INTRODUCTION

Politics of Recognition and Myths of Race

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At the time of this writing, the world is watching incredulously as terror and deprivation ravage the poorest citizens of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The region's middle class and elite fled the disaster, while federal authorities' inaction resulted in starvation for those too poor to leave. Such callousness embodied in US civil society and state institutions has been made transparent to the world, illuminating the increasing class inequality that has evolved since the passage of the Civil Rights Act. In light of this conflation of racism and class inequality, this forum focuses on the ways that multi-cultural politics mystify such power relations with romantic recollections of popular resistance to racism in the post-World War II era: decolonization, the US civil rights movement, and the fall of apartheid in South Africa.

Such mythologies of 'racial progress' pervade contemporary scholarship on racism, often providing triumphal narratives of how, after years of anti-colonial and civil rights struggles, the disenfranchised have finally made their voices heard. To be sure, these wide-ranging social movements contributed to the demise of legally sanctioned racism throughout the world. However, while international capital and national governments responded to these direct challenges to the legitimacy of the liberal-democratic state by gradually dismantling officially sanctioned racism, those same institutional reforms reconstituted racial domination in other, pernicious ways. More than merely co-opting popular movements, reform policies defused struggles for liberation as they recuperated the energy of these struggles into the maintenance of liberal forms of power. The 'cunning of recognition', as Elizabeth Povinelli describes this maneuver of power, does not refuse to recognize past atrocities committed by the liberal state, but acknowledges the horror of these actions—e.g., slavery, genocide, segregation, and apartheid—in order to secure and reinvigorate the future of the liberal nation-state and its core values (Povinelli 2002: 29). In short, liberal forms of multi-culturalism use

national rituals of apology for the past mistreatment of subordinated and oppressed members of society not to transfer power or to change society but to re-create the national form.

Racial reforms—from attempts at reconciliation in Australia, to civil rights in the US, to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa—function as narratives of national redemption, maintaining (and sometimes inventing) racial cleavages along the way (see Dominguez 1994). What surprise, then, that ‘racial reform’ has overlapped—if not conspired—with neo-conservative assaults on the welfare state that have gutted the very institutions that were supposed to remedy these inequalities (Baca 2004; see Prashad in this issue). Such co-existence of racial reform with the deepening of racial and class inequality is not as anomalous as some commentators suggest (e.g., Holt 2000: 5–7). Instead, the manner in which racial reforms complement racializing discourse illustrates the politics of nationalism, which requires that we theorize the relationship between the racist content of neo-liberal reforms and the rise of multi-culturalism (Baca 2003).

As many commentators have argued, racism and its passions are created by and subordinated to the nation (Kapferer 1998; Williams 1989). This forum develops these insights by examining the way that nationalists have used liberal-democratic forms of racism to rework narratives and visions of the nation to meet new political and economic challenges. Contemporary reforms modify racism in terms of contemporary problems associated with globalization as well as the new political context following decolonization. Nevertheless, such reforms draw upon the passions of nationalist discourse to shape—and obscure—class relations. It is the connection between racism and the nation that is the substance of nationalism. As such, the power of nationalism lies in its capacity to provide interactive frames in which the relationships between state institutions and diverse social relations are negotiated (Lomnitz-Adler 2001: 14). Thus, race has attained its modern significance as a mechanism of state control and civil society and as an embodiment of national culture (Williams 1989).

This forum places the practices of racism at the center of analysis of so-called post-racist or multi-cultural nation-states. In this way, each contributor analytically treats racism and its related concepts of race, identity, culture, and naturalizing symbols of blood to highlight the manner in which governing institutions use nationalist precepts to create ‘races’. In the end, it is racism—the actual political practices of domination—that makes ‘race’ salient (Cooper and Brubaker 2000), especially in its multi-cultural and liberal-democratic form.

Myths of Paradox and the Cunning of Recognition

Understanding these connections between racism, nationalism, and class inequality requires historical sensitivity; we must explore the political and economic factors that motivate the mythic post-liberal state. As Brackette

Williams reminds us, “[A] useful prologue to the interpenetration of race, class, and culture in nation-states must be the mythmaking and the material factors that motivate and rationalize its elements” (1989: 429). The material factors related to the emergence of the contemporary concept of racism derives from seventeenth-century class formation, when European merchants and colonists transformed the Caribbean and the southern US into a frontier zone. European colonists invented the modern concept of ‘race’ to make slavery congruent with the Enlightenment ideals of liberty and civic equality. Race resolved the contradiction between slavery—the economic underpinning of both the American and French Revolutions—and liberty by ascribing moral and intellectual features to phenotype, which normalized the disqualification of Afro-Americans from civic participation (Fields 1990: 114).¹ Accordingly, racism is neither paradoxical nor contradictory to democracy, liberalism, or nationalism. In fact, the idea that racism is paradoxical to democracy is intrinsic to the mythical construct of the nation dating back to the eighteenth century, when anti-slavery intellectuals and politicians conceived of racism as being a fundamental contradiction to the basic national precepts of civic equality and universal natural rights (see Trouillot 1995). As such, the historical moment of abolition posed the ideology of nationalism as a paradox to racism.

Since the racialization of the New World plantation system, the social principle of race has emerged as an international framework of ranked categories that segments the world’s population, which differentially recognizes humanity (Trouillot 1990). The multi-cultural state—and its liberal racial reforms—maintains this same hierarchy of races that was at the center of the North Atlantic planetary system. Conventionally, scholars view the US civil rights movement or the fall of apartheid as if it threatened global racial order, a view which is complicit with the multi-cultural state’s national narrative of redemption. Such a view fails to analyze how political reforms, following in the wake of decolonization and the rise of new social movements, have strengthened the global system of race by reworking this international hierarchy. Howard Winant (2001), exemplifies this tendency as he misrecognizes these developments as a “rupture.” Moreover, he glorifies and reifies these movements as “the global resistance to white supremacy.” However, he mitigates his optimism by sounding “a political alarm: all around the world the momentum of struggle against racism is stalemated” (*ibid.*: xiv). Accordingly, he tells us, in Myrdalian fashion, of the “paradox” of a “new racism”:

Paradoxically, in this reformed version racial inequality can live on, still batten on all sorts of stereotypes and fears, still resorting to exclusionism and scapegoating when politically necessary, still invoking the supposed superiority of ‘mainstream’ (aka white) values, and cheerfully maintaining that equality has been achieved. It is rather ironic that this new, ‘color-blind’ racial system may prove more effective in containing the challenges posed over the past few decades by movements for racial justice than any intransigent, overly racist ‘backlash’ could possibly have been. (Winant 2001: 289)

By seeing the relationship between racial reforms and racism as paradoxical, Winant misses the crucial point: the essence of race is power and the contests over power, not merely the contest between ‘blacks’ and ‘whites’ (Fields 2003). Race is also about struggles over power among whites themselves. White supremacy was never the single theme of world history. Even in the US, white supremacy has never led to consensus on a single program (ibid.). Instead, elite forces have consistently harnessed racial ideologies to economic and state projects in order to dominate *both* blacks and whites with what “may be characterized by a patronizing tolerance” (Fields 1982: 159).

Recently, Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1999), in “On the Cunning of Imperial Reason,” dropped a bomb on many such anti-racist US scholars—especially those influenced by the book *Racial Formations* (1994), which Winant co-authored with Michael Omi. Most notably, Bourdieu and Wacquant argued that North American scholars of race represented US imperialism in its most “cunning” form as they had imposed North America’s peculiar and rigid form of race, based upon the principle of hypodescent, foisting US national values and beliefs upon Brazil as well as the rest of the world. Specifically, Bourdieu and Wacquant charged political scientist Michael Hanchard with applying North American racial categories to Brazil, in the process making the history of US civil rights into the universal standard for the struggle of all racially oppressed groups (1999: 44). This intervention resolved little, unraveling into an internecine dispute whereby supporters of US scholarship in Brazil accused Wacquant and Bourdieu of anti-Americanism while being seduced by the Brazilian myth of racial democracy (French 2000, 2003; Hanchard 2003).

Nevertheless, Bourdieu and Wacquant made an important point in that they showed how academic knowledge, even in its critical forms, often reproduces the underlying logic of US nationalism—the racial principle of hypodescent—and imposes it on foreign countries, failing to appreciate the indigenous logic of class and race. Interestingly, Bourdieu and Wacquant’s point was amply elaborated by Michael Hanchard’s response to their critique. Hanchard defended his position by urging analysts to go beyond the politics of the nation-state and focus on the “complexity and specificity of black agency in both Brazil and the US” (2003: 6–7). All the same, he concluded that black and brown people of Brazil should organize as one group to confront the “chimera of racial equality” (ibid.: 20) and reject the categorical distinctions between ‘black’ and ‘mulatto’. In this way, Hanchard falls back on the racial principle of hypodescent as if it were a strategy for mobilization, not fully theorizing how the nation-state provides the very terrain of racism (Williams 1989, 1991). Despite this shortcoming, Hanchard’s response provides an important insight regarding the politics of ‘mixed’ blood in the Americas, pointing out the fallacy, one to which Bourdieu and Wacquant fall prey, that more pliable forms of race in Latin America and the Caribbean are any less coercive. As Viranjini Munasinghe observes in this forum, fluid concepts of race in the Americas do not connote lesser inequality. Instead, such racisms are rooted in class formations and the cultural politics of the nation-state.

Race, Racism, and the Power of Liberalism

One key problem in understanding the relationship between race and nationalism results from the conflation of 'race' with 'racism'. 'Race' is the mythology, the outward emblem of innate difference between humans, often co-nationals. 'Racism' is the *political* use of the myth. The claim that 'race is a social construction' has become a popular mantra, which explains little about the mechanism of its production and its modes of operation. Races do not exist, yet racism *does*. Thus, Trouillot states that "the crux of the matter is the use to which racial categories are put, the purpose for which they are mobilized, and the political contests that make this mobilization necessary in the first place" (2003: 108). Accordingly, when analysts do not analytically distinguish race from racism, 'race' functions to euphemize a wide variety of practices—e.g., slavery, genocide, segregation (Fields 2003). By substituting 'race' for 'racism', race becomes an attribute of the victim as opposed to the act of the racist (*ibid.*), requiring that we go beyond the mantra that race is a social construction and understand the difference between race and racism (see Hartigan, this issue).

National institutions deploy multi-culturalism to re-create myths of 'fraternity', in order to simultaneously naturalize hierarchies and incorporate subalterns into the polity. Racism, though, is more than coercion; it defines productive relations whereby subordinated members of the national community forge links with dominant institutions. In this way, groups labeled as a 'race' must pit themselves against the state-backed image of the nation—which conflates race and class—that ideologically defines the real producers of the nation's patrimony (Williams 1989: 434). Racial reforms such as affirmative action provide a systematic line of interaction between the national state and its racialized subjects. Civil rights legislation in the US, for example, integrated the movement into the state apparatus. Racial reforms invoke diversity in ways that neither question nor challenge the naturalized system of social classification on which the society's system of inequality, which affirms nationalist state projects, is based (Dominguez 1994: 334). Racial discourse demonizes. Even in its most cherished form—e.g., the Civil Rights Act—it distinguishes those marked as racial from the majority, assimilating diversity with liberal sympathy for essentialized racial minorities (Trouillot 1994: 345).

The contributors to this forum explore the cunning of such nationalist practices of racism—what Diane Austin-Broos calls "the politics of moral order" (Austin-Broos 1997, and this issue)—that revolve around class struggles over the nation whereby hierarchies are naturalized. Clarifying this point, Viranjini Munasinghe criticizes Benedict Anderson's optimistic concept of the nation for not taking into account the role of racism in nation-building. She illustrates that nationalism's power derives from the manner in which it conjoins inclusion and exclusion by comparing racial myths of mixed blood in the US and Trinidad, whereby nationalists create visions of purity from historically produced heterogeneity through concepts of hypodescent and race mixture, respectively. Joel Kahn further elaborates the centrality of race in nation-building in his

discussion of racializing practices in contemporary Malaysia. He challenges the conventional view, which assumes that Malaysian racism is a “legacy of colonialism” by examining what Malaysians identify and experience as a paradox: the simultaneous engagement in racializing practices with an anti-racist critique. Instead of being a paradox, Kahn argues that such racializing and anti-racist tendencies are mutually formative and derive from the manner in which Malaysian state formation used racial classification in order to make an association between ‘blood’ and ‘territory’.

Elizabeth Povinelli shows the centrality of intimacy in constructing national narratives in settler colonies such as Australia and the US. By examining the “intimate event,” Povinelli argues that discourses of freedom and social constraint—autological and genealogical imaginaries—collapse alterity into a singular, racialized ‘other’. In this way, multi-culturalism represents a technology of power that builds on—and retains the racializing logic of—the “savage slot” (Trouillot 1991). Racializing practices, even in their multi-cultural form, conjure the specter of “unfreedom,” what Povinelli calls “the drag of descent.” Austin-Broos elaborates these contexts of inequality in Australia and the US by describing how Australian multi-culturalism and US civil rights discourse have deployed racial concepts to moralize the national order by acknowledging past injustices in ways that require the morally disenfranchised to re-examine themselves. She points out ways in which national agencies, rather than reforming racial practices, employ reforms to naturalize class inequalities, as if they arise from moral deficits, deviance, or degeneracy.

Vijay Prashad discusses the political-economic context of these moral politics in post-civil rights US, showing how the integration of Afro-North Americans into the public sphere occurred at a time in which neo-liberal policies had gutted the already anemic US welfare state. The simultaneous passage of the Civil Rights Act and the rise of Nixon’s New Federalism left North Americans with ‘high-minded ideals’ and an enfeebled social-wage state, as neo-liberal proponents disinvested from the very programs in which civil rights leaders had vested their hopes. In complementary fashion, Jason Antrosio analyzes the way that the developing neo-liberal Colombian state implemented drastic tariff cuts and privatization of state-owned enterprises through multi-culturalist racializing practices and politics of recognition. In effect, the Colombian national constitution declared the end of the homogeneous nation-state, and instead presented itself as the neutral arbiter of the market and in respect to national identity.

Finally, John Hartigan tackles the question of race as a scientific discourse, as political activists and conservative intellectuals have used new studies in genetics to revamp the mythology of race. Moreover, he shows that some of the successes in this reinvigoration of racializing practices derive from the failure of social scientists to develop a useful understanding of race and racism. Instead, social scientists have relied on the mantra that race is ‘socially constructed’ and have not kept up with the dynamic manner in which racializing practices articulate the North American nation-state in the post-segregation era.

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Notes

1. See Mintz (1984) and Thompson (1935; 1940; [1939] 1975: 83–111) for an analysis of the relationship between the plantation as a frontier institution in the New World and the invention of race. As a frontier institution, planters used plantations to clear lands and to settle and spread populations in order to bring raw materials into the orbit of European mercantilism.

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