



**Universidad Sin Fronteras
Class on The Roots of Racism, June 26, 2013**

One page reflection PAPER:

HOW DO WE DISMANTLE RACISM, DECOLONIZE, AND HAVE HEALING FOR HISTORICAL TRAUMA?

I believe we can dismantle racism by studying historical contexts and sharing with others. Too many individuals, including myself at one time, have accepted and do accept the “truths” presented to us, whether that be in a classroom, from television, or books written with distorted or questionable stances. I believe that racism can be dismantled with true exposure and evidence. Truths being revealed, knowledge being shared, and communication encouraged are impactful and can dissolve colonization. I support addressing literacy concerns, social support, and not only individual but community-level social and structural determinants of well-being. Lastly, these all can assist in one healing, possibly being fearful but not stopped or hindered in making a difference and facilitating change.

Dismantling racism and colonialism requires building something else in its place: relationships of cooperation and mutual respect. Relationships at an individual level are important, but also building larger structures and institutions in society. I see it as not about a transfer of power or getting a concession from power, but changing the structures so power is shared more equally.

The stories we tell and pass on are important, and it is important to tell stories and pass acknowledging the historical wrongs and crimes that have been committed but even more important to keep alive stories of struggle and resistance. If racism and colonialism grow from roots like a tree, the work of decolonizing is to spread seeds of, nurture, and grow branches on another tree that can replace, overshadow, and ultimately uproot the tree of

racism, an alternative tree that starts with relationships of love and respect, especially for those who may seem “ other.”

Both my mother and I were born in Brunswick, Georgia, but we’ve had very different journeys. Born in 1960, my mother remembers the days of segregation when Jim Crow reigned supreme. At age 26, my views have been radicalized through various experiences and involvement in social justice movements. I’ve found it impossible to convince her that the white standard of beauty is not the superior standard of beauty. To an extent, she still believes Black people should stay in their place.

How can I begin to decolonize her mind and continue to decolonize my own? I believe this can take place through intergenerational conversations in safe spaces. These conversations should consist of people of all ages, races, religions, and sexual orientations. We need to discuss how to best put people on equal footing. In my opinion, the abolishment of capitalism would create a more equal, just world. Capitalism is inherently oppressive—racist, classist, sexist, all of the “isms.” Once we can let go of our capitalist views—our views that people should be exploited—then we can truly begin healing ourselves.

Healing and decolonization can happen on multiple levels. I will talk about spiritual, emotional, and mental levels. On a spiritual level, first truth about history and the present moment must be aired, heard, believed, grieved, understood, acknowledged. Until this happens it is difficult to heal. Because we cannot wait until everyone is ready for truth, we must begin where we are.

The emotional aspect of healing is an integration of the truth. One example would be if whites could be present and witness the anger and hurt and rage caused by colonization, white supremacy from colonized to colonizer, and truly acknowledged. This would need lots of support for all involved.

It is becoming apparent that these elements might happen in varying order, sometimes simultaneously. But a result would be people educated on a deep level about what might be on the other side of the colonial experiment. Armed with this knowledge we could participate in that superstate structure, schools, church, etc. to shift culture within the state.

These are some ideas, but there are so many!

We can dismantle racism by presenting a common enemy to unify against. Also by checking power; power should be a burden not a tool. It should make your decisions hard knowing that they affect everyone. Racism’s roots are a great place to start from, but I think a better starting place would be the roots of revolution. Also eliminating scientific and religious ideas that propagate racism is important. Equality stems from sharing and common responsibility. It’s hard to eliminate an ideal, but maybe through brainwashing and propaganda, we can clean the nation’s brain of racism.

I believe that in order to dismantle a system that strips individuals and whole peoples of their humanity, we must work to recognize the humanity of everyone. Colonialism works to oppress whole groups of people, both on a large scale but also on an individual level. One way to work against this colonialism and racism is to build individuals up and recognize our shared humanity through relationships. Relationships that recognize each individual and

people's struggle and celebrate victories by transcending barriers. I believe it is much easier to heal from hurt when people recognize the wrong and work to fix it. If individuals and whole groups of people work to understand one another, this can help move us all to a place of healing the damage caused by racism and colonialism; then together we can work to right the wrongs that caused the damage to begin with. This should be work on an institutional and societal scale, working towards true justice for all. We cannot decolonize and stop racism without working for justice. Working against the system through reclaiming humanity for all is the way to dismantle the system and then build healing and justice.

Dismantling racism will be a process that draws on historical memory, awareness of contemporary expressions of the problem and clarity about the goal (the vision of a society liberated from oppression). That vision may well be the most important element, the driving factor. In the end it is what we are going towards as against what we are moving away from that opens up the space for creative expression of a better world. We heal from pain by clarifying and awareness about the source of the distress (reaffirming the intrinsic worth/human values) and secondly engaging in the collective process, aspiration/struggle towards a better world and commitment to defend that victory.

The healing of pain of over 500 years is a difficult one but can be done if people are honest with themselves. The truth of the ills will have to be told by those who experienced it. A process to prevent a repeat of such ills has to be put in place, as opposed to celebrating oppression annually. Such conversation can begin with small steps in a safe space that honors and respects the feelings of the oppressed (victims) telling their stories. This will lead to meaningful reconciliation that is tied to justice.

Thoughts that touch on all three aspects noted in the question:

Transfer of power from colonizer to colonized, recognizing that power already (pre)exists within the colonized and it's this power that the colonizer benefits from the most.
Understanding the role of threat and fear: Very few times do we fear or feel threatened by people, places, or things that we do not take seriously. How can such understanding be a catalyst for understanding one's humanity and wholeness?

Justice as a matter of cost: If cost equates to "loss," then it is not truly justice. Justice is fulness, humanization. It's the process that (may) engender a wide range of emotion and reflection but feeling "complete" while living productively with our limitations is important. I want to consider the "de" in decolonize. It's more than separating or returning, particularly when much of what has been colonized has been integrated into the reality and advancements that foster productive outcomes. (I need to work more on what I'm trying to articulate.)

Some people today who have never experienced racism because they belong to the supposed "superior" race believe that there is no racism. So, one way to dismantle racism is through dialogue or conversation processes that include people from different races so that they hear experiences of those who have experienced it. This will help them to realize what they have done or said before that was racial connotation, but without knowing the hurt it caused. The conversation from those who have experienced racism will be a healing process as they will have someone who will listen to what ails them and matters most to them. This will give them a voice and the ability to understand the intentions of those causing and perpetuating racism intentionally or—hopefully—unintentionally.

Dialogue helps even those who experience racism to reflect and realize the roles they have played unconsciously in perpetuating racism. This, therefore, assists in changing people's mentality on racism, and gives them a chance to realize that it does exist. But that they should focus their attention and energy on annihilating racism and being bitter.

How can we flip the dynamics of colonialism? In our everyday actions and the structures we lend our energy to maintaining and building?

From Disconnection to Connection

From Trauma/Violence to Healing

From Erasure/Invisibility to Memory, Culture, History

From Competition to Sharing, Collaboration

From Destruction of Bodies, Resources, Land, Nature to Regeneration, Stewardship, Core of All

How can leadership be about nurturing and stewardship rather than power?

Who can regulate those in power? What actions can make those with power feel and know urgency?

How can religion, science, state government, and the economy be applied as counter forces?

How can power become a burden, a frightening accountable responsibility rather than a commodity or privilege?

Structural racism has manifested internalized racial oppression, which internalized racial inferiority and superiority. Creating space for recognizing the race construct and what it has done to us multi- and intra-generationally is the first step to healing the historical trauma of racism. Creating a space that facilitates multigenerational sharing of the pain and resilience is another step to be able to listen generously and have empathy and compassion for everyone's story and narrative. Thirdly, "gleaning" those factors that we have in common and those common "weapons" of divisions and dehumanization so we can begin to turn those weapons toward those who systematically and institutionally use them to foster the continual trauma. Lastly, keep coming together intentionally to heal, rejuvenate, and celebrate our evolutions of success and victories.

I think we as a collective need to acknowledge whatever injustices happened to an oppressed group of people, so that they can begin the healing process slowly. Decolonizing racism in the U. S. will be hard because we have such a violent history. We need to understand one another and for our feelings to be acknowledged and not trampled or laughed at on national television. First, we must not imprison our oppressors to show them how we were treated. If anything changes anything in this world, it's to be understood by peers or to be loved. Most white Americans in the South choose not to address racism because it is a dark history where they still benefit from today.

The root of the struggle is Humanism. How do we get people to look at the world with respect? To live by the ethos of treating their neighbor with respect? How do we begin to look at others regardless of artificial differences as equal to ourselves?

The enemy is at war with us. While we do not have to fight with the same tools (as that would corrupt us), we must begin to consider ourselves soldiers and spies. One question I ask is whether we can make this safe. Whether Justice can be demanded without endangering the power structure.

One key step is education. It starts with giving individuals the tools not just to know the truth but also to see reality. Decolonization of education along with a fight for institutions such as religion and family that have co-opted by power.

It's up to us to commit individually, wholeheartedly, and without reservations.

We need to have multiple activities and groupings, with each individual and each group contributing what seems most right and capable for them. But at the same time, we need some sense of common purpose and a determination to support each other as committed allies. Maybe we could have regional, national, and global versions of thinking of ourselves as part of a village which has no sense of hierarchy. We should create more and more non-competitive activities to move beyond the reinforcement of a sense of hierarchy, but also develop ways to take the power from the corporations and the most powerful capitalists.

History, history, history. More than any other training or abstract discussion of racism, I have learned more from diving into or being introduced to historical realities, patterns, and truths that are systematically divorced from our experiences.

Sharing experience with a curious and humble mind is also a cornerstone of transformation. Engaging critically with the RELATIONSHIPS of power, people, and systems means our collective capacity to organize our way through this work.

Analyzing the dynamics of history shows so much more than the theories that have dominated this discussion. You can unearth the domination drives through analyzing what theories have justified and created our history.

Building relationships so that we can trust each other to express our most subversive and visionary desires. Resisting annihilation is critical to undoing their attempts to contain us.

I think the system in place at this moment has so many hands and affects many areas of our lives. It is very deep in our culture, showing power and no signs to back up. But here and in many other countries are people fighting everyday to make a better world. I only can think and unify, because that's what is going to dismantle the racism. In order to have a truth process of healing, we need to know our history. Know what happened to our ancestors to understand better what is happening now. We need to name the injustice and unite all our energy in the struggle for dignity, equality, and freedom.

I honestly do not know, especially when many of our movements have not resulted in (according to Emery) the "true" transfer of power from the colonizer to the colonized, economic liberation from capitalism, or a paradigm shift in collective consciousness about the impact of our resistance to colonial legacies. As a result, my default is always what can I do

as an individual, knowing inherently that this is not enough. (I wish I had something more profound to say.)