

Reflections on Racism, “Coloniality of Power”, Mal-Development and Contemporary Capitalism

Letter to a Mentor

By [Tina Renier](#)

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Dear Dr. Benita Bunjun,

I have grown to appreciate our educator-student, mentor-mentee and mother-daughter relations over the years. Our relations have blossomed beautifully in a world plagued by multiple, ongoing crises. You have left an indelible mark on post-graduate studies, living and working experiences while being in Canada and upon my return transition to Jamaica, my homeland for healing and recovery.

Like many racialized international students and post graduate workers, my original perceptions about Canada were shaped primarily by prominent discourses (“hear-say”) of Canada being a beacon of international humanitarian standards and an active promotor of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in movements and social spaces.

However, our friendly meetings, our rigorous, scholarly dialogue, my lived experiences and observations have unsettled and de-mystified the grounds of this national fallacy. You have exposed me to the contributions of critical race, intersectional feminist thinkers such as Professor Sherene Razack, Sara Ahmed, Robyn Maynard and Professor Sunera Thobani.

As an African-Caribbean woman, I have always felt as a “body out of place” in academia and other institutions within Canada which is a white settler colonial society. I never knew why until you personally challenged to expand my social analysis beyond the statement: “racialized, international students/post graduate workers are exploited or discriminated against” and instead, we (I) should shift the focus of my analysis to the mechanics or

techniques of power associated with “white supremacist”, patriarchal politics in the configuration of institutions including the Canadian state. After all, it is Deborah Brock et. al (2019:5) who have also validated the importance of unpacking the centre by emphasizing,

“to exclusively focus on the marginalized without interrogating the centre is to risk reproducing a pattern that defines the margins as the location of the problem”.

Brock’s et. al (2019) assertion therefore means that instead of examining silencing, erasure, social marginalization, precariousness, invisibility/hyper-visibility and the absent-present phenomenon among vulnerable groups in isolation, we should examine how power relations is organized around systems of domination that perpetuate these problems. It is not sufficient to look at the symptoms of the problems in isolation from the “centre” which shapes the systemic, institutional, epistemological- political, discursive, socio-economic, cultural and psycho-affective structures embedded in dialectical relations of domination and subjugation.

We see whiteness and “coloniality of power” imbricated in the organisation of the global political economy where capitalism is the most predominant system of economic relations, which is inextricably connected to racism, the derogation of women’s rights and the exploitation of labour to generate profits.

A 2024 Oxfam International report has illustrated that world’s five richest men (all white) have more than doubled their fortunes to \$869 billion while the world’s poorest 60%- almost five billion people have lost money and billionaires’ wealth have grown three times (3x) faster than global inflation.

Wealth of five richest men doubles since 2020 as five billion people made poorer in "decade of division," says Oxfam

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Screenshot of the [Oxfam article](#)

On the other hand, across 52 countries, the average real wages of nearly 800 million workers have fallen. Oxfam notes that it will take 230 years to end poverty! (Neate, 2024; Riddell et. al, 2024). Oxfam International’s recent report does not only reinforce the alternative, popular notions that trickle-down economics does not work but it also underscores the androcentric dimensions of whiteness that is intricately involved in life-taking or life-sucking activities rooted in visceral, colonial and neo-liberal, capitalist violence. The life taking capacities of this dominant version of development have caused alternatives to development thinkers and eco-feminist, Vandana Shiva (2010; 2016) and Eduardo Gudynas (2011) to label development as mal- development and dominant economic practices and policies in favour of the world’s elite as “zombie capitalism” because there have been numerous attempts to repair and revive exploitative, extractive and unsustainable modes of development.

The life-taking/blood-sucking capacities of power systems are not only limited to macro-economics of development but also the micro coordination of public spaces in our everyday interactions that are frequently taken for granted as “normal”. As you have pointed in your powerful edited collection, ‘Academic Well Being of Racialized Students’, Canadian

classrooms and universities continue to be troubling sites of racial exclusion, white entitlement and a glaring absence and underrepresentation of critical race scholarship and scholars (Bunjun, 2021, p.3).

Your original, scholarly contribution is an extension of Professor Sherene Razack's (2002) three-dimensional framework on spatial theory and Sara Ahmed's (2000; 2012) conceptual framework on spatial determinism. Professor Sherene Razack (2002:8) defines spaces as material, symbolic and representational. Material space refers to spaces that are constituted as a result of unequal economic relations produced by capitalism while symbolic spaces refer to lived experiences and differences in social meanings associated with spaces and representations of spaces refers to names, images and symbols associated with spaces (Razack, 2002, p.8).

From a materialist perspective, Canadian universities and classrooms are products of unequal economic relations in which neo-liberal capitalist economy prioritizes commodification of knowledge for profit generation and the utilization of diversity and inclusion as not only a containment zone for insurgency but also a way of maintaining marketability and academic imperialism.

From a symbolic perspective, many racialized, international students and post graduate workers express feelings and lived experiences of painful alienation and trauma in Canadian classrooms and universities both due to passive and active forms of violence. Additionally, Canadian classrooms and universities persist in the deliberate marginalization and omission of brutal histories predicated on the Atlantic Slave Trade, chattel slavery of Peoples of African descent, a system of indentureship and servitude among South Asian peoples, mass displacement, theft, genocide and land dispossession of indigenous peoples. The brutality of these histories that prevail in the contemporary construction of Canadian universities and classroom spaces are evident in the names of former slave traders and masters such as James McGill, McGill University and Lord Dalhousie, Dalhousie University.

The 2019 Dalhousie report which was written by Professor Afua Cooper and other well renowned academics have illustrated that Canadian classrooms are marked with racist and sexist graffiti on walls long before students enter these spaces. The Dalhousie report goes beyond the material aspects of coloniality which assess the economic imperative of white supremacist politics by looking at other important dimensions such as the ideological and semiotic modes of whiteness and coloniality. Consequently, this is where Sara Ahmed's conceptual framework on spatial determinism becomes increasingly relevant to this discussion. Ahmed (2000; 2012) argues that spatial determinism refers to the fact spaces are not empty or unoccupied but are shaped by social relations and histories and these histories and social relations determine our interactions, encounters and lived experiences within these spaces prior to our entry in them. Ahmed (2012) also explains that one of the reasons racialized identities continue to be socially constructed as and treated as "bodies out of place" is because of conditional hospitality of the "multi-cultural", settler-colonial nation who welcomes international students or migrants, generally on the condition that they give something back to the nation- loyalty to or proximity to the ideology of state formation and national identity.

Conditional hospitality also extends to border imperialist, immigration policies that operate under the shroud of humanitarianism and good will when in fact these immigration policies set the precedence for the precarious labour-citizenship nexus of racialized, international students and post-graduate workers whereby the fate of the future rests solely on their

temporary legal status which makes them susceptible to dehumanising treatment by institutions.

We see a deeply troubling concern with respect to border imperialism and conditional hospitality in other parts of the world such as the United Kingdom under the Rishi Sunak's conservative government administration. Last year, Rishi Sunak had proposed an illegal migration bill to ban refugees and is best known by the slogan "stop the boats" and this year, the Sunak-led government in the UK has passed a policy that will prevent international students from migrating with their families to the UK. The anti-black/Asian/indigenous/racialized racisms and long held xenophobic sentiments are not only compatible with conservative/right wing political ideologies but they also illustrate that borders are not only geographic or physical walls that are constructed to exclude, police, surveil and punish those who are considered as "Others" but borders are also existential, social walls to demarcate differences.

On the contrary, the centre right Prime Minister Andrew Holness-led government in Jamaica deported many of our Haitian brothers and sisters last year on the grounds of illegal entry and while there have been several outcries from reparations activists, social advocates, movements, unorthodox academic thinkers about the mass deportation of Haitians, the government of Jamaica remains unphased and unconcerned.

The life-taking/blood-sucking capacities of whiteness, coloniality, mal-development and zombie capitalism operates in different ways, transnationally from Canada to Jamaica.

In Jamaica, a former colony of Britain where neo-colonial and neo-liberal capitalist relations persists, the mechanics of "whiteness:" is manifested through what Barbara Heron (2007:44) coins as "planetary consciousness".

Planetary consciousness is defined as the global obligation that white men and women feel in relation to saving or civilizing those who they regard as the Other from countries of the Global South and it also refers to the assumption that they are experts on every global issue (Heron, 2007).

In the Jamaican context, we see whiteness and coloniality manifested in the faces of power of international development or non-profit organizations, the preference of Northern expertise on development challenges that plague the Global South, the deployment of language that positions people from the Global South as deficits and the use of foreign aid or official development assistance (ODA) to permeate ongoing imperial encounters.

This is evident in a 2022 (Economic and Social Survey of Jamaica) report which explains that official development assistance (ODA) far exceeds loan repayments and budgetary allocations towards public, social services such as health and education.

We see whiteness and coloniality embedded in the national and transnational movement and advocacy for reparative justice for Peoples of African descent where representatives of global empires issue half-baked, empty statements of apologies atoning for their active participation in the enslavement of African peoples but no serious acknowledgement to the social, economic and political development issues outlined in CARICOM's 10-point plan for reparations and no momentum towards attention towards evidence-based, international human rights law intersecting with other disciplines making a plausible case for reparations.

Several Caribbean countries including Jamaica and Belize have expressed an active interest in decolonising their constitutions and transition from a parliamentary democracy to a republic.

While these efforts and proposals aimed at national self-determination are commendable, the racialization and colonial infrastructure of social institutions remain highly visible to social activists in Jamaica.

We (I) notice the lack of transparency and accountability of the newly formed, Constitutional Reform Committee (CRC) whose primary role is to inform and engage with the public on its three-year strategic plan to reform Jamaica's constitution and help in the transition to a republic.

We (I) also notice the declining public trust in democracy and political leadership despite celebrating 61 years of independence or dependence, I should say.

Declining public trust in democracy and political leadership can be attributed to social and economic development woes ranging from a high cost of living crises, low consecutive records of growth, social marginalization from public service delivery, exorbitant crime and violence rates and high actual and perceived corruption. In fact, the 2023 World Justice Project report conducted in 14 Caribbean countries illustrate that 81% of citizens regionally believe that recruitment in the public sector is based on friends and family ties rather than merit and nationally in Jamaica, this percentage of corruption perception in the public sector stands at 78%. Moreover, 66% of Jamaicans believe that politicians are the most corrupt social group in society.

Mal-development and zombie capitalism continue to be pertinent features of Jamaican development strategies where there is the revival of failed policies that have not and never been favourable for the majority of our population who are disenfranchised and disenfranchised with governance. Our government administration boasts about economic growth and record low employment under the shroud of prosperity but fails to tell the nation why our Human Development Index points out that we have large disparities in life expectancy, income and access to social and economic opportunities. Our government administration boasts that it is working for our people when in fact, it has increased the salaries of the political directorate by over 200% while inflation outpaces salary increases of the island's disgruntled public sector workers who have gone on several strikes and protests for a living wage, not a minimum wage.

Our government administration boasts at COP 28 Climate Summit that Jamaica is not a mere by-stander in the fight against climate change when in reality, its economic development strategy is based on privatisation and deregulation of industries that contribute to pollution and environmental degradation.

Our government administration boasts about its strong foreign policy coordination and decision-making when in fact, a country like Jamaica that was once vocal on anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa and championing the cause of autonomous paths to development for countries of the Global South have now abstained or voted neutral on the escalation of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Like Canada, Jamaica is also silent and silence is a metaphor of complicity or support for war crimes and humanitarian catastrophe. My mentor, friend and mother, continue to walk well on this journey. I salute you as I end my lengthy agitation on the varied injustices that fracture our world today as I speak from my unique social and

geo political locations.

With love and power,
Tina Renier

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