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INTRODUCTION

**Identities in the Contact Zone**

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*As Stuart Hall, following both Franz Fanon and Albert Memmi, has explained, identity is deeply imbricated with colonialism both for the coloniser and the colonised. Their cultures meet in what Mary Louise Pratt calls the contact zone. Inevitably, this meeting is in circumstances of great inequality. Nevertheless, the identities of both coloniser and colonised are shaped through their interactions, and this shaping continues in the postcolonial experience. In this issue of *Borderlands* the essays all share a common concern with identity. Moreover, in diverse ways all the essays are founded in issues of marginalisation, power and (post)colonialism.*

Cultural identity, Stuart Hall tells us, is a “production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not without, representation’ (1990: 222). Incomplete, identity is formed through dynamic relations patterned in the power that structures representations: ‘Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us, by the fatal couplet, power/knowledge’ (Hall, 1990: 225-26). Some relations in power are more overdetermining than others. In this regard, Hall also writes about a form of identity which he describes as ‘a sort of collective ‘one true self’ ... which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common’ (1990: 223). Hall explains the importance of this understanding for postcolonial struggles using the examples of Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor’s idea of *Négritude* for establishing black self-respect and the political project of Pan-Africanism. The implication here is the centrality of the colonial experience in the formation of this sense of shared identity. The five essays that constitute the first *Borderlands* issue of 2010 take up, both implicitly and explicitly, the spectre of the colonial experience (its structures,

conditions of knowledge, relations of power, its effects, traces and problems) in varying ways across different geo-political and cultural spaces.

Identities formed in the colonial experience tended to be reduced to a binary order that implicated both the coloniser and the colonised. Working off of existentialist ideas developed by Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Memmi identifies this relation in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. As Margaret Majumdar explains:

Memmi emphasised the reciprocity or interdependence that is integral to the colonial relationship, as well as its inevitable tendency to disintegrate. The characteristic features and behaviour of both coloniser and colonised are mutually defined and determined by this relationship. (2007: 73-74)

What Hall, following Franz Fanon, identifies is the postcolonial importance of this defining moment for the colonised in their search for identity as well as the recognition that cultural identity always already goes beyond this homogenising formation.

There is another key point we can take from Hall's discussion. This is the incompleteness of identity, which points to the site or scene of struggle in which questions about home, belonging, rights, and politics are in constant contest. Identity can never be settled upon, it constantly changes as seen in the multifarious struggles over, and connections to, identity that animate the present. Here is a short 2010 catalogue: the decision being made by the French parliament for a ban on the niqab and burka; the disregard of Indigenous communities in North-east India whose lands are being grabbed by the state for resource extraction; the continued marginalization of middle-eastern peoples under the guise of the war on terror; the criminalization of non-white ethnic peoples in particular states in the United States as a consequence of tougher security and immigration laws; and the return to conservative, violent, immigration policies and practices in Australia by the current Labor government. What is being secured is identity, or more precisely the security of identity. Lest we forget, there is opposition to these practices of securing identity as witnessed in the condemnation of them by various individuals and collectivities from both within and outside the nations in which such battles are being waged. These oppositions to unjust practices are waged on identity grounds; that is to say they are waged by turning to the discourse of identity as the basis from which resistance to the attempts at securing and determining identity by those who occupy the sites of power can be staged. The battles over identity are caught up in complex networks of power and ideological circuits. These battles, started in the colonial world, persist in the postcolonial present; identity remains a pertinent issue today.

This is why it is urgent to interrogate the contact zones: the 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as

colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today' (Pratt, 1991: 33). These are the spaces in which postcolonial cultural identity is battled over and formed. The identities constructed in contact zones are, as Memmi indicates, always relational. The identity of the coloniser is as inflected by the relation with the colonised as the identity of the colonised is by their relation with the coloniser. And, as Hall explains, these break down into ever more complex lived relations of cultural identity. In this issue of *Borderlands*, we have five essays that explore the dynamic between these forms of identity and the ways that identity is expressed in the postcolonial experience.

Darryl Leroux examines the quatercentenary celebrations of the foundation of Québec City in 2008. The first part of the essay centres on the historical process through which Samuel de Champlain has been constructed as the 'founding father' of Québec. Leroux deconstructs the image of Champlain, showing the ways that this historical character has been formed to provide a figure that can be identified as Québec City's founder offering a clear moment for the establishment of the French colony in what would become Canada. The second part of Leroux's essay discusses the performance of that foundation as a spectacle in the show *Rencontres* that formed a key element in the city's quatercentenary celebrations, Québec 400. Leroux discusses how the spectacle of the show produces an image of the history of Québec as founded in tolerance and cultural diversity. Indeed, Leroux details how the show produces a revisionist history of the meeting of Champlain and the settlers with the Indigenous people. Indigenous 'intransigence' is replaced by a myth of cooperation, producing a new people, the *Québécois*. Leroux explains how the show's spectacular—in both senses of the word—elision of colonial violence works also to elide the unsettling acknowledgement of colonial settlement in turn enabling the development of a nationalistic Québécois identity which can stand against the encroachments of English-speaking Canada and of the United States.

Judy Rohrer offers a more personal account of identity issues springing from a colonial encounter. Rohrer writes about the haole experience in Hawai'i. Haole is the word used by native Hawaiians to describe white people and also, as Rohrer explains, those who perform whiteness. Haole is a description that is now linked with those associated with the American presence, a presence deeply bound up with colonialist practices. As Rohrer explains, unlike the mainland United States, where whiteness is the unmarked norm, whiteness on the Hawaiian islands is marked. Nevertheless, in Hawai'i, which remains under colonial rule, as in many postcolonial states, including the settler states of Canada and Australia which are the focus of three of the essays in this issue, power continues to reside in the white colonisers—indeed, the same point could be made about the mainland United States itself.[1] Hapa haole, then, which forms a part of Rohrer's essay's title, translates as half haole. Rohrer seeks to trouble the idea of haole without reinscribing whiteness through a theoretically informed consideration of her own identity. In California,

Rohrer was taken for a Chicana. As it happens, her mother, she tells us, was the daughter of a Mexican mother and a Greek father. In Hawai'i, her queerness disturbed the normative sense of heterosexuality which pervades the meaning of haole. Clearly, Rohrer's cultural identity varies from place to place and always disturbs the dominant modes of identification. As Hall remarks: 'Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power' (1990: 225). Rohrer uses the ideas of Gloria Anzaldúa to disturb what she describes as her 'seemingly impenetrable monolith[ic] ... haoleness.' The contact zone, as Pratt observes, is permeated by power. How to counter this? As Rohrer comments, building on Anzaldúa: 'The borderlands make strong nationalistic claims and blood logics impossible.' Such a move emphasises inclusion over exclusion, and provides a space for the marginalised as against any construction of a hegemonic dominant identity. Following Anzaldúa, Rohrer advocates living *sin fronteras*, without borders, in, as Rohrer writes, 'contradiction and paradox.'

Jordana Silverstein's essay is concerned with the identity of Jews living in New York, Jews who need to reconcile the idea of Jews as victims in the Holocaust with the treatment of Palestinians by Israel. These Jews also need to understand their own relationship with the United States. Silverstein argues that one reason for the predominance of Zionism among New York Jews is that the existence of the Israeli state affirms Jews as being modern because the state is a modern institution. Israel provides a homeland the acceptance and support of which gives the Jewish presence in New York a modern aura. Consequently, criticising Israeli colonial practices in Palestine can appear as an attack on Jewish modernity. At the same time, as Silverstein notes, in interviews with Jewish teachers that she conducted in New York who taught about the Holocaust, these people, committed to raising their students' awareness about genocide and injustice, nevertheless do not discuss the Israeli violence against Palestinians.

Much of Silverstein's essay is taken up with an analysis of a sign hung on a street corner on Manhattan's Lower East Side. The sign includes the words 'if not now, when,' also the words 'End the Israeli occupation of Palestine,' the year 5767, which started in September 2006 CE, and an arm wound round with barbed wire and tefillin. Silverstein discusses the complexity of these terms, the links with Judaism, with the Holocaust, and the statement demanding an end to the Palestinian occupation. She notes the marginality of the Jews who support the views asserted by this sign: they live in the diaspora, in a state where they are not a part of the majority, and hold views which are not those of the majority of New York Jews. Their identity is formed in a double exclusion that even, paradoxically, places their modernity in question. Hall remarks that: 'Cultural identity ... is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past' (1990: 225). The Jews about whom Silverstein is writing are rejecting a present that locates identity in a modernity

based in the modern state and its colonial practices for a future that surpasses what Silverstein calls 'the exclusivist aspects of the modern western nation-state.' Here we find an echo of Rohrer's invocation of Anzaldúa's suggestion that those of us on the margins, and this includes Israel which exists on the margin of the West and of its modernity, should live *sin fronteras*, without frontiers.

So far in this issue, the essays have focused more or less directly on concerns centred on identity. The next essay, by Steve Mickler, critically engages with some of the people in positions of power who lead opinions in the public sphere. Mickler's interest is in those agenda setters in Canada and Australia who pioneer right-wing views about the circumstances of Indigenous peoples. Over the last thirty-to-forty years, there has been an on-going shift to the right in the day-to-day politics of democratic countries in the West. So great has been this development that, as Mickler explains, the traditional distinction between a political right and left—a distinction which can be traced back to the time of the French Revolution—no longer operates in a meaningful manner. One place where this is particularly true is in respect of issues of self-determination for the Indigenous peoples of (post)colonial states. Mickler relates this denial directly to what he, following Jacques Derrida, describes as the unfinished project of democracy. What Mickler is outlining is the gradual reversal of the logic of democratic citizenship in relation to ideological views associated with the neoconservative practices of neoliberalism.

Mickler shows how opinion leaders in both Canada and Australia have revisioned, as he puts it, 'mundane liberal principles,' transforming them from the bases of democracy into threats to good government. At the same time, Indigenous policy is being reversed. Long-term developments in both countries that saw increasing rights for Indigenous peoples are now being characterised as decreasing their rights and partitioning them off from the dominant, settler populations. To put it bluntly, the violence of colonial invasion is now being re-enacted in policy reversals which, in claiming to treat all people equally, disempower Indigenous Canadians and Australians. Here, we are returned to Hall's insight about the importance of the colonial experience in the construction of a shared cultural identity. Hall was writing about the African peoples dispersed across the Americas but the point holds for colonised Indigenous peoples in their experience of settler colonialism. As Mickler explains in detail, the conservative opinion leaders act as the ideological vanguard for the regressive changes in the treatment of the colonised, including in Australia the officially named Northern Territory Emergency Response (more usually known as the Northern Territory Intervention) which required the putting into abeyance of the *Racial Discrimination Act* in the Northern Territory. Such changes are becoming increasingly normalised.

The final essay is a personalised account by Hamish Morgan of a journey through the sparsely populated interior of Western Australia.

The narrator, his wife and young daughter are taking an Indigenous woman (known in the essay as GB) back to see her dying father in a nursing home in Kalgoorlie. The narrative is pervaded by GB's reminiscences. Her family was the last group of Indigenous people to be brought into white, settler society. She remarks in a moment of understated, aching sadness, 'dad probably would never have got on [the Toyota] if he knew it was a one way trip.' Intertextually, we are reminded of Mickler's comments about the conservative shift towards denying Indigenous Australians self-determination. What the family do get from white society, we are told, and without even proper consultation, is a statue that stands next to the Wiluna Information Centre: something that purports to commemorate but actually functions as information for tourists.

At the core of the essay is an idea of community. This community, linked by kinship networks, spreads out rhizomatically across the land. It has no centre and no periphery. Its members experience themselves as always already within it. The narrator tells us that he has struggled to understand this way of living community 'as an experience, as something that happens to us, rather than as an object for analysis.' We are, as it happens, once more in a world without frontiers. The narrator understands this form of community using the ideas of Jean-Luc Nancy. Nancy's idea of the inoperative community is founded on a critique of totalitarian thought. As Fred Dallmayr writes: 'The notion of an 'inoperative community' is meant to serve as a bulwark against a totalizing globalism (dominated by hegemonic powers) and against the surrender of politics to the relentless self-interest of atomistic agents (be they states, corporations, or private individuals)' (1997: 193). It is this self-interest that lies at the heart of the attitudes of the conservative opinion leaders about whom Mickler writes.

Morgan's narrative moves towards GB's father's inevitable death. He has come from his land to pass in a nursing home in a settler city devoted to mining, indeed to mining that very land. Morgan meditates on death as a marker of life's being and the sharing of the inoperative community. In his writing he also offers us a narration that considers the entanglements of cultural identity in the colonial experience that Memmi describes. Morgan shows us some of what might be lost in the colonial violence that Mickler outlines, and some of what has already been lost in this contact zone.

The five essays collectively examine various contact zones to expose and to elaborate on the relations of power in which the encounters they describe are enmeshed and to identify the effects of these encounters. The essays remind us of the unfinished business of identity, its incompleteness as Hall writes, and usher in the urgency of thinking about identity. Welcome then to issue one of 2010; we would like to thank the entire *Borderlands* collective, all our authors, referees and reviewers, for making this issue possible.

### **Notes**

1. For a discussion of this topic, see C. Richard King (ed.) *Postcolonial America* (2000).

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