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A Dying Hegemony **Resisting Anti-Arab Racism in the U.S.**

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Abstract: What analytics does Frantz Fanon contribute to the study of racisms? Although political ideologies constitute racism, the latter takes on a life of its own and comes to exist in a reciprocally constitutive relationship with political ideologies. I elaborate on the theory of hegemony developed by Laclau and Mouffe and relate it to the present American context in order to analyze what I take to be a distinct break in American perceptions of Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslims and the crystallization of racism against them. Having demonstrated the intimate link between American international power, its supporting ideologies, and the Othering of a contrived Arab figure, I propose that this set of representations can be overcome. Although anti-Arab racism is bound to outlast the political plays that inaugurated it, the fluidity of power that dictates those political plays allows for contestation and the staging of an oppositional set of representations. I look to Frantz Fanon, whose model of radical human agency is absolutely central to reasserting a counter-hegemonic consciousness among the beleaguered forces of resistance in today's world.

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the presidential administration of George W. Bush triggered a set of relays that initiated a new hegemony. This all-encompassing, resilient political formation provided enormous *lebensraum* for the historic bloc comprised by Bush and his allies to enact its foreign and domestic policy goals. At stake was a particular representation of the domestic and global social field that construed relationships in terms of antagonisms, such that the mental preoccupations of American citizens were diverted and channeled to fear the Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern Other at home and

abroad. While these groups had been the targets of both a Western and a particularly American Orientalism before 9/11,¹ it was not until afterwards that a *single, full-blown, pandemic, societal* racism emerged. Various religious, ethnic, and geographic categorizations collapsed into a "racial" one, which I will call, for lack of a better term, "Anti-Arab racism," although included were non-Arabs who fit the stereotype in the American imaginary.²

Frantz Fanon elaborated, in a different

¹ Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, 291.

² See Salaita, Steven, *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA*.

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context, the transformation of racist attitudes into cultural racism. In this article I attend to the analytics Fanon can provide us for understanding racisms, particularly his notion that although political ideologies constitute racism, the latter takes on a life of its own and comes to exist in a reciprocally constitutive relationship with political ideologies; this process Fanon referred to in his characteristically resounding way as “dialectical gangrene.”³

If it is true, as Fanon and others have claimed, that racisms emerge in parallel with political ideologies that necessitate the exclusion of an Other, we should be able to understand much of the current instantiation of anti-Arab racism in the U.S. by questioning the central ideological imperatives of the current political formation here. In order to elicit the ideologies of the present American hegemony, I look to the social theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, for whom the social is nothing but an attempt to impose a political order through ideologies upon an ultimately uncontainable, heterogeneous, and “impossible” field of human interaction.⁴ I elaborate on their model of hegemony and relate it to the present American context, in order to analyze what I take to be a distinct break in American perceptions of Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslims and the crystallization of a racism against them. Having demonstrated the intimate link between American international power, its supporting ideologies, and the Othering of a contrived Arab figure, I propose that this representation can be overcome. Although anti-Arab racism is bound to outlast the political plays that inaugurated it, the very fluidity of power which dictates those political plays allows for contestation and the staging of an oppositional set of representations.

I look to Frantz Fanon, whose model of

³ Fanon, Frantz, *Toward the African Revolution*, 36.

⁴ Laclau, Ernesto, “The Impossibility of Society,” 89-92.

radical human agency is absolutely central to reasserting a counter-hegemonic consciousness among the beleaguered forces of resistance in today’s world. His insistence on the capacity of individual human beings to overcome the internal markings of power, and his fierce rhetoric on the necessity for collective social resistance, are imperative for renewing our understanding of agency in the face of a regime of power that relies on a strategy of obviating human agency and of accommodating resistance. I try to think with Fanon, despite the great contextual divide which separates us, on this question of human emancipation from the prerogatives of power.

THE FORMATION OF A NEW HEGEMONY AND THE SEDIMENTATION OF RACISM

The history of white American racism towards Arabs must be seen in terms of its historical development. It did not occur all at once, nor was it fully formed from the moment of the USA’s founding by European settlers as a vestigial attitude towards the Orient. Certainly the Crusades and the Church’s representation of that conflict had something to do with the way Europeans understood Arabs. Coupled with the development of a scholarly tradition of representing the Islamic Near East in holistic and condescending terms, this European attitude developed into the discourse of what Edward Said has called Orientalism.

But in the “new world,” Arabs and Muslims were a distant threat, and anyway official attitudes of the Catholic Church were part of the decadence that Protestant settlers sought to leave behind. Following the settlement of the Western Atlantic, social actors constituted new threats nearer at hand: Native American raiding parties, European armies, and black African slave revolts, especially after the San Domingo revolution at the turn of the nineteenth

century. Arabs and Muslims in significant numbers did not exist in the United States until the 1880s and 1890s, and even then attitudes towards them did not crystallize in a racist form. Rather, they oscillated in a correspondent relationship to American foreign policy and a shifting juridical definition of this group.

Debates ensued in the second decade of the twentieth century as to the racial status of Arabs, as census-makers sought to classify this growing population based on the extant system used primarily to target Africans. The official status of Arabs wavered between white and "Asiatic" throughout the decade (before finally settling on white), as the United States fought the Ottoman Empire in World War I and questioned the loyalty of Arabs to the American nation.⁵ As the United States came to exert its presence in the Middle East following World War II, however, reactions emerged both within the area and from Arab-Americans newly empowered by the discourse of the civil rights movement that challenged the U.S.'s role in the region. Such reactions constituted the basis for a new level of efforts within the United States to come to terms with Islamic and Middle Eastern identities, particularly Arab ones. Various confrontations with states in the Middle East during the 1970s hardened the U.S. attitude, a development to which civil society lent its resources through the depiction of the Arab and Muslim other as wicked and cunning.⁶

Seen in the light of this long, uneven, and non-linear development, anti-Arab racism did not suddenly appear after 9/11; but neither could one say that it existed in the same recognizable state before then. One might say that anti-Arab racism has its beginnings but not its origin at 9/11.⁷ The September 11 attacks led to the institutional-

ization of racist practices, and to the articulation of overtly racist representations of Arabs and Muslims in the civil sphere. Therefore 9/11 did not constitute a "watershed moment" with regard to the treatment of Arabs and Muslims, but rather the reification of a representation that had gained critical momentum in previous years.⁸ To the question, 'did 9/11 change everything?' we must respond with a contingent and provisional 'yes,' but more importantly, we must try to understand the continuities in American state prerogatives before and after this event, and understand that power narrativized and accommodated the event in a certain way that expanded the scope and intensity of the historic bloc invested in its representation.⁹

In order to understand this non-originary emergence of anti-Arab racism, we must step back from the particularities of the American situation for a moment in order to think more theoretically about the general formations that underlie the U.S. political apparatus. Among these, the most consequential is the nation, the collective and imaginary understanding that citizens belong together because of a common history, cultural and social traditions, and ideologies. But this definition does not suffice. Nation formation in fact relies on the

⁸ See Dudziak, Mary L., ed., *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?*

⁹ I have in mind here the sort of disposition toward the event that would divest the latter of its revolutionary potential by representing it in such a way as to fit it into a continuous narrative rather than understand it as radical break. Foucault refers to this tendency in historiography as "traditional history" as opposed to the "genealogy" he prefers; I think the former disposition extends well beyond the confines of the discipline of history and even the production of knowledge within the university and into the realm of claims made by social actors seeking to make events "their own" through demonstrations of how such an event implicates their subject position more than others. Needless to say this tendency is reductive and identitarian; it also seems to be endemic to the political as we have so far conceived it. See Foucault, Michel, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History."

⁵ Kayyali, Randa A., *The Arab Americans*, 49.

⁶ See, for example, Semmerling, Tim Jon, "Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film, Shaheen, Jack G., *Reel Bad Arabs*, and Said, Edward, *Covering Islam*.

⁷ See Said, Edward, *Beginnings*.

externalization of some defined groups from the narrative of collective identity. As a particularization of the universal condition of nationhood, a nation must not only provide a definition of what it is, but what it is not. This is not a "natural" state of affairs, one that is inherent to any historical process of human interaction, but rather a logic that derives from the creation of the nation-state system several centuries ago, corresponding with the emergence of capitalism.

At times the negative definition of a national narrative may appear in abeyance, during periods of relative peace or insularity. But in moments of crisis, caused by a direct threat to the nation or by the weakening borders of the territorially circumscribed state, the exclusionary aspects of the national definition become paramount again. Oftentimes this return is a result of the direct intervention of the state, which has a powerful interest in preserving the nation formation as the basis for a discourse that it can invoke to incite its citizens to action. But it should be recognized that the long perdurance of the nation as the paramount discourse for defining and differentiating states has had a profound effect on the psychological dispositions of citizens of national societies. Through the repetitive invocation of nationalism, and the constant incitement to action on behalf of this ideology, citizens internalize the values of the particular nation to which they belong. They learn to act on its behalf even when not explicitly called to do so.¹⁰

Racism, in contrast to nationalism, is not a rational ideology and so does not figure into the narratives of most nations as an explicit dimension of its characterization. Rather, it is latent, contained in the negative characterization of the nation, in the particularization necessary to distinguish it from

¹⁰ I am of course invoking the work Foucault has done regarding the "incitement to discourse" as well as the "productive" capacities of power. See in particular his *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*.

other nations. It appears in the formation and evocation of nationalism, which is the ideology of the nation. Racism, as Etienne Balibar demonstrates, "is not an 'expression' of nationalism, but a supplement of nationalism or more precisely a supplement internal to nationalism, always in excess of it, but always indispensable to its constitution and yet always still insufficient to achieve its project, just as nationalism is both indispensable and always insufficient to achieve the formation of the nation or the project of a 'nationalization' of society."¹¹ In that "nationalism is a force for uniformity and rationalization," its object is a society which comes together around the perception of a commonality for the advancement of certain goals. This is the rational dimension of the nation. But, in order to unite the population in a relation distinct from other identities, and because the measure of purity to which nationalism aspires is unattainable, a sense of lack is created in the constituents of the nation. Institutions and individual sentiments of racism arise to fill this void, which in fact can never be filled.

The state often plays a significant role in the articulation of racism, less often today through the vehemence characteristic of individual acts of violence, but rather through the institutionalization of hierarchies based on the semblance of biological difference. I opt for a closed and open definition of the state; "closed" in terms of its actors and "open" in the sense of its function. In this definition, the state does not include functionaries of the repressive or ideological state apparatuses, in order to allow for a distinction between a central set of actors that determine the ideologies and the others who only relay the ideologies. In conceiving the state this way, one can see that a police officer is far different from a legislator, for example, because the former, while certainly an active agent of the more violent policies of the state, does not in fact

¹¹ Balibar, Etienne, "Racism and Nationalism," 54.

formulate them. While police officers have the power to interpellate individuals on behalf of the state, they in turn are responsible to a “higher” authority that forces them to internalize the values of the state. Consequently they serve as mediators between the state and the public, but remain relatively peripheral in the hierarchy of power which is the state.

The value of this distinction, in my mind, is to be as precise as possible about who is actually responsible for invoking the “official” national narrative (which always contains the possibility for racism), and the institutionalization of direct forms of racism. As Gramsci points out, one must be precise about who are enemies and who are allies in collective social struggle.¹² While representatives of the state in the repressive and ideological state apparatuses transmit and even add to the particularities of racism, they do not initiate it, and consequently must not be conflated with true adversaries that articulate political positions and initiate the relay of interpellations that such functionaries as police officers only transmit derivatively. The state remains “open” in the sense that it is not a homogenous unit but a mosaic of interests that frequently fall in line with those of civil society and the non-aligned public, which are brought together only through certain hegemonic formations.¹³

Insisting on the finally “open” and porous notion of state allows for the recognitions that there is room for debate within the state, and that a potential exists for action on the state by elements outside of the strictest functions of its “closed” definition.¹⁴ Such a definition also acknowledges that civil society may—and very often does—perform the ideologically-inscribed functions of the

state. It also recognizes parallels in practice between the functions of, for example, a supposedly independent journalist and a police officer; both may and often do work to disseminate the particular state order and its ideologies. To understand the emergence of racism, we must look to the dynamics of political interaction at the level of the function of the state, which often takes as its task the explicit articulation of a racially based antagonism. To understand how to challenge this function, we must be specific about who is in charge. Hence an open definition of the state allows us to understand the breadth and scope of state power in order to theorize it, while the closed definition allows us to be as specific as possible in developing a scheme for resistance.

The ultimate quest in state politics is to create a hegemonic formation. I follow Laclau and Mouffe in their reconceptualization of hegemony in so far as they formulate this relation in terms of the “articulation” of an “antagonism”: the former refers to the construction of a discursive position that changes the identity of that to which it refers, and the latter to a relationship whereby “the presence of the ‘Other’ prevents me from being totally myself.”¹⁵ A certain subject, “partially exterior to what it articulates” develops an ideological notion that fixes free-floating elements in a relationship that gives meaning to the social field, which it otherwise lacks.¹⁶ The critical precondition for such an articulation is precisely the “instability of the frontiers which separate” the antagonistic forces, ‘me’ and the ‘Other.’¹⁷ The articulation of antagonisms within a social field in which the frontiers advance and retreat is the basis for hegemony.

Such articulations involve the invocation of ideologies, which may become “common sense” to those who wish to reconstitute society in the image of the

¹² Radhakrishnan makes this point also; see his important essay “Toward an Effective Intellectual: Foucault or Gramsci?,” in *Diasporic Mediations*.

¹³ Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe, Chantal, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 180.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 105, 125.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

always unattainable social whole. The condition for ideology becoming hegemonic is indeed the penetration of “common sense” as opposed to its merely philosophical functioning.¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that because any society is not homogenous, and because societies do not have real frontiers between them (even state borders, as we know, are subject to significant permeations), these frontiers are always contrived. For this reason, and because others are always already producing their own wars of position, alternative hegemonies and counter-hegemonies, the hegemonic subject always has to reinvent the articulation that constitutes the frontiers of the hegemonic relationship to the social field.

A hegemonic formation is particularly powerful because it does not “force” people to understand social reality as it has been created by those with power, but rather it makes sense out of the social realm in ways that rely on the basic notion of a lack which can only be filled through the eradication of the Other. Such a logic, a common sense, appears as intuitive “truth,” a natural description of the social world. And it offers the possibility for action to every subject of the political realm: every member of a society feels compelled not only to abstain from supporting the Other, but to take action in opposition to the Other. Meanwhile, the ‘Other,’ the object of the hegemonic subject’s antagonism, becomes fixed in a “natural” and inferior relationship to the articulating subject. An alliance is formed between members of political society, civil society, and private citizens, whose aim is to close down the social field, to resolve the antagonism through the erasure of the Other. Hegemony, in order to endure, must never allow this to happen. Fanon, in talking about the project of colonialism to efface indigenous culture, argued that the aim of colonial power is “rather a continued agony

¹⁸ Gramsci makes this point; also see Anthony Bogues, “Working Outside Criticism,” 74.

than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture.”¹⁹ It seems that colonial and hegemonic power, which I will generally be trying to distinguish, share the need for a site of exclusion.²⁰

What will be emphasized in the post-imperial, hegemonic era, however, is the site of the Other as a necessary *political* crux upon which the formation turns. Whereas in the French colonial context the inert Other was a cultural exigency that only indirectly made the civilizing mission a worthwhile endeavor, in the contemporary American setting the dynamic Other threatens the very existence of the nation through his terrorist intentions, and therefore serves as the justification for wars in the name of regime change, for abrogating juridical normalcy, for granting the president extraordinary powers: in short, for a “state of exception.”²¹ This is not to say that there were not internal political debates within the metropolitan centers of empire about how to conceptualize and treat the colonized, for indeed these took place regularly. Rather the point I would like to emphasize

¹⁹ Fanon, Frantz, *Toward the African Revolution*, 34.

²⁰ I recognize that I am here eliding two utilizations of the concept of hegemony: the one outlined by Laclau and Mouffe, for whom all social interaction is an attempt to hegemonize human relations, and the one developed by the Subaltern Studies group of historians, who situate the Gramscian concept of hegemony in relation to a distinction between the society of control and the society of discipline (formulated by Deleuze in this language but by Foucault in very similar terms). I follow, for example, Ranajit Guha, in his distinction between colonial control and advanced industrial discipline, where the former relies primarily on repressive power and the latter on productive power. It is imperative that one account for differences in spatiality and temporality in discussing the specificities of power. Therefore I reserve the term “hegemony” for advanced industrial and post-industrial societies like the U.S., and follow Guha in his understanding of colonial power as repressive rather than productive, brutal rather than accommodating, restraining behaviors rather than precipitating consensus. See Guha, Ranajit, *Dominance Without Hegemony*.

²¹ Agamben, Giorgio, *State of Exception*.

is that as “hegemony” became the primary political formation in late capitalist so-called democratic societies, the exclusion of an Other or set of Others became a regular political practice. Thus potential or actual political leaders and parties use the threat of an Other to try to create support for their platform, which they represent as the only one capable of resolving the antagonism with that Other.

But the paradox is that if the Other were to be erased from existence, then the basis for the political articulation upon which those leaders came to power would also be erased. Therefore the hegemonic strategy is to either constantly invent a new Other or to never finish the mission of finally destroying it, to keep it always just beyond reach. So for example the sort of strategy for always already displacing the site of antagonism demonstrated by the “War on Terror” seems to be a much more efficacious one than that of prior hegemonic articulations, including the Cold War, because “terrorism” cannot be identified with a single geographic location and therefore its frontiers are by definition free-floating—and cannot therefore be closed.

It is not hard to see how race becomes one of the nodal points within national hegemonic formations. Not just any “moments” (what become “elements” for Laclau and Mouffe after being fixed by articulation) from the field of the social can be chosen as the object of articulation. Political tacticians must select carefully from an enormously complex and fractured social field in order to find a particular set of points that can penetrate common sense. Nationalism may be a site of articulation, because it has an established affect for the national public, and because its energies are constantly in flux, therefore not fixed. While a national narrative is often a part of a nation’s existence from before its inception, as for example with the ideology of American Exceptionalism present from the time of the Puritans’ errand in the wilderness, it

does not remain static but acquires new connotations and subtleties as well as new sites of exclusion over time.

But nationalism is not enough to constitute a hegemonic formation, partly because multiple nodes of articulation are necessary, and also because anyone can appeal to nationalism. Any member of a national society can claim to act on behalf of the nation because of course there are no preordained contents to the nation’s “best interests.” The invocation of an intrusive racial other may appeal to that supplementary feeling of nationalism within the population of a nation, while providing greater content than that of national narratives by themselves. To say that we should detain Arabs and Muslims because they constitute a threat to the well-being of Americans, and because such a move will help to prevent them from undermining the patriotic fight against evil, constitutes a much more powerful utterance than solely invoking the glories of the nation.

Race, then, becomes a viable discourse in the nation-state for “rallying the troops” around a particular discourse of antagonism. As a supplement to nationalism, racism is just as omnipresent as the latter. And yet it is not fixed because race is not an essential truth about human beings but is only correlative to the meanings associated with the physical appearance of difference. Of course, some racisms have been made completely off-limits for adoption by political forces; in the case of the United States black people fought long and hard to demonstrate the fixity of racism against them and to eliminate it from the realm of American institutions. This is not to say that racism toward black people in America no longer exists, because it certainly does (as the pitiful response to Hurricane Katrina demonstrated). Rather it is to say that politicians have a much more difficult time making a bid for office here by appealing to the racism of white people toward blacks. And I think this development can be traced

back to the crucial movements of resistance that challenged racism as the basis for political power and juridical normalcy. Other races, however, can at any moment become the site of antagonistic difference.

This always-present potential for creating new racisms reveals the meaninglessness of race as an analytical concept, but at the same time its alluring power for politicians. Because racism is present in every nationalism, it is always available for hegemonic articulations that would transform its emotive and productive capacities into the basis for the unification of actors in political and civil society. All it requires is a moment of crisis to cast light on the threat of the Others to the dominant race; such crises facilitate the transference of what is normally deemed “excessive” about racism into the realm of the normal and rational.

The empty signifier “security” became critical to the Bush Administration’s hegemonic platform in the wake of the United States’ great ruptural moment, the September 11 airplane attacks. As Laclau says about the importance of empty signifiers to politics, “any term which, in a certain political context becomes the signifier of the lack” plays the “same role” of representing the communitarian order in terms of an unfulfilled reality. To “hegemonize” something, therefore, is to carry out the “filling function” of the lack to which the empty signifier refers itself.²² Thus in the United States after 9/11, what was said to impede the country’s full realization of its “way” and its identity was the lack of security. In order to fill this lack, the “terrorist” became the target against which the official American identity defined itself. In the process, Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Pakistanis, Lebanese, Iranians, Muslims, Sikhs, and seculars all became unwitting victims.

The tragedy of this hegemony is that the racism will outlast the set of relays that constitute this particular formation, for al-

though racism is in many ways a result of the ideologies of power, it tends to outlast the formations of power that give rise to it. But this realization should not discourage, paralyze, or in any way dissuade us from taking action to precipitate the dismemberment of anti-Arab racism. Fanon demonstrated that resistance necessarily has a bearing upon both structures of power and those who would do the resisting. Although we must update Fanon’s strategies to account for the dialectic of power and resistance—which has produced alterations in how racism and power work in the time following Fanon’s life—we ought to begin with one of Fanon’s fundamental realizations: that racism is a “dialectical gangrene.” Inasmuch it has a constitutive effect upon society, it is also capable of being reconstituted by those who are willing to step up and challenge it in all its of its manifestations.

DECOLONIZING THE HEGEMONIZED MIND

We have established that the hegemonic formation of the Bush administration within the United States following 9/11 was a particularly powerful one. But it cannot be overemphasized that, as Edward Said writes, “no matter how apparently complete the dominance of an ideology or a social system, there are always going to be parts of the social experience that it does not cover and control. From these parts very frequently comes opposition, both self-conscious and dialectical.”²³ Such formations of domination, especially hegemony, have constantly to alter their terms and to adapt to changing political circumstances. This is because hegemony is ultimately the result of tactical plays and never that of a grand strategy present from the beginning: in short, hegemony is contingent. In that hegemony forms within the real world’s shifting

²² Laclau, Ernesto, *Emancipation(s)*, 44.

²³ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 240.

alliances, unexpected ruptures, and overall tendentiousness toward chaos, it is, in the words of Raymond Williams, “continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own.”²⁴ At the same time, hegemony is much more powerful than colonialism, which Ranajit Guha has called “dominance without hegemony.”²⁵ Colonial power, which Fanon analyzed, relied on brute force: even its *guerre psychologique* aimed to repress the humanity of the colonized, as opposed to hegemonic psychological warfare, which aims, like the U.S. in Iraq, to produce the sense of belonging to a community which is enlightened to the meaning of human emancipation. While the power of hegemony is much more profound and difficult to resist than coercion because of the “voluntary” nature of the consent it produces, it is never monolithic or absolute.

Following the event of decolonization, which the resistance of people like Frantz Fanon helped precipitate, power was forced to reorganize. Its new strategies are more intensely yet invisibly ideological than former ones, and they aim to incite discourse and produce consent in the bodies of the formerly colonized. Fanon was correct in arguing, within his particular milieu of power and resistance, that “exploitation, tortures, raids, racism, collective liquidations take turns at different levels in order literally to make of the native an object in the hands of the occupying nation.”²⁶ But while Fanon was able to argue, based on this accurate representation of contemporaneous power, for violence as a means of resisting colonialism and racism, the pervasiveness of hegemony today rules out, except in ruptural moments, the use of violence. Whereas the colonized had been the *objects* of repression, the hegemonized are now “subjected *subjects*” who perceive experience as though

possessing full agency.²⁷

Instead of militant resistance, “democracy” seems to be the most effective site for engaging power. Because the United States has privileged “liberation” as an empty signifier in the Iraqi context, the anti-war movement must seek to disconnect this notion from the presence of American troops, and suture it instead to the ideas of diplomacy, the international community, and so on. Rejecting the language of hegemony altogether will only serve to isolate movements of resistance. Rather, effective resistance movements will recognize the necessity of learning the tactics of empty signification within the site of the political. Academics, too, must prioritize the introduction of their voices into the political debate. Academics must engage hegemony oppositionally and within the public sphere, and contest the anti-intellectualism that serves as a compartmentalization tactic of contemporary power.

To fight only one battle, as for example to challenge only the war in Iraq, will not be enough to end racism towards Arabs and Muslims in America, however. Both this racism and the war are festering pustules of a decaying hegemony. We should not be misled to believe that one can be combated without reference to the other. Rather, the whole chain of equivalences inherent to the current political order needs to be recognized in order to effect a counter-hegemony. This means that the debate over gay marriage is just as important as the stratification of wealth in America, the war in Iraq as anti-Arab racism. They are all indissoluble relays in a movement towards power by those who claim to represent freedom, but in fact abhor the deeper and more plural resonances of that concept. Hegemony cannot be effectively combated unless the attackers target the entire network of nodes that comprises the hegemonic formation. In the current climate of single-issue move-

²⁴ Williams, Raymond, *Marxism and Literature*, 112.

²⁵ Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*.

²⁶ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 35.

²⁷ Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 121.

ments, there must at the very least be some effort to situate the groups representing these fights in a dialogue with each other, and to understand that each of these battles against the status quo is in fact one and the same battle against a common hegemonic formation.

The importance of hegemonic struggle has already been demonstrated; what remains to address concerns the personal and existential necessity of rethinking one's own role and options within a relationship of power. This is especially true given the modes of control today; power rules by fostering a sense of separation in the individual while at the same time using him/her to actively disseminate its ideologies which serve as the basis of power. While I have overdetermined the political in this essay, to do so assumes that the individual has already divested himself of his/her complicity with power, has "dehegemonized the mind," to riff off Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's apt recommendation within a different context of power.²⁸ Without any question, awareness of the processes and ideologies of contemporary hegemony, by which racism is constituted but which it in turns constitutes, must determine the first step in any manumission of the self.

Let us go to Fanon, whose own declaration of independence resonates with the mission at hand:

The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions.

I am my own foundation.

And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my own freedom...

It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it

²⁸ See Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*.

is through the lasting tension to their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world.²⁹

Fanon's statement that "history does not determine a single one of my actions," appears to be a brazen refutation of reality at first reading. Is it not true that structures of domination that inhere from the past manifest themselves in the present? Do racisms, class hierarchies, memories of historical wrongs, and other traces of injustice and inequality not contaminate temporality to such an extent that our own moment is irredeemably polluted with the detritus of what violences previous generations have wrought? Fanon does not deny the claims that the past makes on the mind. In fact, he does more than most other theorists to show the inordinate perversions that historical inequities perpetrate upon the psychic lives of individuals, in particular the colonized and racialized Other. But Fanon's project is two-fold, in the nature of the best theory: it is worldly, reflecting the vicissitudes of temporal and spatial contingency, but also "intentionally out of sync with the world," dissenting, always committed to the imagination and realization of a better world.³⁰ Fanon seeks not only to criticize, but to posit an alternative vision. This is why his representation of colonial power is neither absolute nor totalizing; he must allow space for the agency of individual resistance to operate.

At stake in Fanon's delinking of history and individual action is in fact the destruction of a syllogism. For in fact "history does not determine a single one of my actions" is not one utterance but two. Implicit is the notion that the site of historical interpellation is the mind, the receptacle of ideologies, the critical node that makes human beings "ideological animals," to use Althusser's

²⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 231.

³⁰ Radhakrishnan, R., *Theory in an Uneven World*, vi.

phrase.³¹ Fanon does not deny that history has a determinative effect upon the mind in the present. To the contrary, he is profoundly aware of the multiple historical channels through which power courses. The critical break that Fanon makes, however, is to recognize that just because a phenomenon, an ideology, or a desire has a constitutive effect upon the mind, it need not have a pre-determining effect upon one's actions. In short, Fanon declares that a constitutive effect is not the same thing as the power to constitute. For Fanon, human beings are the ultimate mediators between the world and individual action. In introducing human thinking into the facile connection often made between history and practice, Fanon makes a double move: he attends to the violences of power at the site where its effects are most strongly felt, but he also reasserts the agency of individuals to intervene in the historical process whereby structures of domination that seem "larger than life" prepare individuals for subordination. All is not preordained; the role of thinking is reinvigorated as a life-force capable of breaking the chains imposed upon humanity by history. Although Fanon privileges concrete collective social struggle, he would initiate the cycle of human freedom in the life of the mind.

Fanon's other statement that interests me in the present context is another one from *Black Skin, White Masks*: "[m]an's behavior is not always reactional. And there is always resentment in a *reaction*... To educate man to be *actional*, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act."³²

This statement does not contradict the emphasis I have accorded to thinking in Fanon's denial of the determinacy of history. Here Fanon assumes that one has already undertaken oppositional thinking,

that processes whereby structures of domination have constituted themselves in the life of the mind have been identified, and that the individual has initiated his/her freedom by beginning to divest the mind of all of its various historical interpellations. Now Fanon asks the human being to be "actional": to put theory into action, to disseminate theory, to practice what one preaches. Fanon's use of the term suggests that he understands action as a practice that is always already occurring, an ongoing process without beginning or end, an active disposition towards Being rather than an isolated instance of action that is destined to be succeeded by inaction. It is precisely this disposition that, I believe, is sorely lacking in American society, even among people who deplore U.S. foreign policy and its attendant social hierarchies.

Fanon insists, and I do too, that it is not enough to simply disapprove, to criticize, and to imagine that one can divest oneself of complicity with structures of domination by simply saying so. One must take two sets of positions, one critical and one affirmative, and based on these, one must actively seek to superannate the sort of world of which one is critical and create another that one affirms.

I have not provided a set of concrete strategies for resisting anti-Arab racism here. Instead, I have tried to demonstrate, through and with Fanon, that human beings have the capacity to resist oppression. Such a simple revelation ought not to be taken for granted given the remarkable capacity of power to accommodate resistance and sterilize opposition. Fanon reminds us of the liberating potential that inheres in the very act of resistance. In this light no instance of resistance can be a failure: each act alters power, if only by infinitesimal degrees, and each reconstitutes and strengthens the agency of the resister.³³

Fanon asks us to begin our process of

³¹ Althusser, 116.

³² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 222.

³³ See Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism*, especially 69 and 179.

resistance by making a survey of the self, to be our own interlocutors. He wishes us to see the inscription of power upon our psychic selves. Fanon requires that we turn the gaze—so long an outward refraction of the same power that hails us—inwards, where we will see the imprimatur of the Other. In doing so, we will realize that what has been constituted as radically Other and excluded, here the Arab Muslim, is in fact only a political apparition that haunts our own social beings.

But as we gaze inside, we will encounter another life-force, which also begs that we temper our counter-hegemonic struggle. This non-essential, pre-rational (or post-rational, if you like) sensibility could become the basis for a different sort of respect between peoples. It is not sacred space; it contains traces of the historic and the political like every other dimension of human existence. But we must make every effort to treat it in ourselves and in others with a care, responsibility, and love whose historicity is always mediated and dialogic—never vehement or vengeful. The soul, a concept forgotten or perhaps never really discovered in the West, may be the basis of this new humanism toward which I am leaning. Within the soul lies the ultimate antagonism between power and resistance, the self and the other. But it is also the site of the most profound articulation for freedom from oppression in the future.

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