

# TRANSFORMATIVE ANTI-RACIST PRACTICES

Addressing institutionalized racism in the academy & "safe/brave" spaces

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## A SUGGESTED FRAME FOR DECOLONIZING AND LIBERATING OUR MINDS, CULTURES AND SYSTEMS



- **SELF-INQUIRY: ON MY PERSONHOOD IN THIS SYSTEM**
  - **WHOLENESS & FRAGMENTATION:** Where and when am I seen as a full and multidimensional person? Where and when are only parts of my identity or my self received or perceived as "normal"?
  - **MY RESPONSES:** How have I coped with being fragmented or essentialized? How have I challenged it? How have I contributed to the fragmentation or essentialization of others?
  - **WHO IS IN CONTROL? WHO BENEFITS?** Who and what determines my rights to personhood? What opportunities am I permitted to have? What am I not? How does the larger oppressive structure and dominant culture benefit from where I am positioned?
  
- **ENGAGING WITH WISDOM: DISCERNMENT, AUTHENTICITY, AND REVERENCE**
  - **DISCERNMENT:** Where is my voice and engagement going to be most impactful?
  - **AUTHENTICITY:** For whom and to whom am I speaking *in this moment or event*? Am I clear about how I am causing, being impacted by, and/or benefiting from the oppression *of this moment or event*?
  - **REVERENCE:** Are my presence, experiences, and perspectives adding value to disrupting oppression *in this moment or event*? Am I exploiting the voices, power, vulnerability, or labor of others *in this moment or event*? Am I being a savior?
  
- **RADICALLY LISTEN**
  - **LOVE:** How does this other person make meaning of the world? How can I decenter the way I make meaning? Am I committed to being brave? Can I draw strength and wisdom from my highest self, which transcends the oppressive events, culture and system I'm caught in?
  - **OBSERVE THE EGO:** Can I listen without interrupting, defending, correcting, advising, or making it about me? Am I asking authentic questions for learning, not for showing off or being rhetorical?
  - **UNVEIL ASSUMPTIONS:** What did I assume was neutral or self-evident? What was or is obscured? How can I remind myself that it is not a zero sum game?
  
- **COMMIT TO A PERSONAL TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE**
  - **PRACTICE:** What embodied personal practice can I engage in that will help me process my feelings, thoughts and realizations in ways that my intellect doesn't?
  - **PRIORITIZE:** How can I prioritize replenishing my spiritual energy daily to build my stamina to be brave, loving, and aware? How can ensure I am not using spiritual practice to avoid or bypass the discomfort of my transformational process and work?
  - **HONOR THE SOURCE:** How can I ensure that my identity group and I are not colonizing practices of communities and that my focus is on building stamina, not tending to my supposed fragility.

## SOME KEY CONCEPTS TO CONTEMPLATE

- **Intersectionality is a theory of oppression, not difference.** “And when we treat it simply as a way to understand our differences, we erase its powerfully subversive critique. Thus, we need to recognize that it’s an **act of intellectual, discursive, and rhetorical colonization** for White folks (and folks with other forms of privilege) to erase the critique of power from our use of intersectionality. Unlike colonization of land and bodies, this discursive colonization is harder to interrupt because it’s harder to see, but this doesn’t mean that the colonization of intersectionality is somehow not violent.” (Utt, 2017)
- **Intersectionalities appear as events.** “Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them[...]But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. In these cases the tendency seems to be that no driver is held responsible, no treatment is administered, and the involved parties simply get back in their cars and zoom away.” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149)
- **Question binaries.** Binaries reify the dominant axis.
- **Identities are socially located. What is the social contract that you were either born into, immigrated into, or adopted?** “When desis come to the United States in large numbers, I argue, they sign a social contract with a racist polity by making a pledge to work hard but to retain a social life at some remove from U.S. society[...] When desis find that the racist polity simply wants their labor but does not care too much for their lives, the social retreat sanctioned by U.S. orientalism provides a space to develop a life, even if this space is under constant threat from educational and other institutions[...]What does it mean...for us to mollify the wrath of white supremacy by making a claim to a great destiny when we ourselves are only a product of state engineering through immigration controls and of the beneficence of more socialized systems of education in South Asia, or when we are but the children of those who have accumulated a certain amount of cultural capital because of those processes?” (Prashad, 2007)
- **Nothing is neutral.** This doesn’t mean that there aren’t empirically validated facts, but even those facts are uncovered within a system or scheme that is not neutral.
- **Fragility and privilege appear to be fallacies that perpetuate the myth that whiteness is fixed and immutable and keeps oppressive systems stuck by reinforcing or reinventing colonial tropes.**
  - Fragility appears as an immutable quality that evokes the delicate imperial woman, who is indisposed by the brown savagery of the colonized. “As I argue, “India” is constructed to profitably regulate the desire of the late-imperial white woman, controlling her pain and reforming her alienation so as to make her stronger upon her return to her metropolitan location. Hindu India is produced by the white woman as a

- source of feminine healing and regulation. This facilitates her survival, and thus the reach of whiteness and American imperial power. India enables the fragility, and hence ensures the resilience, of imperial whiteness.” (Chandra, p. 489)
- A counterpoint to fragility might be “un(der)developed stamina”, which recenters the power and valor on the people (of color) who have developed their stamina, often since childhood.
  - **Similarly, privilege also appears as a fixed quality within individuals (thereby muting systems, actions, and interactions) that only serves to reify white supremacy.**
    - Alternately, sociologist Charles Tilly offers an interesting (even if problematic framework) framework of “opportunity hoarding” in his book, “Durable Inequality”.
  - **Colonization in academia is of people, ideas, and epistemologies.** “The majority of British people are still proud of colonialism and the British Empire. Americans continue to show an almost total indifference to the lasting poverty and devastation inflicted on the country’s indigenous population. Being pro-colonial is no bar to success in academia; Harvard historian Niall Ferguson has long defended the British Empire as a force for good in the world. And now, Princeton PhD and Portland State University professor Bruce Gilley has published an unapologetic “Case for Colonialism” in Third World Quarterly, a respected academic journal” (Robinson, 2017).
  - **Compassion and productive conflict can co-exist.** But both of these are constructed in different ways in different cultural paradigms.

## Resources

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