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UNSETTLING EUROCENTRISM IN THE WESTERNIZED UNIVERSITY

*Edited by Julie Cupples
and Ramón Grosfoguel*

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CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	viii
<i>Notes on contributors</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
1 Introduction: Coloniality resurgent, coloniality interrupted <i>Julie Cupples</i>	1
2 The university as branch plant industry <i>Lou Dear</i>	23
3 The white university: A platform of subjectification/subjugation <i>Lucas Van Milders</i>	42
4 Can the master's tools dismantle the master's lodge? Negotiating postcoloniality in the neoliberal university <i>Lili Schwoerer</i>	56
5 Black studies in the westernized university: The interdisciplines and the elision of political economy <i>Charisse Burden-Stelly</i>	73
6 Black feminist contributions to decolonizing the curriculum <i>Francesca Sobande</i>	87

- | | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 7 | Denaturalizing settler-colonial logics in international development education in Canada
<i>Trycia Bazinet</i> | 100 |
| 8 | Planetary urbanization and postcolonial geographies: What directions for critical urban theory?
<i>Simone Vegliò</i> | 116 |
| 9 | Decolonizing legal studies: A Latin Americanist perspective
<i>Aitor Jimenez González</i> | 131 |
| 10 | The challenges of being Mapuche at university
<i>Denisse Sepúlveda Sánchez</i> | 145 |
| 11 | Learning from Mayan feminists' interpretations of <i>buen vivir</i>
<i>Johanna Bergström</i> | 156 |
| 12 | Other knowledges, other interculturalities: The colonial difference in intercultural dialogue
<i>Robert Aman</i> | 171 |
| 13 | Poetical, ethical and political dimensions of Indigenous language practices in Colombia
<i>Sandra Camelo</i> | 187 |
| 14 | Surpassing epistemic hierarchies: A dialogue between expanded art practices and human scale development
<i>Maricely Corzo Morales</i> | 204 |
| 15 | "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité": Debunking the myth of egalitarianism in French education
<i>Olivette Otele</i> | 221 |
| 16 | Dismantling Eurocentrism in the French history of chattel slavery and racism
<i>Christelle Gomis</i> | 235 |
| 17 | Beyond the westernized university: Eurocentrism and international high school curricula
<i>Marcin B. Stanek</i> | 248 |

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 18 | What is racism? Zone of being and zone of non-being in the work of Frantz Fanon and Boaventura de Sousa Santos
<i>Ramón Grosfoguel</i> | 264 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 275 |

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5

BLACK STUDIES IN THE WESTERNIZED UNIVERSITY

The interdisciplines and the elision of political economy

Charisse Burden-Stelly

Introduction

When the Black studies¹ movement was inaugurated in the late 1960s, it represented the intellectual expression of political Pan-Africanism in United States universities. It was formed to fundamentally challenge the statist, imperialist, racist, and Eurocentric underpinnings of the traditional disciplines in westernized universities by centring community development, African and African descendant struggles for liberation and self-determination, and the importance of internationalism to the larger project of Black freedom. As early as 1900, Pan-Africanism and radical Black internationalism rendered legible the ideological convergences and structural imperatives of decolonization in Africa and the Caribbean and the quest for Black self-determination and liberation in the United States. However, the institutionalization of Black studies in the westernized university engendered a turn away from these early commitments. With American studies and area studies setting the precedent, the struggle over redistribution was replaced by a struggle over representation (Ferguson, 2012). The mobilization of culture became the means of securing recognition and reward. History and literature became the two areas through which Blackness was studied, defined, and codified, and cultural production and formation became the focus of anthropological and sociological studies of the Black condition. Political economic and structural approaches became relegated to "culturalism" as Black studies became institutionalized and legitimated. Culturalism can be understood as the regime of meaning making in which Blackness is culturally specified and abstracted from material, political economic, and structural conditions of dispossession through statist technologies of antiradicalism (Burden-Stelly, 2016).

By the late 1980s, when Black studies had become more or less fully incorporated into the westernized university, there was a noted and distinct absence of political economic and material critiques of racialized dispossession in its formulation, and

an overwhelming overrepresentation of literary and cultural studies (Mason and Githinji, 2008). The organization of Black studies around the analytic of “diaspora”, starting in the late 1980s and early 1990s, acted to reify the abstraction of Blackness from material and structural realities through the transnationalization of the study of Black sociality and culture. In other words, given the turn to cultural specifications in Black studies, African diaspora studies became institutionalized as another culturalist project. Despite the reality that the shift in global accumulation – that is, the transformation of capital from its liberal to corporate form (Robotham, 2005) – precipitated by the 1973 world recession and oil crisis (Arrighi, 1991) had homologous, albeit geospatially specific, effects on all African descendant peoples, African diaspora studies was nonetheless “content to confine itself to the surface of social, cultural, and economic life ... while avoiding ‘the hidden abode’ of production” (Robotham, 2005: 21). Because political economy has essentially become anathema to Black Studies, it has remained a largely academic enterprise divorced from the increasingly immiserated material conditions of Black people. The cultural politics of recognition continue to dominate the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of Black studies, to the detriment of an approach focused on the practical necessity of radical economic praxis to apprehending the actually existing realities of Black communities. Largely missing from Black studies curricula are political economic histories that can adequately explain the parallels in global Black economic conditions, and the gaps between “the West and the rest” in income, wealth, and the ownership of factors of production. Such exclusions hamper the decolonial potential of Black studies.

Julianne Malveaux (2008: 785) contends that “traditional and theoretical disciplinary formulations” of Black studies have been largely influenced by the exigencies of accommodation to the westernized university. Such imperatives are best served by the field’s culturalist approach. This chapter argues that once Black studies became the object of academic disciplining and control through management by the westernized university, it became abstracted from its activist, community-oriented, and militant origins. Specifically, the process of westernization occurred as Black studies began to take on the epistemological and structural form and function of American studies and area studies. The latter were the founding interdisciplinary projects that emerged in the Cold War university, purged of Marxism by McCarthyism (Pfister, 1991). These provided the grammar, form, and function for subsequent “interdisciplines”, which, like their predecessors, elided class and political economic analysis.

American studies, area studies, and the inauguration of the “interdiscipline”

Roderick Ferguson (2012) analyses the role of the westernized university in harnessing minority difference to the reconstitution of capital and to the needs of the U.S. State. He does so in the context of demands for inclusion by minoritized subjects on the one hand, and of the global entrenchment of the U.S.-led political

and economic order on the other. He argues that, by the late 1960s, the westernized university had become the “training ground” for how the U.S. state and capital ought to contend with the meaning, representation, and accommodation of minority difference (Ferguson, 2012). It was concerned with developing ways to “combin[e] tolerance for diversity with the imperatives of world order” (Gleason, 1984: 356). With the proliferation of domestic and global minorities in the westernized university, disciplines that focused on specific races, ethnicities, global areas, and identities increasingly became sites of surveillance (Schueller, 2007).

Ferguson (2012) locates the rise of the interdisciplines in the institutionalization of ethnic and gender studies. He argues that with the ascent of U.S. empire came the concomitant need to regulate and manage groups of “others” domestically, and nations of “others” internationally. This demanded a shift in the westernized university away from specialized disciplines to interdisciplinary forms of knowledge. However, Ferguson’s analysis overlooks that the narratives of freedom and democracy necessitated by the spread of the ideology of embedded liberalism rested upon the spread of knowledge about a distinctive American culture, civilization, and society that differentiated itself from Europe and Asia. It was this imperative that led to the emergence of one of the first major interdisciplinary fields: American Studies. This was accompanied by the development of area studies – the other foundational interdiscipline – which aimed to acquire and produce knowledge about other parts of the world with which the U.S., as the dominant empire, would have to contend (Schueller, 2007). Liberated from the restrictive methods, canons, and approaches of dominant disciplines, the foundational interdisciplines were able to deploy the power of the state and the westernized university to position difference as their object of critique and engagement (Ferguson, 2012). Acting in the service of U.S. state and empire, these interdisciplines provided the acceptable institutional model for fields of study focused specifically on minority difference as it related to history, culture, and society. They allowed the westernized university to strategically accommodate the demands for Civil Rights, “relevant education,” and equality. American studies provided the grammar, and area studies structured the relationship between the state, the westernized university, and the study of difference. With American studies and area studies as the intellectual arms of the U.S. state, “anti-fascism, anti-communism, and anti-imperialism coexisted in an uneasy partnership in the governing vision of U.S. post-World War II promise: universal nationhood and liberal, capitalist democracy” (Singh, 1998: 488). Such coupling had consequences for the development of Black studies. Contrary to the desire of Black radicals and nationalists to use institutions of higher education to inculcate their vision of the state and society, Black studies was institutionalized and legitimated to a large degree in the image of the foundational interdisciplines.

The westernized university became a site of “reactive crisis management” (Habermas, 1975: 60) that both accommodated and disciplined challenges to Eurocentrism, Euro-American coloniality, and white supremacy. While it incorporated new cultures, knowledges, and bodies, it did so in a way that produced new means of exclusion in the service of U.S. empire. The state – by way of the university – was

able to reconstitute its pedagogy through the “distribution [of] recognition and legitimacy” (Ferguson, 2012: 22). It transformed its power in order to “incorporate formerly marginalized and excluded subjects and societies, an ability signified through the extension of recognition and sovereignty for people who spent much of their histories under the colonial yoke”, and an extension of recognition and rights for people who had hitherto been marginalized from citizenship through processes of racial exclusion. In effect, “the modern idea of empire and the modern idea of difference” (Ferguson, 2012: 24) coalesced into an ideological project that entangled “the management of the international ... with the management of diversity” (ibid.). The “interdisciplines”, especially area studies, American studies, and, later, Black studies, were essential to the efforts by the United States to refashion itself as anticolonial and antiracist in order to legitimate itself as the world leader and to absorb heterogeneity.

The westernized university plays a fundamental role in the maintenance of the state as the institution by which national values are cultivated, stored, and reproduced. Further, it serves a political function, operating in relationship to the state, which is dedicated to maintaining the interests of empire “over and against various communities which exist in this country that are committed to radical change” (McWorter, 1969: 63). With the rise of the United States after World War II came the necessity to develop an epistemic practice that demanded consolidation of knowledges from different fields of study as interdisciplines. This was because,

The interdisciplines were an ensemble of institutions and techniques that offered positivities to populations and constituencies that had been denied institutional claim to agency. The interdisciplines connoted a new form of biopower organized around the affirmation, recognition, and legitimacy of minoritized life.

(Ferguson, 2012: 13)

This was in response to the changing demands of post-World War II and postcolonial formations.

The westernized university became the space in which demands for the reformulation of epistemological and cultural representation converged with the capitalist-imperialist interest in difference. It provided the means by which state and capital developed its “methods of representation and regulation”. This is especially true in the context of the 1960s and 1970s, during which “[n]ational liberation, civil rights, and neocolonialism [came to] be understood as part of a larger social context that proclaimed the command of a new mode of power, a mode that was composed of power’s new techniques of management, especially around internationalism and minority difference, as well as its insinuation into political agency. This period inaugurated a new intentionality in the university that, as an instrumentality of state and empire, needed to locate, “know”, accommodate, and affirm difference so that it could simultaneously legitimate and depoliticize it. American studies and area studies institutionalized the historical

imperatives of U.S. power to manage international and sociopolitical difference (ibid.: 25–27) through the inscription of their new knowledge into the pedagogy of U.S. state and empire.

American studies

The position of the United States as the new superpower at the conjuncture of World War II and the Cold War created the conditions for the development of American studies. Nikhil Pal Singh (1998: 488) argues that: “The ideological framework of the cold war ... creat[ed] a new understanding of American universalism that tied together a celebration of America’s pluralism and political exceptionalism with the fate of the ‘the West’ as a whole.” Throughout the 1940s, as the United States became more important economically, politically, and militarily in the world-system, there arose a need to narrate the role of American society in Western Civilization. As the U.S. ascended to the status of world power, nation, identity, and culture came to constitute the basis of a powerful state ideology that

powerfully reinforced existing tendencies toward cultural nationalism, gave great prominence to the ideological dimension of American identity (that is, to the ideas and values for which the nation stand for), and forged a link between the democratic ideology and the idea of culture that became central to the American [s]tudies approach.

(Gleason, 1984: 345)

A peculiarly U.S. brand of democracy became identified with the defence and preservation of Western civilization. The democratic ideal became a foundational aspect of Americanness. It was the *ideology* of democracy – not the practice – that the United States came to represent. As an abstract ideal, democracy became the essential component of national culture (Gleason, 1984). The patently undemocratic reality of postwar U.S. society did not interfere with this narrative of democracy as endemic in American culture. “American culture” became abstracted from material and structural realities, including inequality, racism, and capitalist exploitation, and came to be understood as the way in which the American people existed in the world – in other words, as the “American way of life”. The collapsing of “democracy” into “America”, and “culture” into “way of life”, provided the basis for the development and organization of American studies that paved the way for the institutional form of Black studies.

The casting of democracy in cultural rather than structural terms negated an effective critique of the racialized, classed, and gendered materialities of the United States. Thus, the Marxist intellectual tradition was irrelevant as a counter to this narration of the project of democracy insofar as the latter was wholly abstracted from the structural features of U.S. economy and society. In other words, “Popular front and cold war ‘Americanism’ ... created the special conditions that had blocked the development of an American Marxist” tradition (Shank, 1997: 96). The “nation”

came to operate metonymically for American “culture” and “civilization”. This became reflected in the creation of the first American Civilization departments that presaged American studies. These departments came about because the study of American culture could not be accomplished by a single discipline, and thus required a move to interdisciplinarity. As Gleason (1984: 354) explains, “... understanding the national culture holistically is the task Americanists have always set for themselves ... [it is] the implicit (and sometimes explicit) premise of the American [s]Studies approach ...” The emphasis on culture was integral to the maintenance of the status of American studies as a discipline; even as American studies began to centralize social science methodology over more humanistic approaches, anthropologically based notions of culture remained foundational to the study of “America”. Culturalism in the United States came to inhere in ideological notions of nationalism that tended to be abstracted from historical material realities. The study of culture in this way required little attention to structural power relations. Epistemologically, culturalism came to constitute the ways that Americans understood themselves and their relations to society. Accordingly, such “[s]tudies of culture too far removed from studies of social structure” have left us unable to fully explain the world in which we live (Lipsitz, 1995: 371).

New Black and ethnic studies programmes that entered the academy in the late 1960s and 1970s inherited the interdisciplinary approach from American studies that had become “high pedagogical fashion, but [was] more of a slogan than a serious endeavor” (Marx, 1979: 400). Black studies began to assert forms of cultural politics characterized by Eric Hobsbawm (1996) as essentially assertions of particularistic nationalisms in claims by groups to their right to self-determination. In making these claims, many aspects of American studies came to be reproduced in Black studies. The American studies project was conceived to describe, construct – and later critique – a particular American culture and civilization (i.e. national self-determination) vis-à-vis other “great” civilizations in order to provide a scholarly basis for American empire. Similarly, Black studies employed approaches of American studies, specifically those that mobilized the use of history, literature, and culture to articulate “difference” and cultural particularity in their efforts to challenge white supremacy and Eurocentrism and to assert their right to self-determination.

Area studies

Area studies emerged in the 1950s as the intellectual arm of the Cold War, as “part of the struggle for World hegemony against Communist states” (Paik, 2013: 4), and in response to the emergence of the United States as a global political and economic superpower. Even after a respecification of area studies under a new Higher Education Act in 1968 in the face of increasing criticism of the ethnocentrism and sociopolitical agenda of the field, it continued to be bound up with the imperialist agenda of the American state (ibid.) This has much to do with the fact that it was inaugurated to support the global demands of the U.S. imperial state and its

efforts to secure and expand U.S. power (Spivak, 2003). As Mimi White and James Schwoch (2006: 11) assert,

World War II saw, particularly in the USA ... an incredible state mobilization of cultural analysis, most prominent for the American case ... in the restructuring of universities themselves. This led, particularly in the USA, to the postwar rise of area studies programs ... During the Cold War era, many of these USA area studies programs would become politicized in the service of a national security state, most notably through the influence of research funding.

In the era of decolonization and international bipolarity, area studies took on the role that anthropology occupied in the era of direct colonial administration (Wallerstein, 1997). The Cold War influenced the types of knowledge that would be sought about strategic areas in the decolonizing world in order to conscript them into the orbit of U.S. empire. Hans Morgenthau confirmed that “[it is not] an accident that the areas around which area studies are centered are generally defined in terms which coincide with the areas of political interest” (cited in ibid.: 207). Built upon the “intellectual, material, and racial pillars” (ibid.) of U.S. national politics, area studies was officially institutionalized in 1958 through the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) and Title VI. A response to the Soviet Union’s launching of Sputnik, the Act aimed to address the perceived U.S. educational weakness, and to educate citizens in science, language, and areas studies in order to surpass the Soviet Union in technological capability and international influence (Kuntz, 2003).

Additionally, “to meet the demands of war, scholars of diverse disciplines *were forced* to pool their knowledge [of many areas of the globe which had been inadequately studied] in frantic attempts to advise administrators and policy makers” (Spivak, 1998: 809). This formalization of the “material and political relationship between area studies and the state” (Schueller, 2007: 44) was bound up in the anti-communist and culturalist ethos of the immediate postwar period. Marxist analysis – which emphasizes class difference, critiques nationalism as an ideology that produces distortions both in scholarship and in reality, and asserts the role of relations of production and political control in specifying “third worldliness” – had no place in area studies because it was patently antithetical to its project and methodology. Inasmuch as Marxist scholarship highlighted conflict, heterogeneity, resistance, and change (Prakash, 2000), it was fundamentally incompatible with area studies. The possibility of radical scholarship was severely circumscribed, underscoring the inscription of area studies in the anticommunist, Cold War politics of the U.S. state.

As an interdiscipline, area studies was epistemologically grounded in the logics of U.S. empire, locating theory in the Global North and the objects of study – those to be represented – in the Global South (Grosfoguel, 2011). As such, “... areas to be studied/conquered are ‘out there,’ never within the United States ... [a]rea studies in U.S. academic settings were federally funded and conceived as having a political project in the service of U.S. geopolitical interests ...”. Area studies maintained a

particular “epistemic privilege” by asserting itself as observer and the Third World as the object to be observed. Mohanty concurs: “The focus on [area studies] implies that it exists outside the U.S. nation-state ... [I]ssues are based on spatial/geographical and temporal/historical categories located elsewhere. Distance from ‘home’ is fundamental to the definition ...” (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006; Mohanty, 2002: 519–520). Area studies scholars reproduced the investments and ideologies of the U.S. state in the westernized university by representing “others” as culturally relative and nationally specified. The discovery of new histories and cultures, revealed through “reality on the ground”, was made possible by essential understandings of the nation in terms of the culture concept. Like American studies, area studies emphasized culture and the nation through their “depiction of vibrant realities [that] fell in line with nationalist celebrations” (Prakash, 2000: 172).

Area studies initiated a political and academic response in the face of decolonization, anticolonialism, and struggles against neocolonialism. Paradigms were established “that worked in the logic of empire: to contain or direct anticolonial movements and, later, to influence African independent states” (Pierre, 2013: 190). Through area studies, the westernized university developed and constructed knowledge about newly decolonized countries of strategic importance that conscripted them into various liberal discourses such as liberal rights, development, and modernization, and ordered them hierarchically based on their level of compliance. It is no coincidence, for instance, that African studies programmes proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s just as African development was ascending as a national policy issue. Area studies combined the social scientific focus on development with humanities and culture-oriented discourses of modernization. Such epistemology (re)produced the United States as model and benefactor, and, as such, rationalized the latter’s intervention in strategic areas on behalf of development and modernity. In this way, area studies became an arm of neocolonialism that influenced key foreign policy considerations, including which countries would receive aid and which would be invaded; the level of democracy or authoritarianism that would be accepted; and how Third World populations would be disciplined, managed, and/or accommodated.

By 1968, area studies had come under heavy scrutiny and critique due to its ethnocentrism, complicity with the Cold War, and its problematic assertions of modernization theory and its “three worlds” division (Wallerstein, 1997). However, the framework had been set for fields of study that both institutionalized state pedagogy and informed the ways in which the state ought to accommodate difference. As Black studies became absorbed into the pedagogy of the state by way of the westernized university, it aided in the reconstitution of capital based on new forms of governmentality and exclusion through cultural specifications. The logics of modernization and development that circulated in area studies became transferred to Black studies through their investment in historicism and the privileging of history; through civilization narratives and the privileging of literary and cultural studies; and through cultural explanations of deviance and pathology and the privileging of structural-functionalist sociology. The result was the production of Black studies

specialists whose expertise and production of knowledge served the interests of the state and its engagement with notions of difference that became reduced to specifications of cultural condition.

The institutional formation of Black studies

Community activism, Pan-Africanism (Drake, 1984), and student demands for more relevant education were responsible for the introduction of Black studies into the westernized university. Revolutionary cultural nationalism, the movement it supported, its tendency, and its ideology – in other words, its “intellectual spirit” – motivated the demand for Black studies programmes (Cruse, 1969). Despite its community and activist roots, “university administrators were determined to reshape [Black studies] into a purely academic phenomenon” (Drake, 1984: 228). The university was largely successful through its deployment of “networks of power ... [that] work[ed] through and with minority difference and culture ... to redirect originally insurgent formations and deliver them into the normative ideals and protocols of state, capital, and academy” (Ferguson, 2012: 8). As the number of programmes began to shrink considerably – from about 500 in 1971 to about 225 in 1984 – the survival of Black studies programmes came to rest on their ability to successfully perform a purely academic function. With its move away from counterhegemonic struggle and activism, Black studies succumbed to the “institutionalizing ethos”, and became part of the “imperial tendency” of the U.S. state to co-opt, manage, and ultimately undermine oppositional tendencies (Colón, 1984; Drake, 1984; Ferguson, 2012). Black studies was to be an intellectually valid, educationally responsible, and socially constructive project, which, like American studies and area studies, demanded little attention to class:

While overall the movement was positive, particularly in its critique of white supremacy, the movement’s blind spot with regard to class, and specifically, working-class issues, subjected the movement to subversion by pro-corporate forces ... the blind spot to class served to increasingly isolate and marginalize the black studies movement ...

(Fletcher, 1983: 159)

Relatedly, Manning Marable argued that the majority of Black studies programmes rejected political economy and public policy to focus on arts and humanities, creating an imbalance between literary and cultural studies and structural critique (Gates and Marable, 1983). Thus, the formalization of Black studies instantiated a move away from class and community.

Area studies provided the basis for a new form of governmentality that inhered in liberal inclusion instead of racist foreclosure and conscious and unconscious “ignorance”. It set the precedent for racially specific studies to become sites for the management of difference. Area studies specialists became essential to the formulation of policies and practices adopted by the U.S. state in strategic areas of global

governance. Black studies scholars, on the other hand, were largely irrelevant to efforts aimed at the implementation of policies that impacted the material realities of Black people. According to St. Clair Drake, Black studies scholars “did not ... have a strong impact in areas not directly related to teaching and research” (Drake, 1984: 236). Black studies did, however, provide an understanding of how Black people should be managed by the state – namely, through discourses of multicultural rights that asserted equality in terms of cultural recognition. As Schueller (2007: 52) argues, “This severance of race from rights across a broad sociopolitical spectrum ... made it possible for multiculturalism ... to simply represent politics of cultural recognition without recognition of equal social reward or redistributive justice”. Stated differently, redistribution became extricated from cultural recognition in demands for self-determination. The emphasis on abstract representation ultimately allowed the westernized university, the state, and capital to shore up their power, because “the margins” and the “periphery” came to be understood as sites of cultural empowerment and contestation. The goal was to “develop cultural strategies that make a difference” (Hall, 1992: 107). The accommodation of difference, first through area studies, then through Black studies, allowed the U.S. state to acquire knowledge so that it could adequately conscript those occupying the margins into its imperial project. Through its enunciations of culturally coded Blackness, Black studies became self-disciplining as a prerequisite for its institutionalization. Moreover, like area studies, Black studies became an instrumentality for the management of radical and potentially revolutionary movements, thereby helping the state, capital, and empire to rearticulate itself through incorporation, absorption, and regulation.

As was the case with area studies, Black studies was an “attempt to create a systematic body of knowledge and experience based on the history” (Colón, 1984: 268) of a group that had previously been excluded from academic study. Both area studies and Black studies had the impact of inserting into the westernized university, especially predominately white institutions, research and teaching in areas that had been considered outside of the purview of civilization. In order to facilitate imperial expansion in the postwar moment in which the majority of the world was contesting race-based forms of coloniality, the “American” creed had to be expanded beyond the “cultural values of the Anglo-American tradition” so that “others” could be more easily accommodated. Instead of conscripting racialized and colonized subjects into a model that refused to recognize them, through the university the U.S. state inaugurated programmes of research and scholarship that made their experiences, histories, and cultures constitutive of imperial expansion. One such example was the funding of African student exchange programmes throughout the 1960s with monies appropriated under the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (commonly known as the Smith-Mundt Act) – passed to institutionalize U.S. cultural and informational programming as a peacetime technology of foreign policy – and from the sale of war surplus materials abroad. These students were closely supervised by the Department of State under the auspices of the Institute of International Education (African Studies Association, 1961: 1–3).

Another example is the intervention of the Ford Foundation in the formation of Black Studies programmes to ensure that they were geared towards solving the problems of racial exclusion and racial integration, but were not tightly bound to Black Power ideologies and did not exacerbate racially inflected structural crises on campuses or in Black communities (Rooks, 2006: 15–30). The accumulation of knowledge became the means by which the state and the university could monitor and influence the direction of potentially revolutionary movements. Black studies became a site of surveillance and discipline to ensure that, eventually, demands for material redistribution would collapse into demands for cultural recognition.

With the focus on difference and cultural politics, the “margins” came to be incorporated into the “centre”, and the “periphery” came to be incorporated into the “core” of global capital, while both the “margins” and the “periphery” effectively maintained their subordinate status. As the site of struggle shifted to the *meaning* of difference and to demands for representation and recognition of cultural identities in society, the focus of Black studies necessarily shifted to the politicization of culture, to the development of new identities, and to contesting the cultural hegemony of the “mainstream”. With domination culturally specified, demands for change in and reconfiguration of relations of power came to rest on efforts aimed at the deployment of a politics of difference that would place Blackness on an equal footing with white cultural forms. The state was able to accommodate these demands by shifting to a more open, inclusive, and accommodating “disposition of power” (Ferguson, 2012) that was effective without compromising its capitalist and imperialist agenda. While increasingly worse off in material terms given the ascent of neoliberalism, Black people came to be recognized and represented in popular culture and popular discourse, where they could be adequately policed, regulated, and commodified. Through collaboration between the state and the westernized university, culturalized identity politics came to be recognized as the only acceptable articulation of Black struggle and contestation.

American studies provided the grammar for the conflation of Black studies with the interdisciplinary study of culture. Fletcher (1983: 159) asserts, “... black studies in the sixties ... focused on the national or ‘ethnic’ feature of the African American freedom struggle. Culture was prominent, but so too was a nonclass view of African American experience”. The cultural specifications of Blackness readily accommodated the transition to African diaspora studies as the 1980s and 1990s inaugurated concerns about globalization and transnationalism. Such specification created the conditions for African diaspora studies to further distance itself from the (Black) left, because, “[a]t a certain level, the Left, through its critique of empire, intersects with the foreign in being cast as unnational” (Schueller, 2007: 54). Diaspora deterritorialized, relativized, and abstracted Blackness in a way that seriously hampered a structural critique of power. Blackness was delinked from the nation-state and its historical specificity and was asserted as a hybrid, transcultural phenomenon, so the location-specific materialities of dispossession and domination that produced and reinscribed Blackness went largely uncontested. As international linkages became culturally specified and divorced from political and economic realities, possibilities

offered up by variations of socialism and communism that "reache[d] out to all oppressed colonial subjects ... [and] enabled many different people to identify with other oppressed peoples and to reject patriotism and national identity" were negated (Kelley, 2004: 43). Race became essentialized in globalized relations of representation (Hall, 1996) and the possibilities of international alliances against capitalist oppression were marginalized.

Conclusion

Engagement with global political economy and radical critique is essential to decolonial praxis. Manning Marable (1983) argued that if Black studies was to remain an important interdisciplinary field, it had to continually interpret and understand socioeconomic and global forces that were rapidly restructuring the life chances of Black people throughout the world. However, with the exception of its engagement in anti-apartheid movements, Black studies continued to refuse consideration of the structural and material effects of "global policies" while asserting Black transnationality through a culturally specified diaspora analytic. In the tradition of American studies and area studies, Black studies became conscripted as the academic arm of U.S. imperial multiculturalism by specifying transnational Blackness as a culturalized trope while ignoring critical engagement with the material conditions of racialized abjection. In the final analysis, the integration of the Black into the global axial division of labour is the necessary condition of capitalist accumulation. It is only through structural and antisystemic modes of critique that expose the material conditions of Blackness that decolonial challenge can be mounted by those racialized as Black in a manner that resists reinscription into the statist project of global capital.

Note

- 1 Black studies is used here as a metonym for the entire (inter)disciplinary project, starting in the 1960s, that came to be known variously as Africana studies, African-American studies, African and African American studies, Africology, Pan-African studies, and Black new world studies. While I acknowledge that there are politics and ideologies associated with the naming of these programmes, departments, and centres, I have chosen to use one iteration for the sake of convenience.

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6

BLACK FEMINIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO DECOLONIZING THE CURRICULUM

Francesca Sobande

Introduction

This chapter outlines how Black feminist thought critically contributes to decolonial efforts, both inside and outside of academic institutions. There is consideration of how digital and social media accelerates Black feminist conversations, content, as well as internationally coordinated efforts (Cooper *et al.*, 2017; Hull *et al.*, 2015; Jackson, 2016; Williams, 2015). In addressing these matters, it is not my intention to imply that the compelling contributions of Black feminists are solely a product of twenty-first century politics and online communication channels (Emejulu, 2016). On the contrary, there is recognition of the longstanding concerns and creativity of Black feminists. After all, as Baszile *et al.* (2016: xiii) assert: “Make no mistake about it, Black women have always been theorizing and organizing based on our experiences of the world”.

The development of Black feminism has involved building bridges and solidarity between the views and experiences of Black women and women of colour, such as individuals with African and Caribbean backgrounds, as well as those with heritage from other parts of the world, including the Global South (Hill Collins, 2000; Mirza, 1997; Spivak, 1988).

Consequently, this chapter particularly draws upon the seminal work of Black feminists and women of colour, who share a commitment to sustaining intersecting anti-racist and anti-sexist activities (Crenshaw, 2015).

Higher education institutions are now accessed by more “students who formerly had no way to pay for college (class), or students who historically faced discriminatory barriers to enrollment (race, gender, ethnicity or citizenship status, religion)” (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016: 2). However, despite changes to the makeup of student populations, academia remains steeped in exclusionary practices and processes (Ahmed, 2017), which Black feminism tackles. Many obstacles preventing