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Oakes 80B

11 December 2017

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Decolonization can be formally defined as “the process by which communities that were grossly affected by colonial expansion, genocide, and cultural assimilation may go through by reframing with other indigenous frameworks of thought.” (Oxford English Dictionary) Although accurate, this definition does not even begin to grapple with the true transformative nature of decolonization within heavily colonized Latinx communities. My interpretation of decolonization can only be limited to the Latinx experience because of how colonization so deeply affected and uprooted a wide variety of communities in the global south; decolonization is an individualized process to reconcile the past and present. These processes are dependent on understanding the pre-colonial society and psyche as well as influences of diaspora. Therefore, throughout this paper, I will attempt to explore decolonization and its burgeoning relationship with my diaspora, the only narrative I can beckon any claim to. Decolonization begins here, now, with you and with me.

How is colonization still prevalent?

Since 1492, my ancestors and their descendents were forced to struggle with colonization. Their artifacts-- books, tablets, and calendars that illuminated the rich traditions and histories of the Mexica-- were destroyed with no remorse. Their natural resources stripped, stolen, and shipped across oceans for the benefit of a Catholic crown. Their bodies exploited,

beaten, and decimated. Such a thorough process of destruction that we never recovered, not as a continent, not as a country, not as a people. The process is ongoing and our identity continues to be buried under 6 feet of cement and industry unless we dig it out ourselves. The books given to the children in traditional school setting tell tales of cooperation from our ancestors, paint Christopher Columbus and Hernan Cortes as adventurers, and avoid the truths too real for a white institution to reveal. From our birth, students are spoonfed a eurocentric tale focused on the erasure of marginalized histories. Then, they go home and turn on the television, to watch strangers that look nothing like them. The intentional lack of meaningful representation of brown people in media leads to detrimental comparisons of worth and value based on a distant reality not created for the brown audience. Brown liberation expands beyond societal confinements when the state we exist under operates for the explicit benefit of white supremacy. And so the cycle continues of manufacturing consent for hegemonic institutions set on the suppression and erosion of our natural, complete beings in all aspects of our physical life. Decolonization fights against these institutions beginning within.

Education

Academia and its related institutions often operate as “neoliberal apparatuses.” (Alarcon and Bettez) Brown people often experience ostracization and questioning in academic spaces often rooted in racial biases, implicit or explicit. As Jeannette Alarcon and Silvia Bettez describe in “Feeling Brown in the Academy: Decolonizing Mentoring Through a Disidentification Muxerista Approach,” we must create our own arenas of collaboration and criticism in academic spaces as a tool of decolonization. Academia has a long, outstanding history of centering the cis-hetero affluent white male and his work. Yet, brown people continue to demand access to space, acknowledgment, and credit within these racially biased arenas. Throughout this process, we

must attempt to dignify, justify, and explain the merit not just of our work but of ourselves to a white audience. As a brown academic, we face two hurdles; earning respect for our brown existence (which could be toppled at moment's notice at a white will) then beginning to earn respect for our work. Critical energy that could've been spent creating or discovering new work, growing as an individual, or recognizing and destroying oppressive systems has, instead, been funnelled into the tedious task of explaining our personhood and attempting proximity to whiteness.

So, as an act of protest to the eurocentrism and white supremacy so often prevalent in academia, Jeannette Alarcon and Silvia Bettez argue that fostering relationships between Latinx academics of mentoring and recognizing one another could serve as a tool against “oppression and the academy.” Centering brown womxn is the most anti-colonial practice. As Dolores Calderon and her co writers explored in their piece published in the Harvard Educational Review, employing a “chicana feminist epistemology” is transformative and inherently an effort to decolonize and liberate. Brown folx, particularly womxn, would no longer have to straddle the borderland of brown, radical existence and research with white hetero-male academia. Our psyches would be free from the constraints of environments curated for our suppression if we begin to create our own.

Culture

Decolonization in terms of cultural reclamation and recognition proves to be yet another hurdle towards brown liberation. There are various intersections of our own brown oppression and the loss of cultural values and practices.

As previously stated, the Catholic church functioned as a hegemonic institution employed to enable the subjugation of indigenous particularly along the California coast extending into Mexico. The Spanish *conquistadores* employed traditional, indigenous icons but converted and perverted symbols of importance, culture, and safety. *Tonantzin* and *Coatlicue* were appropriated into *La Virgen Maria* who is now hailed as *La Reina de Mexico*. *La Malinche* was degraded as an indigenous woman and her image later manipulated into a scapegoat for colonization. A key to decolonization is reclaiming our exploited symbols and reconnecting with their spiritual meaning still found within. The Mexica religious symbols were not distant and omnipresent as in modern interpretations of roman catholicism (the most popular religion in modern-day Mexico), each deity represented a distinct feature of the human nature. Understanding the indigenous religion was simply understanding yourself and those around you in a more complete and complex way. *Coatlicue* was a manifestation of womanhood in all of its complexity. She represented fertility, maternal instinct, innate kindness, as well as rage, a woman's wrath, and nature. *Huitzilopochtli* represented the capability of human rage and the intrinsic evil within. He served as a tool to control as well exert said rage for benefit to channel destructive energy into productive means or to exert as a mode of expansion. To further discover and reconnect with our holistics, complete natural psyches and beings and better the experience of our physical selves, indigenous, pre colonial religion serves as a pathway.

Similarly, our outward expression of self can be reflective of our inner workings. Returning to culturally significant apparel and embracing a visible representation of *la cultura*

reaffirms our existence and our resistance publicly. Opting to don a handmade *huipil* not only promotes small, indigenous business that manufactures the shirts and the family owned *tiendas* that sell them, but serves as an act of resistance of eurocentric beauty standards and a fast fashion industry that encourages, enables, and depends on the exploitation of poor womxn in underdeveloped countries.

In addition to decolonizing our clothing as a cultural marker, we must decolonize our wallets and the way we interact with violent capitalism. There is no such thing as ethical consumption under capitalism but being more aware of our money's impact on our brown and black sisters and brothers worldwide can contribute to the destruction of exploitative markets. Because brown people often occupy lower socioeconomic positions in society compared to white counterparts, their practices of survival such as depending on second hand or thrift stores to provide adequate clothing for themselves have often been criticized. Yet, second hand shopping is more environmentally friendly and its own form of personal decolonization. Especially when people of color are disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation, it is vital that as existing as a brown individual in a relatively privileged country that consumes the majority of the earth's resources to be conscious of our personal carbon footprint as a form of decolonization.

Food

As colonizers exploited our natural resources and degraded our natural environments, indigenous americans became separated from their organic food sources. And we never completely reconnected. Our bodies have become so heavily unbalanced and we lack the holistic health to be in tune with our natural, pre colonial manifestations. We are controlled by diets

accustomed to the euro body and existence. For example, 53% of mexican americans and 74% of indian americans are lactose intolerant, yet dairy is a staple item of our diet in colonized territories. The Mexica were not familiar with owning, breeding, and living with livestock (a contributing factor to the massive genocide by disease) and survived and thrived on an essentially plant based diet filled with *maize* and *nopal*. What we consume influences our physical and mental livelihood. The American diet was never meant to encourage our health especially as a brown person. As Katherine Bradley and Hank Herrera describe in “Decolonizing Food Justice: Naming, Resisting, and Researching Colonizing Forces in the Movement,” social justice surrounding food must center brown and black bodies as those disproportionately impacted by food deserts and food insecurity rooted in white supremacy. It is by no mistake that supermarkets in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods often lack fresh fruit and vegetables to constitute a healthy diet. If you are what you eat, white corporations and institutions are routinely poisoning brown and black people.

Beyond consuming food, we must always take in consideration who is growing our food and suffering direct damages of careless profit based white corporations to achieve meaningful decolonization. Who cares if you have *tacos de nopal* and *horchata* everyday if brown people are literally poisoned by known carcinogens used as pesticides in the central valley of California and beyond? Who cares if you have gone meat-free if brown people continue to suffer post traumatic stress disorder and physical mutilations while working at meat slaughterhouses? Veganism and decolonization of your personal diet mean very little if you are not actively fighting for improved working conditions and humane practices for people. Personal decolonization must include a fight for global decolonization, otherwise who are you really fighting for?

Modern Examples of Decolonization

There is a plethora of organizations performing groundbreaking work for decolonization and the plight of brown liberation nation and world wide. In Chiapas, México, *El Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN* is actively working towards indigenous sovereignty through a womxn based, indigenous centered, leftist, grassroots movement inspired by the proletariat sect of the Mexican Revolution of the early 1900s led by Emiliano Zapata. The Brown Beret movements, serving as reincarnations of the popular 60s grassroots movement that worked in conjunction with the Black Panthers and Yellow Power, have grown in size and numbers nationwide most notably (where it all began) in East Los Angeles-- a historically brown, poor, immigrant community. There are also grassroots organizations fighting a modern form of colonialism- gentrification- in cities nationwide. Defend Boyle Heights functions as a community resource as well as staging protest and occupations against gentrifying establishments (like white art spaces or white niche coffee houses) to raise awareness of the violent displacement of the brown immigrant community. Decolonization also means to become an active member of brown liberation as an actor and as an accomplice, beginning internally and working outwards-- finding your intersections of privilege and and another person's oppression then attempting to destroy it.

Conclusion

Decolonization is an act born out of love. Love for yourself. Your lineage. Your history. Your ancestors that perished still chanting "*Aztlan.*" Your comrades who stand next to you. For those who are too intertwined in the basic fight for survival to even begin to consider liberation. We owe it to them. We owe to ourselves. We owe it to our *abuelitas* and their *abuelita* and theirs and

theirs and theirs. We never exist singularly because we will always exist connected by our painful history of violent colonization. But, that also means that we will never fight alone. We hold the invisible hands of each other. We are all stamped with *el nopal en la frente, la águila en el corazón , y el esfuerzo de existir con piel morena*. Brown liberation. *Para Siempre*.

Works Cited

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