Do Contemporary Practices of Schooling Reinforce Colonial Relations of Power?

In his seminal text '*Orientalism',* Said (1978: 94) posits that alongside government, the authority of academic institutions lends to them the power of creating "not only the knowledge but the very reality they appear to describe". For Said, this constructs a practice, or tradition, of constituting knowledge; what Foucault termed as discourse (1991). For both Said and Foucault, power is diffuse in nature, is incarnated in "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1991), and creates a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, or "dialectic of reinforcement" in which "the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read" (Said, 1978: 94). It can certainly be said that the production of knowledge has been partial and disproportionate for centuries, since the history of colonial rule began. Indeed, colonial power relations emerged out of a system of domination in which the colonisers determined themselves as the ideal future for the subjects of their empire. European concepts became the way in which the 'other' would understand themselves. I argue that contemporary practices of schooling reflect ethnocentrism narrated as universal truth, reinforcing power relations that resulted from colonial rule by maintaining binaries created during colonial rule.

For Said, orientalists have "plotted oriental history, destiny, and character" (1978: 95). This can be recognised in Macaulay's (1835) '*Minute on Indian Education'*, in which he talks about the creation of "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". To Macaulay, education was a method of administrating knowledge upon the masses of the British Empire in India; a way to "refine", "enrich" and "render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge" (ibid). This maintained the imposition of Western culture, colonial ontology and power by constructing Western culture as a standard, ensuring its hegemony as a superior way of being. Indeed, Macaulay believed "the intrinsic superiority of the Western literature" to be fundamental to the "oriental plan of education" (ibid). The role of education here can thus be seen as a vessel for instilling a doctrine of colonial ideology in Indians. Education was indeed a tool of the empire, one which Cecil Rhodes believed to be instrumental in "the extension of British rule throughout the world" (qtd in Flint, 1974: 252).

It is argued that these power structures employing education have continued into contemporary practices of schooling, long after India was freed of British colonial rule in 1947. Krishna contends that colonial power relations "far from being over… continues to hold us and our futures in its thrall" (2013: 340). Unsettlingly, in more recent times, academics such as Samuel Huntington have put forward ethnocentric claims that enlightenment, freedom, and democracy are Western notions (Said, 2005). For Jackson (2007), many current discourses on issues such as terrorism are informed by assumptions from the long tradition of orientalist scholarship. Jackson argues that Huntington's '*The Clash of Civilisations'* was an antecedent to contemporary academic discourse on 'Islamic terror'. These contemporary discourses reflect cultural stereotypes that stem from the oriental 'other', and can be seen as a "cultural corollary of contemporary forms of imperialism" (Jackson, 2007). I would argue that contemporary representational practices involved in academic discourses such as that on 'Islamic terror' are rooted in *us/them* and *civilisation/barbarism* narratives that have lasted from the colonial era. It is such striking binaries as these that are reified in contemporary academic literature, so reinforcing the same power relations that existed during colonial rule. According to Said (1978), "a text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual… is not easily dismissed", so by its very authority of being a piece of academic writing, a text conveying binaries such as those mentioned above will reify them due to the fact that "expertise is attributed to it" (ibid: 94).

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Critical looks at contemporary higher education institutions and curricula in the UK include campaigns addressing the lack of non-European thinkers and teachers, such as the 'Decolonising SOAS' movement (Mandhai, 2017). This comes after a UK study found over 92% of UK professors to be white, finding only 17 black female professors (ECU, 2015). Another case study is the 'Rhodes Must Fall' protest movement, which aims to expose persisting institutional racism in universities and challenge the legacy of Rhodes himself, arguing that Rhodes's vision of the world is not so much part of the past but is still rather present in unequal opportunity, manifested in universities (Chaudhuri, 2016). According to Giroux (1992b; 18), there remain practices "wedded to the legacy of a colonialism that either directly constructs or is implicated in social relations that keep privilege and oppression alive as active constituting forces of daily life within the centres and margins of power." Certainly, the presence of "hierarchical knowledge and power relations" (Mohanty, 1990; 196) constructs non-Western experience and history as peripheral, or inessential, in the production of knowledge. This I believe is directly applicable to educational institutions in the post-colonial world such as universities. The protest movements mentioned above champion the inclusion of anti-racist pedagogies in education, and protest the boundaries imposed by persisting repressive social orders.

This relates to concerns raised in Freire's seminal work questioning the kind of society that emerges from, or is perpetuated by, modern processes of schooling and education (Freire, 1970). Giroux draws upon this idea, describing the problem of a "politics of erasure" (1992a; 4) in pedagogical practices in which issues such as racism or sexism are unproblematised by way of "labelling those who argue against them [as] ideological tyrants" (ibid). For Giroux, there remains a Eurocentric outlook on identity in academic institutions that labels any attempts to challenge them as 'radical' or 'political correctness'. These contemporary practices certainly reinforce colonial relations of power through means of maintaining cultural and racial boundaries. This can be harmful because pedagogy is fundamental in the forming of our self-understanding, our self-situation, and our understanding of and relation to others. The relationship between pedagogy and power remains problematic, argues Giroux, describing schools as "cultures which legitimise certain forms of knowledge and disclaim others" (1992a; 14), producing certain logics. This is reminiscent of Macaulay's (1835) belief in the superiority of Western schooling over Indian ways and topics of teaching. Similarly, Spivak postulates that even simple labels such as 'British', 'Asian', or 'African' have "histories that are not anchored in identities but rather secure them" (1993: 53). That these identities and histories, constructed through Western projections of what it was to be civilised or savage, have lasted seems indicatory of the persistence of colonial ideologies in contemporary schooling.

Bristol (2010: 171) infers that "practices of oppression" exist in educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago that stem from educations original purpose there of serving "the development and maintenance of a labouring class for the plantation" and "to police and shepherd the masses into an assimilation of British civility" (ibid). In Trinidad and Tobago, primary school teachers are completely detached from decision-making when it comes to the curricula they must implement. The political agency of teachers has been removed, serving to dilute the input of indigenous knowledge. Bristol postulates that this tells of an ideological dependence on the US and the UK, and has created a form of "plantation pedagogy" (ibid: 171). Contemporary discursive practices in schooling observed by Bristol constitute a patriarchal, linear understanding of knowledge transfer. It can be argued that this Western way of teaching, considered enlightenment, adopts an understanding of "divine/appointed authority" (ibid: 172) and one-way knowledge transfer. So, again hegemony of Western intellect is imposed. This contemporary practice of importing education harks back to Freire's (1970) idea of banking education as a means of colonial oppression. It is thus argued that contemporary practices of schooling, as Bristol's idea of plantation pedagogy believes of Trinidad and Tobago, operate against non-Western forms of intellect, imitating colonial ideologies of the superiority and destined spread of Western knowledge, and the rejection of 'other' forms of knowledge. Bristol links her theory to Fanon's (1952) theory of the construction of the black colonial self. Fanon's important analogy of *black faces, white masks* describes the two-dimensional self of the colonised black man as a direct psychological consequence of colonial subjugation and the creation of an inferiority complex. The disturbing idea that "he becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness" (ibid: 18) is linked to contemporary schooling practices in the way that the teaching of Western or colonial ideologies subjugates the indigenous intellect; a tradition rooted in colonial history (Bristol, 2010).

For Tikly (2004), education is fundamental to the emergence of a new form of imperialism by which hegemonic systems of knowledge are employed as a Eurocentric form of 'discipline', also referred to as a "colonisation of the mind" (Nandy, 1997, qtd in Tikly, 2004; 188). Tikly argues that an over-emphasis on primary education has side-

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lined further levels of education and removed the capacity for indigenous innovative research, which is "centrally important if countries are to link education to indigenously determined future development priorities" (ibid: 190). The removal of this indigenous agency reflects a Western assumption of homogenous education based on Western systems and thought. Sardar (1999, qtd in Tikly, 2004; 194) says these persisting power relations mean that the non-West will have to "rediscover its lost and suppressed intellectual heritage", and that resistance to Eurocentric systems of education can only come from non-Western ways of thought. Giroux (1992a) also supports the importance of a critical pedagogy for the reacquisition of agency. Similarly, Brodber argues that what black people know about themselves comes from white people, and that there is a need "to carve out a blackspace in this white world" (1997; 80) to complete the process of emancipation and to create a new definition of the self that is separate from Western or colonial historical epistemologies. Blackspace proposes a move away from Western knowledge as a presumed authority for the production and spread of knowledge.

Further, for Grosfoguel, contemporary attempts at introducing radical or alternative knowledge by subaltern study groups in American universities have "reproduced the epistemic schema of Area Studies" (2007; 211), producing studies *about* rather than *from* a subaltern perspective. Grosfoguel argues that an imperialist epistemology exists in Area Studies in which the subject of study is based in the South whilst the theory radiates from Western philosophy. This practice of privileging Western thought as the theoretical benchmark by which to study a different region echoes a colonial epistemology, and reinforces power relations that value Western thinking as superior. This conceptualises Western canons of thought as a universal paradigm of thought, a practice that Grosfoguel argues reproduces "a coloniality of power/knowledge" (ibid; 212) in which subaltern perspectives are diminished. This practice reflects the "colonial logics of othering" (Birla, 2010; 88), that in colonial times elevated the European self above the Orient 'other'.

The contemporary homogenisation of education and globalisation of Western practices of schooling and curricula reflect the endeavours of colonial Britain to re-educate colonised India through the use of native 'informants'. Selected for the purpose of the diffusion of Western thought, these 'informers' became an instrument of colonial authority who "speaks for 'the native' in service of efficient governing" (Birla, 2010; 88). This colonial education policy was fundamental in the formation of colonial power relations. The continued hegemony of Western thought in contemporary schooling reveals the legacy of Macaulay's (1835) belief in the innate superiority of Western knowledge. This continuation reinforces colonial binaries of knowledge and power in the post-colonial world.

Veblen concludes that "an institution is, after all, a prevalent habit of thought" (1918, qtd in Carnochan, 1993:na). As an institution, education is no exception. Through a postcolonial approach, the legacy and persistence of colonial power relations and binaries can be seen in contemporary practices of schooling throughout the world. The colonial practice of replacing indigenous forms of knowledge with Western ways, seen as superior, continues in schooling practices and development practices. Schools as cultures which legitimate some forms of knowledge as hegemon and expunge other forms of knowledge certainly strengthen colonial relations of power. This can be seen as a form of new imperialism that continues the subjugation of non-Western forms of knowledge. The association of education with enlightenment or liberation can be understood as partial from this perspective and serves to highlight the diffuse nature of oppression as it still survives in the postcolonial world.

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