From Alterity to Hybridity: A Query of Double Consciousness

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Alterity, otherness, and hybridity have emerged as popular conceptual devices in contemporary educational discourse on multiculturalism. On the one hand, the dominant liberal democratic model of multicultural education endeavors to demystify the construction of alterity and otherness in order to call for a recognition and inclusion of the marginalized groups.[1] Although this model intends to acknowledge and promote cultural pluralism, it also tends to inscribe "alterity" or "otherness" as a monolithic group identity for people who are either marginalized or oppressed. "Invisibility" and "marginality" might accurately characterize the positionality of "others"; but such an overgeneralization and totalization of "others" appear to oversimplify the power structure within and beyond educational institutions.

On the other hand, the propagation of postcolonialist perspectives espoused by Arif Dirlik and Homi K. Bhabha acknowledge the colonized or marginalized people's agency in their encounter with the hegemonic forces. To Dirlik and Bhabha, oppression and resistance are mutually imbricated in the process of colonization. Thus, it follows that colonization results in cultural hybridization rather than wholesale cultural imperialism.[2] In the postcolonial era, the ongoing globalization heightens our awareness of the dynamic and interactive nature of cultural formation within the international communities. Consequently, hybridity embraces both anti-colonial and anti-essentialist strategies in confronting and challenging established hegemony. In effect, it is common for the marginalized people perceived as "others," to develop a "double consciousness" in the process of cultural hybridization, and to assume epistemic privileges in educational communities. However, the formation of hybridity in both contexts of colonialism and globalization is not based on reciprocal cultural interactions between the dominant and the subordinate groups. Often, only "the selected few" from the marginalized groups are allowed to participate in the project of cultural hybridization. These selected few have emerged as what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls "metropolitan hybridists" whose diasporic location distances them from the other underprivileged subjugated people.[3] Also, the dominant group's undiminished cultural hegemony indeed impedes the hybridization among varied subordinate groups. Thus, it is uncertain whether all marginalized people are able to assume unqualified epistemic privileges in critiquing dominant groups' extensive hegemonic forces that interpellate diverse subaltern groups in varied ways. In other words, the formation of one's "double consciousness," to a certain degree, is subject to external political, economic, and cultural forces. It is unclear how cultural hybridization can entail a radical departure from cultural assimilation in the colonial and postcolonial contexts.

The main purpose of this essay is to inquire into the contentious and asymmetric relationships between alterity and hybridity within the context of multicultural education movement. I first explore varied mystification and demystification of

alterity, otherness, and hybridity, with emphasis on the dialectic interplay between the racialization and diversification of Asians and Asian Americans. I argue that multicultural education as a process of decolonization must go beyond the center-periphery framework. More specifically, multicultural education cannot focus exclusively on decentering what Spivak terms "the great macrostructural dominant group."[4] Instead, the demystification of alterity and hybridity must attend and attest to the in-betweenness of diverse subordinate groups. Next, I examine the merits of the inherent epistemic privilege of W.E.B. DuBois's conception of "double consciousness" in defining, conceptualizing, and implementing multicultural education. I argue that cultural hybrids must, metaphorically speaking, "double" their double-consciousness by questioning the aims and consequences of the construction of cultural hybridity in the age of globalization.

MYSTIFICATION AND DEMYSTIFICATION OF ALTERITY AND HYBRIDITY

The construction and consumption of alterity and otherness have disciplinary effects on determining the marginalized and oppressed groups' educational experiences. Almost a century ago, DuBois posed the confounding question, "How does it feel to be a problem?" in *Souls of Black Folks.*[5] A century later, "black folks" are still perceived as a problem in the United States and beyond. Even though other ethnic minority groups, such as Irish Americans, Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, and recently Arab Americans, have been perceived as "a problem" in varied historical contexts, the perpetuation of black folks as a problem deserve multicultural educators' attention. The dilemma is especially troublesome since other ethnic immigrant groups such as Asian Americans have emerged as "a solution" to racism.[6] It is not surprising that Dinesh D'Souza representing "model minority" or even "honorary white," is eager to pronounce that the oppression of African Americans resulted from the collapse of their own civilization rather than racism.[7]

Undoubtedly, the perception of black folks as "a problem" is a deliberate effort to justify racial oppression in the United States. Frantz Fanon points out that the colonizers are able to impose intolerable "alterity" and "otherness" onto the colonized people.[8] In addition to military and economic oppression, the imposed alterity leads to distorted individual and collective identity of the colonized people. Following Fanon's thought, Charles Taylor argues that the marginalized people's "first task ought to be to purge themselves of this imposed and destructive identity."[9] But, does the demystification of alterity and otherness eventually lead to a due recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity? To Taylor, the formation of one's individual identity depends upon one's dialogical relations with others. In order to ensure a positive formation of one's identity, Taylor endorses "a politics of universalism, emphasizing the equal dignity of all citizens, and the content of this politics has been the equalization of rights and entitlements."[10] The procedural dimension of "equalization of rights and entitlements" is the basis of substantive protection of individuals' rights to be nourished by the marginalized cultures in order to fulfill their human potential and to flourish. Within this liberal framework, it is logical and desirable to extend equal individual human rights to the recognition of equal worth of all cultures. To a large extent, the elevation of "the margainalized

groups" to equal status with the dominant group(s) is simply an instrument to facilitate the due recognition of all individuals regardless of their group affinity and identity. In other words, the dominant liberal democratic model of multicultural education stresses equal representation and recognition of individuals rather than oppressed groups.

However, such liberal democratic model of multicultural education is problematic. First, Taylor's theory of "recognition" is similar to John Rawls's argument that rational human beings have moral capacity to wear "the veil of ignorance" in order to recognize one's and the other's "original position" that reveals equal rights and entitlements for all human beings.[11] To Rawls, seeing "differences" could facilitate a justification of social oppression, whereas unseeing "differences" facilitates the pursuit of justice. To Taylor, the politics of recognition is to see through differences in order to attain a due recognition of fundamental human equality. However, differences are not necessarily "given." Rather, "differences" are socially constructed and institutionalized, supported by power structure, resources, and rewards. The fictional "original position" requires one's moral imagination and understanding. Wearing "the veil of ignorance" does not necessarily facilitate a contextual understanding of how the construction of "differences" supports and justifies the dominant group's privilege and the marginalized groups' plight. In other words, the reification of "the veil of ignorance" devalues the marginalized groups' lived experiences and discourages the dominant group's "learning to learn from below."[12] Second, while the dominant group can easily impose a generalized "alterity" onto all the marginalized groups, differences among the marginalized groups are discernable and contribute differently to oppressive systems, simultaneously sustaining or subverting the hegemony. To be blind to such differences is to obstruct our understanding of the operation of the oppressive systems in their totality. Hence, Rawls's "veil of ignorance" is not conducive for all marginalized groups "to seek situational unity" in the liberation movement.[13] In what follows, I examine how the construction of Asians and Asian Americans strongly demonstrates the need to attend to the differences among marginalized groups.

Western conceptualization of Asians and Asian Americans is situated in the context of the continuous globalization ensuing from Euro-American hegemony. To a large extent, globalization has entailed a sort of "space-time compression" and "a mutual re-organization of the global and the local."[14] On the one hand, globalization is conducive to fostering our appreciation of human cultural diversity. On the other hand, globalization sustains rather than challenges Euro-American cultural hegemony. Therefore, globalization provides a useful focal point from which educators can examine the multicultural landscape of education in the new millennium. In the United States there has been an undiminished effort to "homogenize" and "racialize" the heterogeneous populations of Asians and Asian Americans as imported "foreigners." While Asians in America may find the label of "foreigners" acceptable, Asian Americans as "forever foreigners" cannot help but lament being subject to eternal xenophobic gaze. It is not surprising that in the film *Joy Luck Club*, a Chinese American woman, in confronting racial prejudice against Asians during the Viet Nam War, asserted that "But, I am an American!" implying only non-Americans

deserve racial discrimination. In his attempt to invert such binary accounts of the natives vs. the foreigners, Gary Y. Okihiro claims that Asians did not come to America; rather Americans went to Asia.[15] In the same vein of thought, David Palumbo-Liu points out that there has been a double movement: "imagining a set of possible modes of introjecting Asians into America, and projecting onto East Asia a set of possible re-articulations of 'Western presence.'"[16] Thus, a critical inquiry into the identity formation of Asians and Asian Americans must be situated in the context of massive flows of transmigration and incursions of the United States. across the Pacific. The dynamic of Asian's implacements and dis-placements (roots/uproots) in the United States plays a key role in shaping the heterogeneous political and cultural identities of indigenous and immigrant minority students.

While the heterogeneity of Asians and Asian Americans is visible and notice-able, the racialization of Asians and Asian Americans has gradually become entrenched in the political as well as cultural arenas. Entrapped in the black/white binary racial system, Asians and Asian Americans are compelled to question: "Is yellow black or white?" Gary Y. Okihiro explains:

> Is yellow Black or White? Is a question of Asian American identity. Is yellow black or white is a question of Third World identity, or the relationship among people of color. Is yellow black or white is a question of American identity, or the nature of America's racial formation. Implicit within the question is a construct of American Society that defines race relations as bi-polar—between black and white—and that locates Asians (and American Indians and Latinos) somewhat along the divide between black and white.[17]

Within this binary racial system, "Asia," originally a geographical designator has been transformed into political, cultural, or even biological denominator demarcat-ing this diverse group of immigrants from the other groups. While Columbus discovered "India" in this continent, Asians and Asian Americans discovered their "colored" or "whitened" Asian identity outside Asia—a vast culturally diverse region.

Above all, the recent identification of Asians and Asian Americans as "model minorities" or "honorary whites" has functioned as an instrument to discipline other minority groups while simultaneously reinforcing the essential "otherness" of Asians and Asian Americans. In the academy, the establishment of "Asian Studies" and "Asian American Studies" especially contributes to the reinforcement of the construction of Asians and Asian Americans. To a large extent, the chameleon-like Asian identity is bound to be contextually variegated. While self-effacement has been essential to some Asian immigrants' "native" or "perceived" ethnicity, the deliberate eradication or confirmation of perceived "Asian identity" has proved to be a necessary strategy for survival in the process of cultural hybridization. Undoubtedly, Asians and Asian Americans are not passive recipients of not-yet-multicultural education. In fact, many Asians and Asian Americans have undertaken counter-hegemonic efforts to interpellate the dominant academic paradigm and promote cultural hybridity. However, it should be noted that Asians' and Asian Americans' positions in higher education often appear to be based on a strategic calculation to access both material and symbolic resources, which in turn enable them to manipulate racial hierarchy to their professional advantage.[18] To a certain

degree, the perceived academic success of Asians and Asian Americans in higher education does not necessarily demonstrate that they are "equal partners in cultural production;" rather they are simply given "the permission to narrate" as suggested by Edward Said.[19] At the same time, it is not rare for Asians and Asian Americans to enjoy an indulgence with what Rey Chow calls "self-subalternization" in order to gain authority and power in the academy and beyond.[20]

As I have mentioned, Asians and Asian Americans as a political or cultural constituency has functioned as "a buffer group" between black and white and between the natives and immigrants. Beyond the Civil Rights movement, a coalition within and between Asians/Asian Americans and the other ethnic minorities is a recurring issue in the United States and beyond. Recognizing the connections between what he called "brown people" in Vietnam, Muhammad Ali's declared that "I am not a Negro….I am Muhammad Ali. And I am an Asiatic black man."[21] Yet, contention and conflicts among and between Asians in America and Asian Americans are also prevalent at both individual and institutional levels. In fact, crossing the boundaries between Asians in America and Asian Americans can be a futile effort in certain contexts. To illustrate: it is not uncommon for Asians in America to disapprove the "Americanization" of Asian Americans and Asian Americans to question the "authenticity" of Asians' ethnic identity. In short, Asian and Asian American identities are produced and recovered. The historicized Asian and Asian American identities implicitly indicate that while the marginalized groups have participated in the construction of their own fluid identities, they do not have total autonomy in shaping their own destiny.

The goal of multicultural education, to a certain degree, is beyond the negotiation of ethnic identities and resolution of ethnic conflicts. However, if the pursuit of social justice and human equality is the underlying ethical foundation of multicultural education, then educators must attend to the external forces and the individual and collective human agencies that shape identity formation. The postcolonial perspectives that stress differences and asymmetric power relationships among "others" are especially helpful in positioning academic discourses in ways that could actively promote continual dialogue across cultural and political boundaries and beyond established traditions. More specifically, according to Dirlik, the goal of postcolonialists "is to no less than abolish all distinctions between center and periphery as well as all other 'binarisms' that are allegedly a legacy of colonist way of thinking."[22] While it is helpful for educational institutions to focus on decolonizing sensibilities that preserve, cultivate, and expand the postcolonialist critique and resistance, multicultural educators also need to avoid both romanticization and normalization of postcolonial perspectives. Without sustaining continuous efforts to demystify the established hegemonic institutions and radical human reflectivity that entails auto-criticism, postcolonial cultural hybridization like globalization can be reminiscent of cultural assimilation embraced by Western imperialism. In other words, the hegemonic apparatuses are capable of shaping the perceptual lenses through which postcolonialists undertake their theorizing. Thus, Anne McClintock points out that the term "postcolonial" "metaphorically…marks history as a series of stages along an epochal road from 'the precolonial,' to 'the

colonial' to 'the postcolonial'—an unbidden, if disavowed, commitment to linear time and the idea of 'development,'" which still reflects Western cultural hegemony.[23] Similarly, Diana Brydon argues that "When postcolonial theorists embrace hybridity and heterogeneity as the characteristic postcolonial mode, some native writers in Canada resist what they see as a violating appropriation to insist on their ownership of their stories and their exclusive claim to an authenticity that should not be ventriloquized or parodied."[24]

All in all, the praxis of multicultural education must go beyond de-centering the dominant group(s). After all, omnipresence is the very nature of hegemonic apparatuses. Multicultural education as a process of decolonization cannot be confined within the binary system. Kwame Anthony Appiah points out that "if you postulate an either-or choice between Africa and the West, there is no place for you in the real world of politics, and your home must be the otherworldy, the monastic retreat."[25] In the meantime, the multicultural education movement must not foster a fixation of hybridity as the sole key to resist or to re-construct hegemonic cultural institutions. In the next section, I attempt to explicate how "doubling" DuBois's conception of "double consciousness" can be helpful for educators to embrace such self-reflectivity in the multicultural education movement.

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS: REVISITED

In the post-Civil Rights movement era, DuBois's conception of "double consciousness" still sheds significant light on our understanding of the multicultural education movement. According to DuBois,

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him to true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[26]

As discussed above, DuBois's conception of "double consciousness" emphasizes that the formation of self-perception and collective racial identity is historically situated. Furthermore, duality of consciousness appears to indicate a fragmented psychic space where marginalized and subjugated people are able to resist and re-appropriate hegemonic apparatuses, such as education and laws.

Stuart Hall points out that cultural identity is "not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic transcendent 'law of origin.'"[27] In the same vein of thought, Paul Gilroy argues that African Americans' "true self-understanding" is entangled with a "true understanding" of their collective diasporic "racial identity," emerging "national" identity in the United States and boundary-less Pan-African or even universalist human identity. Thus, we can only locate the "black essence" through "routes" rather than "roots."[28]

To a certain degree, DuBois's conception of double consciousness appears to also reflect Hegelian dialectics. After all, the formation of double consciousness is

a dynamic and never ending process striving to remove varied "veils" that inhibit true self-understanding in order to re-integrate one's consciousness. However, the attainment of true self-understanding does not suggest a consummation of one's self identity. Nor could we "locate" or "fossilize" the essence of any group through the "routes" of identity formation, as suggested by Gilroy. Just as cultural hybridization "is not the 'free' oscillation between or among chosen identities," the "doubling" of one's consciousness cannot be "free" from critical awareness of one's vulnerability to and complicity in sustaining the surrounding social systems.[29] Hence, the formation of double consciousness is not simply a cognitive process of constructing self-knowledge or self-identity. Rather, DuBois's conception of double consciousness embraces a human reflectivity that questions self as a supreme being. Such reflectivity is a volitional human activity that could beget the "doubling" of one's double consciousness further. In short, the formation of double consciousness is a nexus of interconnected processes of generating and re-generating dialogical human relationships. Likewise, multicultural education is a commitment to facilitating an ongoing cultural dialogue and conversation about coexistence, reconciliation, and hybridization.

CONCLUSION

The changing demography of the United States has been the underlying motive for promoting multicultural education reforms that aim at equipping prospective citizens with necessary skills and knowledge to live in a culturally diverse society. At the same time, there have been some ongoing, fundamental, and persistent questions concerning the nature, aim, scope, content, and methods of multicultural education. In particular, there have been constant debates on the perplexing tension between pursuing cultural unity and preserving diverse cultural traditions. This either-or bipolar perceptual framework undermines our ability to recognize that the formation of "cultural unity" and "cultural diversity" is always historicized. Cornel West remarks:

> A sense of history is so very important to allow us to get beyond it. Without confronting it, there is very little chance. A sense of history would serve as the crucial pillar for the kind of public conversation that we need to have about race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.… The sense of history ought to be linked to an expansion of empathy…something called courage in the form of self-criticism. How do we get beyond simply having the courage of our convictions and actually have the courage to attack our convictions?[30]

Self-criticism is the key to demystifying imposed alterity, to unveiling the dynamic process of cultural hybridization and the formation of "double consciousness." In conclusion, Spivak's commitment to "learning to learn from below" does not sustain oppressive social hierarchy. Rather, "learning to learn from below" is to envision a society that has the courage to reconstruct its oppressive social hierarchy.[31] West argues that multicultural education must acknowledge "the 'distinctive cultural and political practices of oppressed people' without highlighting their marginality in such a way as to further marginalize them."[32] Clearly, multicultural education is not a celebration of alterity and or marginality. Nor should multicultural education endorse cultural hybridization without undertaking a critical and reflective inquiry into the formation of alterity and hybridity.

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3. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial,* ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2000).

4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can Subaltern Talk?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

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7. Dinesh D'Souza, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society* (New York : Free Press, 1995*)*.

8. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

9. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 26.

10. Ibid., 37.

11. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971).

12. Spivak, "The New Subaltern."

13. Ibid., 472.

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16. David Palumbo-Lui, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)

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19. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993) and Edward W. Said, "The Permission to Narrate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13 (3): 27-49.

20. Rey Chow, "'It's You, and Not Me': Domination and 'Othering,' in *Theorizing the Third World" American Feminist Thought at Century's End*: *A Reader*, ed. Linda S. Kauffman (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993).

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22. Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994): 329.

23. Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Postcolonialism," *Social Text* 31-32 (1992): 85.

24. Diana Brydon, "The White Inuit Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy," in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-colonialism and Post-modernism*, ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 195.

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29. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

30. Cornel West, "A Grand Tradition of Struggle," *English Journal* (July 2000): 43-44.

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