correspondents at large

Racialization and the Colonial Architecture: Othering and the Order of Things

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STEVE MARTINOT ARGUES THAT RACISM IS THE SYSTEM AND RACIALIZATION "THE PROCESS THROUGH WHICH WHITE SOCIETY HAS CONstructed and co-opted differences in bodily characteristics and made them modes of hierarchical social categorizations" (180). Over half a century ago, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was so concerned about the genesis and consequence of the "process" that it issued a statement on race. Reeling from World War II, the global community saw the urgent need to put in place mechanisms for promoting global peace. The establishment of UNESCO in 1945 was aimed specifically at promoting a culture of peace. Convinced that racism and racial inequality were a root cause of the war, the authors of the UNESCO constitution (1945) condemned "the doctrine of the inequality of men and races" in the constitution's preamble. Responding to a resolution adopted by the United Nations Social and Economic Council at its sixth session in 1948, UNESCO gathered a group of experts (anthropologists and sociologists) from almost all continents (Africa was the exception) to develop for dissemination a statement on race that was based on scientific facts. The committee released a "Statement on Race" on 18 July 1950 which concludes that "there is no proof that the groups of mankind differ in their innate mental characteristics, whether in respect of intelligence or temperament [and] the scientific evidence indicates that the range of mental capacities in all ethnic groups is much the same" (9). The statement also asserted that the "biological fact of race and the myth of 'race' should be distinguished. For all practical and social purposes 'race' is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth" (8). The committee affirmed the universality of the "brotherhood of man" and suggested that race as a concept be replaced by "ethnic" (6). Criticism of the statement was swift and vehement. The controversy prompted UNESCO to empanel another committee to produce a second statement the following year. Over the years, other organizations, such as the American Sociological Association and the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, have issued their own statements on race.

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A disciplinary issue helped generate the controversy over the 1950 UNESCO statement. Critics of the 1950 statement objected that the committee had only social scientists as members. Consequently, the committee that produced the 1951 statement had not only social scientists but also biologists and geneticists. The disciplinary question is an important one because of the role of scholarship in authenticating and legitimizing with the force of authority centuries of racialization and racism. It was precisely this disciplinary foundation that antiracist revolutionaries among the colonized—from members of the negritude movement to Frantz Fanon—used their creativity and intellectual power to assail. Indeed, Aimé Césaire's classic *Discourse on Colonialism* went as far as making a multidisciplinary argument by indicting most disciplines for collectively participating in the mythology (in the Barthesian sense of the word as lie, cover-up) of race cloaked in the authority of scholarship; for example, Placide Tempels (theology and philosophy), Pierre Gourou (geography), Lucien Lévy-Brühl (ethnology and sociology), Octave Mannoni (psychology), Jules Romains (literature and humanities), and so on. Césaire's work draws its salience from its vigorous insurgency against the disease of racial reasoning (unreason, to be more precise) that has eaten into the fabric of intellectual life.

The race question is an enduring one—extending from the evolutionary theories of the beginning of the nineteenth century and subsequent racist pseudoscience to present-day racist pronouncements by scientists and intellectuals. In an interview that appeared in the London *Sunday Times Magazine* of 14 October 2007, James Watson (Nobel laureate, geneticist, and DNA pioneer) said that he was "inherently gloomy about Africa [because] all our social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours whereas all testing says not really" (qtd. in Nugent). Watson's comments set off a global furor and charges of racism that forced him to retire from his post at the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. Watson's concern about policy is at the heart of the racialization question in the colonial context. Racialization is a process, but its understanding must not be limited to procedural consideration. Its aftermath has enormous consequences and implications that must be factored into any analysis of the process. Racist colonial policies, whether they are under the aegis of paternalistic "association" or nihilistic "assimilation," that are imposed on different carved-out entities of the European empires would illuminate racialization as process. In the colonial context, the invention and manipulation of race or of racialization are engineered to justify policies that are rooted in hierarchical categorizations. Octave Mannoni's ascription of a dependent psychology to the Malagasy as a justification for colonial domination mimics the a posteriori mumbo-jumbo justifications of colonial racialization and its consequences, reminiscent of laughable Panglossian sophistry: "Observe how noses are designed to hold up eyeglasses, and therefore we have eyeglasses. Legs are obviously meant for wearing shoes, and so we have shoes" (Voltaire 2).

In the colonial imagination and discourse, Africa as the epitome of "primitivism" morphed "under the generalizing and homogenizing impulse of the imperial political culture into an irreducible African Other" (Trumbull 29), despite the immense diversity within and between the colonies. Discursively, colonialism took two seemingly contradictory steps. On the one hand, it imposed discursive uniformity on the continent; on the other hand, it racialized, fragmented, and hierarchized colonized groups for the maintenance of colonial power and dominance. Colonialism linked state power and structural racism and maintained power by creating borders and formulating policies (e.g., the pass laws of apartheid South Africa) to police the borders and punish border crossing. Racialization as colonialism's first step to the demonization of the other erected

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a hierarchical architecture of containment designed to rearrange and stack up categories of colonial subjects. The colonized space must not be dismissed as a racialized monolith or a simple dichotomous paradigm of colonizers and colonized. As an agenda and a practice of the encoding of meanings, racialization (dynamic and unrelenting) took different forms as it stamped its presence on the colonial landscape. Ultimately, the race question in the colonies was conditioned by the specificity of prevalent conditions. Also specific was the racialized and racist gerrymandering that sustained colonial power and internalized policies by entrenching racialized hierarchies and racist exclusions. Depending on the nature of the privileges and modalities for access, racialization could adjust to accommodate shifting exigencies and in the process distort notions of racial difference.

To account for the insidiousness and violence of empire, one must look closely at how the racialized occupants of the colonial space are arranged, rearranged, and stacked up. In East Africa and South Africa, Indians were imported to create a hierarchy of colonized categories necessary for the maintenance of colonial power. In colonial Nigeria, Lebanese and Cypriots occupied the intermediary space of relative privilege (mainly economic) in the overall colonial architecture. Colonial Madagascar featured a racial hierarchy of *blanc* 'white,' *jaune* 'yellow' (for the Austronesian highland Merina), and *noir* 'black' (for the dark-skinned inhabitants of the coastal areas [Raison-Jourde and Randrianja]). It is important to note that these colors have no validity in reality (e.g., no one has the color "white" as we know it); they derive their meanings from the ideas they evoke. Colonial education was sought after because it guaranteed upward social mobility and access to privileges. In colonial Nigeria, as in many parts of Africa, the colonizers devised a weird method of determining (in the absence of birth certificates) that African children were old enough to start school. The children were deemed of school age if they were able to bend their right hands over their heads and touch their left ears. Imagine unleashing this age-verification process in a place like Rwanda where physique varied among groups (Tutsis are usually taller than Hutus). A seven-year-old Tutsi child might find it easier to perform this colonial ritual of proof of school age than a Hutu child. In this instance, biology (as manifested in physique) was used to establish racial (ethnic) hierarchy (i.e., hierarchy within a "race"). Indeed, this hierarchy within a "race" makes ethnicity visible and exposes the landscape to a struggle for resources and privileges that can engender ethnic violence and cleansing. Authorities on Rwanda, such as Jean-Paul Gouteaux, argue that there is a link between Belgian and French racism and the genocide in Rwanda.

In his "systematic defense of the societies destroyed by imperialism," Césaire claims that precolonial societies were antecapitalist, anticapitalist, democratic, cooperative, and fraternal societies (44). This was generally true; interactions and cooperation between northern and southern Africa were greater before being disrupted by the rearrangements of racist colonial reasoning and intervention. The Sahara was a place of commerce and regional interactions and relations until colonialism refashioned it as a racialized marker of difference by creating the Maghrib to the north and "Black Africa" to the south. The Maghrib and sub-Saharan Africa inherited a racialized Islam. Colonial power named the Islam practiced in sub-Saharan Africa "Black Islam" (*Islam noir*), to distinguish it from the Islam practiced in the Maghrib. In the colonial imagination, religious difference is inflected by racial difference (as it is concocted by colonial imperialism). In Algeria, racist colonial policies drove a wedge between Berbers and Arabs, thus creating a racialized hierarchical structure—Berbers, Arabs, and sub-Saharan Africans—that was based on amenability to the French civilizing mission. The more amenable the colonized group was,

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the higher it was placed in the colonial architecture—Arabs, as "less than" whites, enjoyed privileges, and black Africans, as "the least," were at the bottom of the hierarchy. Colonialism's politicization of race (racialization) is grounded in a belief in racial essentialisms that ignores the hybridity of racial categories and its capacity to transcend racial boundaries.

Jean-Paul Sartre in *Anti-Semite and Jew* demonstrates the irrationality of prejudice; in the same vein, the introduction to the 1950 UNESCO "Statement on Race" argues that the problem of race has its roots "in the minds of men." Race is an invention; racialization is mythologization. Racism and racialization are tools in the age-old toolbox of prejudices, hateful exclusions, and inhumanity that have bedeviled human history. When Pius Adesanmi (a Nigerian) experienced marginalization in South Africa as a *makwerekwere* (a term used by black South Africans to designate blacks from other African countries), he recalled this toolbox:

> Our pantheon of small-minded hate is formidable: Christian prejudice manufactured the unbeliever; Islamic prejudice manufactured the infidel; heterosexual prejudice manufactured the faggot; patriarchal prejudice manufactured the hysteric; European prejudice manufactured the native; American prejudice manufactured the nigger; German prejudice manufactured the Jew; Israeli prejudice manufactured the Araboushim; Afrikaner prejudice manufactured the kaffir. Not to be outdone, Black South Africa has manufactured the **makwerekwere** as her unique post-Apartheid contribution to this gory pantheon.

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