recognize that the same elements exist in their own societies.”¹

Increasingly, immigration from the colonial world into the métropole is creating political crises for national governments. Now confronted with the face of their colonial exploits at home to sustain their national positions in the twenty first century, they have become ever more resistant to social change, cultural integration and political democratization. Post colonial societies are being confronted with the contradictions of empire and domination.

DIALECTIC OF RACIALIZATION

As products of the same system which produced institutional racism based upon an internalized sense of racial superiority, we, too, have been impacted by this global phenomenon. The dialectic of institutional racism is the internalized racial oppression it produces. We observe the manifestations of this oppression expressed daily in self deprecating acts and in violence, most frequently, against one another. This phenomenon occurs wherever racism has been institutionalized as part of the fundamental system of domination. Its ramifications impact our interaction with other communities in the Diaspora, between ourselves and those from Africa. Those who live in the midst of white dominated societies feel the direct impact of these institutions on a daily basis. But they are not the only ones subject to its impact. The internalization of racial inferiority has provided the foundation for imperialism and the marginalization of people of color globally.

The implications of this dialectic on the actions of the colonized have been well documented by Franz Fanon (*Black Skin White Masks*) and Albert Memmi (*The Colonized and the Colonizer*). The process of assimilation has produced a colonized person whose cultural, social and political values and conception emanate from those derived from the colonizer. Their systems of schooling were established to reproduce a colonized person with this distorted conception of themselves and their (his)story. Confused, but seeking acceptance and the rewards of inclusion, colonized elites accommodate first at a social, then cultural and political levels. Ultimately, some come to actually believe they are acting in their own interest while serving the forces of their continued oppression.

Carter G. Woodson wrote of the implications of this in *The Miseducation of the Negro*, on the African American population. By controlling the mind of the oppressed, the information they receive and their self conception, those who control social systems have little to fear from dominated groups.

W.E.B. DuBois discussed the nature of the dueling tensions within the oppressed when he wrote in the *Souls of Black Folk*,

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.²

1. Amritjit Singh and Bruce G. Johnson, *Interviews with Edward W. Said*, (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2004), p. 116.

2. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, (Greenwich, Fawcett Publications, 1961) p. 16.

The situation which he describes would be clinically considered schizophrenic. This he suggests, however, is the normative condition of Africans in America.

The psycho-social manifestations remain evident throughout the Diaspora. Marc Prou in his article, "Black, Mulatto and Light Skin: Reinterpreting Race, Ethnicity and Class in Caribbean Diasporic Communities," discusses the continuing implications of color on class and social relationships.¹ While perhaps not as exacerbated as it has been historically, the residual impact on class, residential, social and economic relationships impacts the structure of what becomes "possible." While often unspoken, the implications of color characteristics still subtly impact socio-political relations.

REFLECTIONS ON THE OTHER

The African exists in America as the "other." The relationship of African people to the dominant European American group—regardless of their ethnicity—is still one of marginalization, oppression and exploitation. African Americans represent a higher percentage of their population living in poverty than that of the European American population. African American labor is still paid less than white labor. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics,² 12 million plus full-time wage and salary earning Black working women and men, 16 years and over, receive \$120 less per week than their white counter parts.

African Americans are also incarcerated in extraordinarily greater rates than the dominant group in the population. With approximately 13 percent of the population they comprise nearly 50 percent of the two million people in U.S. prisons. The unemployment rate for Black men in many cities runs more than twice the rate of the white population. African Americans have higher rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, prostate cancer, breast cancer and HIV than nearly any other group. Black males are also more frequently and disproportionately shot down by police officers than their white counter parts.

Can African Americans continue their existence without a paradigm shift? What shifts must take place in order to reach reconciliation and/or reparations? What new decolonizing methodologies must be developed in order for African Americans to go beyond insanity as normative behavior?

INSTITUTIONALIZED STRUCTURES OF OPPRESSION

The American state has been established on a set of institutions which undergird its structure. The governance system, from the construction of the constitution, has been based upon the unresolved contradiction of race. A civil war and the era of reconstruction attempted to bring greater inclusion of those non-citizens into the country. This process was rebuffed as the system responded with legal, structural exclusion for more than half a century. With the legal transformation of this codified segregation, a social movement for inclusion was required to force the state to implement its own laws. Legislation has been required to further delineate the implications of rights for selected groups. All persons are not equal. After such a history it should be clear that all groups don't start from the same place nor does equal opportunity exist for the "minorities" who will soon become the "majority."

This contradiction is compounding the problem and response of the system. Charges of reverse discrimination have systematically been made, largely by white males, for whom the traditional system had been constructed to benefit. An internalized sense of racial superiority has become deeply imbedded in the psychology of the system. Change isn't easy and a by-product of the process is often fear. This dynamic has been used by those who support the status quo to entrench conservative values and policy positions.

To maintain order in the domestic colonies, draconian laws have been implemented increasing the marginalization of the "Orient within."³ The state has fostered the promulgation of a prison-industrial complex at the beginning of the twenty first century unlike any in the world. Prison expansion has become privatized in the name of patriotism. Fear has become the foundation upon which "intermestic" policy decision-making occurs. The inextricable link between

1. Jemadari Kamara and Tony Menelik Van Der Meer, *State of the Race-Creating Our 21st Century: Where Do We Go from Here?*, (Boston, Diaspora Press, 2004) p.234

2. <http://stats.bls.gov/news.release/wkyeng.t02.htm>.

3. Amritjit Singh and Bruce g. Johnson, *Interviews with Edward W. Said*, p. 39

international and domestic public policy has now formed a new more myopic vision of this society in relation to other people of the world.

The U.S. has a very provincial attitude towards cultures and people whom they don't understand. Living for centuries essentially on a monolingual island, American culture has reflected the Anglo-Saxon origins from which it emerged. The rising importance of Hispanic bilingualism is a very recent phenomenon. While appreciating Black entertainers, there's little understanding of the richness nor depth of the culture from whence it comes. Its connection to and continuum from the culture of the African continent, seen as the most backward, reflects the relative insignificance given to it.

The clash of cultures, perspectives and worldview makes it difficult to transcend certain barriers of communication when perceptions of rationality, social order and acceptable behavior are very different. We tend to fear that which we don't understand and distrust that which appears different. Understanding, respecting and accepting differences can be a real strength of the diverse American society. Whether the political culture can deal with this diversity, without creating a threat, remains to be seen. We only have our memories upon which to reflect.

Since World War II U.S. foreign policy has been driven by the image of a foreign threat. Anti-communism fueled the cold war, Korean and Vietnam wars. The domino theory framed the requirement for the U.S. to stop the spread of communism before all of Southeast Asia fell under their control. Of course, then the Oriental "other" would come across the Pacific and get us. This sense of external threat helped to drive increased defense budget expenditures boosting certain durable goods and technology sectors of the economy.

The post cold war period has had no such clear "boogey man." Since the 1970s oil crisis increasingly the Muslim Arabs of the Middle East have become perceived as a threat to the American system. This threat stimulated the Gulf War and has increased our support for Israel during this era. The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have served to only increase suspicion of Arabs and heighten anxiety about the Muslim community of which most Americans know very little.

The necessity to be prepared to meet this global threat to the American way of life has fueled American backing of international institutions like the IMF and World Bank. This same sense that the United Nations was no longer directly under American control, and that "those" states were wielding too much influence, caused the U.S. to withhold its dues seeking to reorganize the bureaucracy and exert greater influence.

The global expansion of the cultural hegemony of Western society in the beginning of the 21st century manipulates symbols, appropriates systems and co-opts popular cultures as elements for its own utility. Furthermore, it expropriates the benefits from the creative artists who produce these new genres that are the most unique product of western society. The so-called McDonaldization of the world is reflected in products from Coca Cola to Hip Hop culture.

The 21st century dynamic of globalization represents not only the expansion of capitalist market relationships, but a socio-political construct interlaced with values of individualism, competition and ever increasing abundance. The sense of limitless growth fueled by consumer demand for the newest technological toy, begs the issue of society's relationship to a planet with finite resources. Socio-economic, class contradictions both within and between cultures are exacerbating the tensions felt among those most exploited in the global system.

The process of this systemic reproduction is increasingly being implemented by the cultural elites within each group. Therefore, it isn't only "the white man" leading the oppressing institution or implementing regressive local or state policy. Rather, the leadership now comes in Asian, Black, Latino or Arab face. Twenty first century globalization has now produced a generation of leadership that implements the policies of oppression for their own self-aggrandizement. Therefore, one of our foremost struggles must be to challenge those institutions of society that reproduce leadership with no critical thought or analysis of their role as political and economic gatekeepers. Skills, without a consciousness of the construct one serves, will only reproduce a cycle of exploitation and oppression, widening the gap between those with limited income and those with excessive wealth. Ultimately, these new "leadership" elites are becoming the tools of their own oppression.

CONSTRUCTING DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGIES

In order to transcend our current state of underdevelopment, we must engage our struggles at many levels. Said has played a pivotal role in the struggle around ideas and worldview. Among the essential elements in creating a decolonizing methodology is the conscious process of transforming perspectives. Decolonization doesn't assume the re-

jection of all Western knowledge. Rather, it suggests that there must be a recentering of the theoretical debates and applied research based upon the perspectives of all people. There is more than one way of knowing. In formulating our research perspective, it is important that the colonized create models in which they are the subject not the object of the discussion.

Theoretical frameworks that construct applied research paradigms appropriately link the use of theory to a world engaged in struggle to transform the current hierarchies of socio-political domination. Praxis is at the center of our research construct. The applied use of theory and knowledge is a vehicle to empower and facilitate human liberation. Objectification is a process of dehumanization.¹ It is a means to abstract the researcher and research in the name of science to universalize the project. This problematic confronts new initiatives from within the communities of the dominated that seek greater participation in and control over the process of research on them. This parallels the political struggle of communities to become more self-determining and to regain control over their educational, environmental and social well being. The process of empowerment requires participation. Research can be a significant tool for the engagement of communities in making this transition. Within the academy this form of research has limited legitimization. Therefore, the struggle around ideas and paradigm shifts must not only be waged within communities, but within the academy itself.

The application of knowledge to real issues is an essential element of this new methodology. Said suggests that we must transcend Foucault's analysis of the sciences based upon unequal relationships between cultures to a more Gramscian approach rooted in local struggles essential to this view of praxis. This inextricable link between theory and practice is what helps to shape the new methodology.²

In order to break the cycle of systemic reproduction a conscious process of confrontation and transformation will be required by the petty bourgeoisie. Amilcar Cabral refers to this as the commitment of "class suicide" by this class. Why would any group wish to engage in such an irrational act? He suggests that, in fact, the long term survival and integrity of this group depends upon it. Without this realignment of interests by the educated elite, their basis of power will remain linked to the good will of the former colonial master as opposed to the masses of people whom they suggest they represent.

Within the academy as well the struggle for the legitimization of applied research approaches, qualitative research methods and indigenous knowledge is continuously confronted by the traditional disciplines and pedagogical approaches. The struggle against the "colonizing disciplines" being used to "discipline the colonized" is another essential element in shifting the paradigm parameters.³ Rather than creating a real system of education helping to lead us out of our constraints of colonial relationships, we've constructed a system of schooling to socialize controllable elites and requisite labor into uncritical thought processes and "acceptable" behavior. This processing is antithetical to the liberation of the mind and spirit required for any nation of people.

Another essential element in developing a decolonizing methodology is engaging in the process of reframing, redefining and renaming ourselves.⁴

Ture and Hamilton would agree that African Americans have plenty of questions which should challenge the foundation of this society.⁵ They state,

we must first redefine ourselves. Our basic need is to reclaim our history and our identity from what must be called cultural terrorism... We shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to the society, and to have those terms recognized. This is the first necessity of a free people, and the first right that any oppressor must suspend.⁶

A major aspect of constructing decolonizing methodologies is to reframe, redefine and rename one's self in one's own interest. In 1966 the desire for self determination became manifest through the call for "Black Power" articulated by the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activists who challenged the non-violent "we shall overcome" rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement. This ideological shift took place during the course of mass demonstrations and was the subject of a long essay by Dr. King.⁷ These changes led to a healthier definition, image and

1.Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, (London, Zed Press, 1999).

2.Amritjit Singh and Bruce g. Johnson, *Interviews with Edward W. Said*, p.136.

3.Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, p.68.

4.*Ibid.*, p. 143.

5.Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, p. 34.

6.Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, p. 34-35.

consciousness about blackness along with the eventual acceptance by a larger mass seeing themselves as African people.

Kwame Ture, one of the authors of *Black Power* is a case in point. After the publication of his book, he changed his name from Stokely Carmichael to Kwame Ture, an African name that connects him to Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Ture.

While the changing of one's name may not free one, it represents a psychological shift and a dis-association with one's oppressor. It is an act of resistance which rejects "the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group" (Ture and Hamilton) and "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over" (Said) a people.

These processes are accompanied by the retelling and rewriting of a people's story. The reclamation of history from the perspective of "the other" is necessary for transformative restoration. The healing and repair of relationships between groups is an important step in allowing societies to productively move forward. Without a structured process to acknowledge and confront prior injustices, resolve internal contradictions, repair social relationships and consider repayment when required, resentments will fester unresolved exploding at some future moment with society saying, "we don't understand what the problem is."

CONCLUSION: TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

As an attempt to resolve past conflicts numerous societies have formulated "Truth and Reconciliation" commissions to engage a cross section of their communities in dialogue to heal the souls and mend the spirits of those involved in social and political injustices. South Africa, Bosnia, Haiti, Ivory Coast, to name a few, have all been involved in some form of tribunals. The expressions of truth are a prerequisite to any discussion of socio-political reconciliation.

Said discussed the necessary conditions required for "the other" to be able to confront the oppressor's injustices. However, this is a necessary but insufficient step in social resolution. Said further illuminated the structural character of oppression. It is the institutionalization of the process that produces the capacity for systemic reproduction. Therefore, achieving systemic change must be an objective. Even with the best of intentions, unabated structural inequality will lead to increased tension and resistance. Some open, public discussion must occur regarding resources required to repair and redevelop those harmed. Reparations are part of the resolution which must be considered.

The systematic use of violence as a vehicle to impose the colonial order has produced a twenty first century cultural environment where violence is endemic. Achieving reconciliation without disarmament (or minimally a truce) is a recipe for frustration. The creation of a new cultural environment is what's required. The transformation of values, guaranteeing a basic human quality of life, health care, housing and education, is possible if we have the political will. It is essential to demonstrate cross cultural respect, social justice and economic inclusion. Because if society doesn't, there will be no peace.

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