

SESSION 2

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WHITE STUDIES AND THE UNIVERSITY IN RUINS

To Vacate the Space or Dwell in the Ruins?

Yusef Proglar

Whatever the field of study or regional location, a course of study in most universities today will follow a similar trajectory by first identifying the great white European or American men of each discipline and then drilling their theories and practices as if they were universal, while ignoring or undermining most other forms of knowledge. Thus, in biology, DNA genetics dominates, having supplanted cell biology after Western scientists isolated the double helix, but while completely ignoring all forms of indigenous people's biological knowledge. Physics dwells on Isaac Newton's model, with a taste of Einstein's relativity and quantum mechanics for the adventurous, but neglecting the pre-Newtonian physics that enabled ancient architects to build magnificent structures. The staple of any math major today is calculus, with most other forms of mathematical knowledge, such as the Asian and African roots of algebra, carefully filtered through the modern Western worldview. Philosophy majors run the gamut of Western thinkers from Plato and Aristotle through Kant and Sartre, but with little more than a passing wave to the great Muslim philosophers like Ghazali, Ibn Rushd and Mulla Sadra, not to mention any other philosophical traditions. Psychology still builds on Freud, to the total exclusion of Buddhist wisdom. Western medicine is based on a mechanistic Cartesian model, with mastery of surgical and pharmaceutical technique being the ultimate goal, while the Ayurvedic, Yunani or various herbal methods are undermined or even ridiculed. Western chemistry strips away the self-edifying and spiritual aspects of its Islamic ancestor, alchemy. Sociology often begins with the work of Durkheim, while Weber is seeing a revival, but Ibn Khaldun receives little more than a historical footnote. Those studying economics will learn all about Adam Smith and John Maynard Keynes, and perhaps even Marx, before delving into Milton Friedman, neo-liberalism and the techniques of transnational capitalism, but rarely will any course of study consider the economic implications of the Islamic ban on usury, or the environmental economic ethos of many indigenous peoples.

In short, from history and political science to agriculture and health care, Western knowledge is the only knowledge. Cherokee scholar Ward Churchill aptly dubbed this amalgam of Western theory and method as "White Studies," which was his succinct way of identifying what might be more politely, but also more clumsily, referred to as a "Euro-American centric knowledge system." In any case, pursuing an education dominated by White Studies today means adhering to a set of theories and practices that were developed with Western modernity and spread by colonialism.

In addition to evaluating the content of the contemporary academic disciplines, one would have to consider the institutional structure of White Studies, which has enabled higher education to normalize narrow forms of Western knowledge. Higher education relies on a rigid compartmentalization and departmentalization of knowledge, developed in its present form during the 19th century and further modified during the Cold War era. Supposedly rooted in Western civilization by way of the Seven Greek Sciences, the Roman Quadrivium and the Enlightenment's Useful Arts, White Studies as presently configured in most modern universities assumes that the best way to control thought is to make sure that no one ever sees the big picture, how the Useful Arts fit together, how the Quadrivium meshes with the Seven Sciences, and so forth. Compartmentalization was perfected during the Manhattan Project, under the direction of General Leslie R. Groves, who later admitted that his main achievement was to compartmentalize, and thus control, the scientific research for the atomic bomb. During the Cold War, most universities in the West adopted this tactic. With the rather limited "independence" of all the formerly colonized nation states, local universities adopted or continued the compartmentalized structure of White Studies as their guiding and normative mode of thought and action.

Graduates with a degree in a White Studies academic discipline often use their limited sense of empowerment to reproduce Western modernity, sometimes finding solace in the pious fraud that Western knowledge is the sum total of human knowledge, or that since Asians and Africans may have had a hand in developing these sciences centuries ago they should continue to be enslaved by them now in their modern transmogrified forms. The resulting pathological condition, often referred to as being "educated," means that one takes Western science as the arbiter of truth, even in matters of religion. It means that in order to think one must do so through the lens of the modern disciplines. It means that unlimited technological progress and economic growth are the keys to human happiness. It means that quantity is more important than quality and that technique and efficiency must govern all aspects of a desacralized life. Those seeking guidance and prosperity through White Studies may find that the best they can attain is to keep their traditions in private and let the West do the rest in public. This is true for anyone attempting to live within or revive any number of traditional cultures, since most of the world is firmly ensconced today in a system created and maintained by the purveyors of White Studies.

I first came across Ward Churchill's article "White Studies" quite by accident when I was a graduate student in the early 1990s. It was in an obscure journal, now defunct, called *Integrated Education*, in a special issue on Native American education, published in the early 1980s. The title "White Studies" is in some ways misleading, because the first thing that people say is that this is reverse racism, but it was the subtitle that really attracted me, "the intellectual imperialism of American higher education." As someone who was winding his way through the maze of American higher education, I read the article, and also found a number of other articles in the same journal by other Native American scholars and activists with similar titles, each linking education to colonialism and imperialism. All this was done primarily from their perspective, but it resonated with me because, even though I was in higher education, I felt that I did not belong there. As a working class American, I felt that higher education was not speaking to my experiences

or my interests or my concerns or who I was as an individual, so I immediately took to these articles, with a sense of being a fellow marginalized person.

Ward Churchill observed that if you look through university catalogues you will find departments and programs in African Studies, Native American Studies, Latino Studies, Islamic Studies, South Asian Studies, and a whole host of thematic and area studies programs, except there is no White Studies. Why not? The reason why, according to Churchill, is because all higher education is White Studies. Therefore, it is an unnamed yet ubiquitous presence, and it is implicit in the entire system. Even in those ethnic studies programs can be found this dominant way of viewing the world, which Churchill calls succinctly, in the Native American tradition of parsimonious speech, White Studies, which also appears, perhaps intentionally, polemical and irreverent. His view of White Studies has been motivating the work for the past two years of the Multiworld Network and the Multiversity Group, but it also set me on a path towards critical self-discovery, and toward discovering indigenous perspectives on Western modernity.

However, I am resisting the urge to evaluate Churchill's article as a definitive statement on education and imperialism, or to judge it as a theoretically rigorous response to other academics who have written on the same topic. To me, it has very little to do with engaging in academic discourse. In fact, Ward Churchill and the other Native Americans who I read in that journal were not writing only as academics, they were also writing as activists. And so, like activists, although they can be intellectually grounded, the main reason for putting forth the writing is a call to action. It is not meant as an exercise in polite conversation between academics, but as a call to action, to do something. And so that is why it appears irreverent, too, because there is no need to join the polite parlor games that most academics play to maintain their status. It identifies the problem, succinctly and irreverently, as White Studies. And it was this tone of irreverence that also attracted me, because at the time I was a big fan of Malcolm X and he also used irreverence as a way to awaken people, to get them to see something that was wrong, and to open a call to action.

When faced with this regime of White Studies, one realizes that both the subject and the object of study will occur through the lens of what some have called the Eurocentric worldview, to use a phrase that might be more polite. All of the terms of reference, for ourselves as well as the world in which we live, are through this lens of White Studies. So, if we are all subject to the discourse of White Studies as we dwell in higher education, we do not have many choices. John Mohawk, a Native American scholar with whom I was fortunate to have studied as a graduate student, said that there are basically three options for colonized peoples, in terms of subjecthood to a colonial discourse. The first response is to become a good subject. A good subject means that you play by all the rules, you treat it with respect and reverence, and you do what you are supposed to do, you work within the hierarchy, you follow all the parameters, procedures and protocols of the system, and you are a good subject. The second response is to become a bad subject. A bad subject means that you do not really question the foundations of the system, of the discourse, but you merely engage in quibbling over its details, arguing and perhaps even trying to wrestle some control away of the discourse from those who established it, much

the way nationalists tried to wrestle control of the state away from the colonialists. But, the bad subjects cannot really change much, they can just gain control, or they complain, or they argue, but they do not really get at the root of the problem, they do not alter the terms of the discourse, and so they more or less perpetuate the same colonial system.

Before I mention Mohawk's third response to colonial subjecthood, I want to relate an anecdote. I recently had an interesting conversation with an up and coming Palestinian scholar, as she was preparing for travel to the US to attend a yearly mega-conference in cultural studies. She noted with some discomfort how it was in many ways insulting to participate in that whole scene, as the convener of the conference, and one of the current celebrities in the cultural studies circuit, was an ardent and proud Zionist. On top of that she noted the ongoing institutionalized paranoia ruling the US since 911, with much of it directed at Arabs and Muslims. I asked her why she bothered to go to such conferences, especially now that she was residing in the Arab World, and she replied that, no matter how bad it is, "we cannot vacate the space" of American academia. Some one has to become, she continued, "the next Edward Said," engaging the system from within. She was speaking as a bad subject, and without belittling the accomplishments of Palestinian scholars, it was beyond the realm of her comprehension that there may be a third option.

But there is a third option, to continue with John Mohawk's reasoning, and that is to become a non-subject, to abandon the discourse completely, to "vacate the space," if you will, to give up on it. Now, granted, this third option is very difficult to pursue, but it is none the less, at least in my view, a viable option that ought to be pursued. When I put this idea forward among academics, they usually jump down my throat, because they say that we should not, we cannot vacate the space, we have to continue in the dialog, we have to stay in the universities, we have to continue participating in the system, to become the next Edward Said, as it were, or the next Third World scholar who makes it big in American or European academia. I say to that, fine, maybe some academics can do that, but many of us cannot, first of all. Second of all, and more importantly, by staying the course and not vacating the space we are validating the system. We are in a sense paying allegiance by our very participation, by publishing in its journals, by teaching in its institutions, by sending our children to its schools, by seeking jobs and fame and fortune from within this system, we are supporting it, perpetuating it. So, vacating the space is a way to force the system to fold in on itself, by removing the diversity that it needs in order to be a legitimate academic system. We have the power to withhold that diversity, and to reveal the system for what it is, which is White Studies, for all to see.

Becoming a non-subject or vacating the space are not easy to do, and I am not saying that we all have to do that, and I will not chastise anybody for not doing that, but what I am saying is that they can and should be possible choices. After all, this is a call to action, to return to Ward Churchill's discussion of White Studies, and so it is not just an analysis. Certainly, we can analyze these ideas and drown them in further analysis, but in the end that is not what the ideas are intended for. There is not a corpus of literature from Ward Churchill, he has not made a career out of White Studies, there is no series of responses and clever rejoinders and replies, and while he might have updated the article once or twice, in my view it is basically a statement that came out of a particular experience, from

a particular moment of time, in which he said what he needed to say about it, and moved on to other projects, such as Native American land reclamation efforts, serving on crimes against humanity tribunals, and forming campaigns to free Leonard Peltier from a US federal prison. In other words, whatever Ward Churchill is doing now, we are still left with this challenge that he put forth. Like all activist scholarship, it is a challenge to do something. At the same time, if we no longer see the problem that he described as a problem that faces us, then we can ignore this call to action. However, if we see it as an ongoing problem, then we need to respond to that call to action. That is how I would see this work. I would take it out of the realm of polite academic discourse, and put it more into the realm of activism. Polite, or impolite, White Studies is a call to action for us all.

What kind of action? That is the question we all came to Penang to discuss. I am not going to lay out a five year plan here. I want to see what others think about this call to action, and discuss whether the problem of White Studies is even worth acting on. The participants in the Penang meeting have attended for a reason, presumably. One of those reasons is, I believe, that we all recognize something is amiss in the university system, something is amiss with social science curricula. So, if there is something amiss, then what is amiss and what do we want to do about it? All these great minds together, what are we going to do about it? And it is not as if we, or Ward Churchill or any one else, has suddenly discovered this problem. It has been happening, the system itself has now even recognized its own faults, its own uncertainties, its own contradictions, which means, in my mind, that this is an ideal time to act. There is a window of opportunity emerging from Western uncertainty, and this uncertainty has also been elucidated from within.

Before coming to Penang, I decided to read a couple of books that I thought sounded interesting. One of them was *The Uses of the University* by Clark Kerr, who was President Emeritus and former Chancellor and Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley. In *The Uses of the University*, which was first published in 1963, he actually calls the institution of which he was president a “multiversity,” the first chapter in the book is titled “The Idea of the Multiversity.” But to Clark Kerr it was not what we are talking about in the Multiworld Network or the Multiversity Group, it has nothing to do with the Third World or indigenous knowledge, or resurgence of anything outside of the West. Clark Kerr’s multiversity is primarily within the American system, and to him the multiversity is an institution that has lost its singular sense of purpose and it has lost its universality. Therefore, he believes that we should no longer call it a university, since it has become a multiversity.

Kerr suggested that the institution in which he was dwelling in the early 1960s had become a combination of the German research university, the American land grant college and the British liberal arts system, and within that amalgam there was a variety of often conflicting constituents. There was the US government, first of all, which at that time during the peak of the Cold War, was pouring money into American universities in order that they engage in Cold War related research. Unlike in Europe and other places, where they set up separate institutes for that task, in the US they pressed the universities into service. So, Kerr said, that is one clear constituent, and there is a lot of money coming out of there, and the universities have to pay attention to the people with the

money. However, there are also other constituents. The corporate world was beginning to make its mark in academia, and there were also the students, who are becoming more diverse and also becoming dissatisfied with the system (although he underestimated that dissatisfaction). So, he said that the university has multiple purposes and multiple constituents, and therefore we ought to call this institution a multiversity.

Ten years later, after all the student activism in the late 1960s, Kerr writes a follow up chapter to the initial book, coming now after the student revolts and admitting that he underestimated students, and then reconsidering those revolts and further reflecting on the state of the university. Eventually, it became a sort of thing for him to do. Every ten years, Harvard University Press asked Clark Kerr what he now thought about the university. And so in the early 80s, at the peak of Thatcherism and Reaganomics, he writes another chapter on the “failed reforms” of higher education, updating, reflecting still further, twenty years down the road. Then in the mid 90s, he adds three additional chapters focusing on the waning of the “golden age of the research university,” and discussing the “hard choices” of an era that has transitioned “from federal riches to increasing state poverty.” Now, Kerr is an old codger at this point, he has seen it all, and he is telling it like it is. Finally, just before he passed away, he adds one last chapter at the dawn of the Western millennium, in which he reflects on “the city of intellect in a century of the foxes,” alluding to Isaiah Berlin’s famous essay on the fox and the hedgehog, and concluding that while a few hedgehogs need to remain “to protect university autonomy and the public weal,” university presidents ought to adopt the tactics of the foxes. In any case, when you read through this book, the unavoidable conclusion, at least for me, is that there is nothing left called the university. It has become, in other words, uncertain. Clark Kerr’s 40 year story is one of uncertainty. What is the university, what is it supposed to do, where it is going? Whatever his conclusions or recommendations on the history and direction of the American university, it has clearly lost its academic edge and prestige.

Along side that, I also read *The University in Ruins* by Bill Readings, an Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Montreal, who tragically, and perhaps ironically, died in a plane crash in 1994 soon after completing the book. In *The University in Ruins*, also published by Harvard University Press, Readings suggests that the university, the Western university in general, has lost its purpose, and lost its focus. It went from being a place for those in pursuit of pure reason and the whole Kantian project, to the 19th century when it becomes a place of supporting the nation state, with the Humboltian university in Germany being the model for the modern national research university. Then, in the 20th century, Readings finds the decline of the national university and the emergence of what he calls the “university of excellence,” which is really a way of talking about what others have come to refer to as the university as a corporation.

Coming from a rather different perspective than Clark Kerr, Readings nailed the same problem down in the early 1990s, on the heels of Reaganomics and Thatcherism, before it had really become that painfully apparent, or before most other academics were willing to admit it, that the university was getting hijacked by corporations and the whole rule of business, with its economist oriented, accountant managed, bottom line monetary mentality, driven by “standards,” with “excellence” as its defining feature. The purpose

of the university was no longer the pursuit of pure reason, and it was no longer the edification of the nation state. The modern Western university has now evolved into the “university of excellence.” But, as Readings cogently points out, “excellence” is a vapid concept, with no referent. Universities can be excellent at anything, and that what is excellent to one person may not be so great for another, which means excellence has no meaning, no referent to it. At least the university of pure reason and the national university had points reference, there was a referential aspect to their existence. The university of excellence has no reference point, as Readings sees it, and I agree with him. Therefore, the Western university has lost its meaning and purpose. So, as Readings evocatively admits, we are left with the “university in ruins.”

However, as a dedicated university professor, he concludes that academics ought to learn to “dwell in the ruins,” and he puts forth a way to think about that, suggesting that the university can become a “community of dissensus,” and he raises a number of sophisticated and interesting points about cultural studies and the “post-historical university.” But, in the end, to me at least, Readings concurs with Kerr, that the Western university is lost, it has no clear purpose.

So I put it forth to you. As an institution plagued by White Studies, and as an institution in ruins, what are Third World peoples to do with the university? Should we wait out this period of uncertainty until the white man can get his act together again, and then follow him on his merry way? That seems to me to be the epitome of the colonized mind, or the “captive mind,” as Syed Hussein Alatas puts it. Perhaps this period of uncertainty is an opportunity to escape captivity, to move on. Or, is there any hope at all for continuing intellectual work in the university? Should we still be dwelling in the ruins? If so, then we ought to be discussing it as such, what to do in the ruins. Churchill and Readings, and even Clark Kerr, have offered some practical strategies for that, and there can likely be several other strategies.

On the other hand, if we want to vacate the space, to leave the university system altogether, then what? Where do we go and what do we do? Where do we pursue and develop knowledge? Where do we get together? Perhaps one of the last saving graces of the modern university is that it remains, for better or worse, a place that people can get together and think. But at the same time, there are cogent arguments, and movements afoot, toward vacating the space, “walking out” of the system, and seeking and developing other ways of being, other knowledges, other educations, and we ought to admire those movements, if we indeed choose to dwell in the ruins, and we ought to also help nurture those people who are vacating the various institutional spaces. So, inside outside or upside down, from the left or to the right, where is the university going, where are we going, what are we going to do with it? Any honest talk of curriculum reform and curriculum redesign has to deal with this institutional aspect, the fact of the university.

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DISCUSSION

Shao Lung: I have two questions which I put for the consideration of this audience.

1. What is the function of a self-described critical or left-leaning university in an age of high American imperialism, if you don't question the very basis of that imperialism?
2. If we are going to vacate or recapture the space, how are we going to finance this venture or how will we deal with the politics of financing our politics?

Yasmin: I am wondering why we are talking about education at university level only and not dealing with elementary level at all when the exact situation is faced at the elementary level too. The first step should be to work at the elementary level. We need to create models starting from the elementary level, where we have more control on our curricula. The second step is to examine the process by which learners acquire knowledge. Students are generally passive consumers of knowledge. We therefore need to make them critical consumers of knowledge. If we can start this process right at the beginning, perhaps when they reach university level, they will not blindly accept all the information and knowledge presented to them, but they will have questioning minds. We need therefore to change the process through which we expose our students to acquire knowledge. We have to develop their skills, especially of critical thinking. Thirdly we have to look at the self-concept aspect. If our children have a healthy self-concept, i.e. they know who they are, which communities they belong to and what their communities are doing, when they reach university level they will not have an inferiority complex.

Hassan (from U.K.): Ward Churchill proposes a strategy of using the route of inter-disciplinary approaches as a backdoor way to add colour to white studies. This article was written quite a few years ago and present circumstances may not justify this strategy. My experience in the U.K. where I was born and am presently studying, is that the social sciences, post World War II, have become more and more insecure in their approaches, their theories and their presumptions. Therefore, while maybe in some parts of the world the interdisciplinary approach may be valid, in other parts of the world a new strategy needs to be developed. Perhaps we need to ask the question, which strategy is relevant for which areas of the world rather than examining just one strategy for all.

Yusuf: Since Ward Churchill recommended it in 1981, interdisciplinarity has basically been hijacked by the corporate university, which sees students as consumers. That's what students have become today - simply consumers. The university is selling them a product, although I prefer to think that the product is the student i.e. the student is creating him/herself as a product and not that the student is buying a product by getting an education. Interdisciplinarity is a problematic concept in some contexts. If it has been hijacked by the corporates (Readings calls it the University of Excellence) in America and elsewhere, that might have rendered it a politically suspect strategy although it is certainly not because Ward Churchill recommended it. In fact it might be that because it was starting to catch on that it got hijacked. I would like to know from others about the state of the university in the third world. How relevant are the things that are going on in American, European or Japanese academia to what is going on in the rest of the academic

world - not in terms of replicating or escaping it, but in terms of how far behind we are. Is the 'University in Ruins' going to happen 20 years down the road in our part of the world?

Wasif: I find that the term activism is being used in the sense of what needs to be done within the university or within the academia. Noble as that is, I think the word activism should be used with reference to the victims of academia, the victims of all the experts, consultants, advisors, upon whom all these minds have descended. More especially it is in the course of the last 50 years work in the field of development that the need for activism is most urgent and acute. One of the obvious routes that one needs to choose is to regenerate and recapture the dignity and wisdom of knowledge that exists, and which has been degraded and vandalized by universities and formal academia. One great activist who recently died in Pakistan is Ishfaq Ahmad. He brought back the traditional storytellers, the elders, the poets, as valid public intellectuals and urged society to view them with respect and dignity. He believed that all the sources that have been made irrelevant and invisible by academia need to be restored. One aspect of activism is to challenge and delegitimize White Studies. This is not difficult to do. In fact, it has already been invalidated from within by a few good thinkers. The bigger challenge is what needs to be regenerated and brought back into the discourse and the sensibilities of our interaction.

Another aspect is what is to be done about the people who are suffering because of the experts of White Studies. How can people like myself, who for years have interacted as intermediaries, have gone into villages and communities and have annihilated and terrorized these people by calling them illiterate, undeveloped, useless etc., get ourselves activated so that we can roll back that annihilation and bring their role and presence back into the discussions on education that we are having. I don't think that individually any one of us has the skills or abilities to link to that level of diversity but how can forums like this become more diverse in actually engaging and inviting people like Ishfaq Ahmad to enlighten us and make us more aware of what the reality of non-White Studies actually is.

Shao Lung: Although people like Edward Said, Foucault etc. may have slain the beast of White Studies from within, they have now become the new dogmatism. Academics love this phrase of Foucault about power-knowledge because it only sustains their own privilege as gatekeepers or guardians of knowledge and therefore that gives them power over other people. So we still have a problem with the White Studies model because it still continues to produce. It may have been killed from within but it has become a zombie. It refuses to die and is still walking forward. So the problem is how do we kill the zombie.

Wasif: The silver bullet for me is to regenerate and to bring new discourse into the university and not to keep on trying to slay it from within. This is something which has escaped this entire institution for the last 300 years. One purpose of activism could be to engage those sources of knowledge to take it beyond Edward Said and Foucault and further invalidate, not just from a critique, but from a new body of knowledge. That

should be the level of activism. I feel that the critique of White Studies has been adequately done to a point where the next levels can be attained.

About finance: In Pakistan a few years ago a Centre of Philanthropy was hurriedly founded because of the primary fear that billions of rupees of unregulated financing of community charity goes on. This only goes to show that even poor people do charitable things, they do contribute, share etc. I think there is enough spirit of resources available amongst people to support and strengthen activism of this sort.

Anu: I want to say a few words on how we looked at this concept of curriculum of social sciences in my department of geography. I have a batch of about a dozen research students. I asked them to take a look at the syllabus that they are presently studying at post-graduate level and sieve out what they thought was not fitting in with what India needed to study. The students categorized the readings, and found that out of the 400 odd readings, $\frac{3}{4}$ were written in the West or were by Western authors. Secondly, in the models that were taught, even in subjects like agriculture, we were looking at land use patterns of Europe more than those in our part of the world. Similar was the case with theories and concepts, case studies etc. It became clear therefore that when students were given this kind of awareness they were immediately able to see things differently. Hence, if we can create an awareness of the problem at the student level, particularly at post-graduate level, it will eventually generate change.

The second issue discussed was how to change things. We ran into a road block here because the kind of resources that we need to reshape the syllabus into a form which is relevant to Third World countries are scarce. By resources I mean literature, field work, case studies etc. I suspect that it is not as scarce as that it is fragmentary. So putting these resources together would be another way of fighting the White Studies problem.

Thirdly, are universities in crisis in India? I would say that since the 1970s, universities in India have been on the road to decadence. However, they are questioning their relevance nowadays. So this is the right time to introduce the idea of redesigning syllabuses.

Finally, I am not very sure that we need to vacate the space. One needs to snowball at the space that one has and attract other individuals to ourselves. That snowballing will help to internalize and provide an energy model to eventually cause a shift.

To conclude, we need to look at 3 angles:

1. Student needs
2. Resource material available.
3. What the country would need to move ahead.

This is my answer to the challenge of White Studies.

Mariamamma (Univ. of Malaysia): I am presently a law teacher at the university. When I studied law I was taught only western jurisprudence. After I read White Studies, I realized that I needed to introduce change into the syllabus that was given to me. So

along with a colleague of mine we decided to modify the jurisprudence syllabus and to incorporate Malaysian and Islamic jurisprudence as well as make the students aware that there are other forms of jurisprudence apart from the Western theories. I agree that creating awareness among students is essential. To vacate the space is too radical or revolutionary for us and that is also not our style. I suggest that we first create awareness among the people. Secondly, we approach those in a position to make decisions, people in the ministry, people in university, those in a position to influence curricula, to make changes where necessary.

Farid Alatas: I agree with those who have said that enough has been said about this problem. The problem is that we talk too much and don't do enough. However, we should at least talk about this correctly. People often forget that before Edward said there were many others who also raised this problem. For example Tibawi spoke about orientalism in the early 1960s. In the 1920s and 1930s the Indian sociologist Binoy Kumar Sarkar made a distinction between orientalist-type indology and another type of indology which he thought was more accurate in terms of its understanding of Indian society. In the 19th c. there was Jose Vissar who drew up a plan of Philippino history and society intending to study it from a non-Spanish-centric point of view. So the critiques have been there and it is not necessary for us to repeat them although we can discuss them to educate our students and the public.

It is unnecessary to vacate the space. In many cases it would be irresponsible, especially for those in tertiary education where it is not difficult for us to make changes. In many countries, primary and secondary education are a matter of state policy so you have to get the Ministry of Education to approve changes and only then can you change the text books. But at the University level it is different. In most cases we have autonomy to change the syllabi and it is really upto the individual. So why don't we just do it? In my case, my colleagues and I have made changes and have taught courses along the lines of the critique of euro-centrism and orientalism in the social sciences. The fact is that not enough of people are doing it. I would like to therefore know from those present who are teaching in the universities, why you have not done it already and what obstacles you face.

Chiu: So far we are discussing practically upon a presumption or premise that we would like to take intellectual work as a site of struggle and activism. Intellectualism is what we know best, what we do best and that is what we want to struggle against. My problem with Ward Churchill is that after he wrote White Studies, he has not written anything else. So where is his activism and his relation with intellectualism. In what way is his kind of activism relevant to us. That is my problem of vacating the space. Just as we cannot pretend that we intellectuals will overnight become workers, the workers also cannot pretend they become intellectuals overnight. So let us not pretend to change our status and our identity.

Whether we have or do not have enough freedom in academics depends on whether we are serious enough in our job. By snowballing you somehow have a split personality. You are both inside and outside of the formal academy. Everybody calls you a professor but

only your students know what you are doing, Only the students know that while you pretend to teach them, you are actually ‘unlearning’ them. I am basically an entertainer because real education bores them. If I can entertain them, that’s a form of revenge and I have somehow already won the battle in some other way.

Thirdly, I still believe that intellectual work is a worthwhile exercise. But what worries me is Ward’s concept of the dubious use of White Studies because we have a lot of American academics or Japanese academics talking about their academic problems which they want us to sympathise with, but who are not willing to listen to our problem, namely that we have been a subject of study for decades. We study China and USSR as enemy studies. Sinology, translated in Chinese, is study of the western slave. But what is interesting is that now the Chinese themselves create their own sinology, i.e a zombie. So to kill the zombie it has to shoot at its own head and commit suicide because we are the zombies.

Vimbai: We are here to discuss how to participate in the creation of our own destiny instead of allowing it to be created by others. This is the real issue. The university was created by the British to serve the British interests. It was called ‘university’ because the concept of the university was that the whole world has one way of seeing things so they needed to teach our people to see things the way the British saw them. The concept of Multiversity is that there are several ways of seeing the same thing. What is universal is the thing, what is diverse are the ways of seeing it. However, in our curricula, even in the present-day African university, the African way of seeing things is missing. Through Multiversity, we must involve our people in the ability to read their destiny and then participate in changing it and recreating their own lives. These people may not have gone to school but their analysis of things is so pithy that it makes fools out of us. The ability to read the world does not necessarily come from books it comes from participating in reality or by involvement.

We also have distinguish between knowledge and information. The university that was left to us by the white man encouraged acquisition of information. You do not acquire knowledge. You create it. Knowledge is not a finished product. It is not a commodity. It is a process. If you keep on revisiting and reevaluating what you know today, you begin to see its value in humanization. So, while there is a lot of information around, real knowledge is what is behind the camera. The people who know what is behind the camera are those participating in the process, not those whose pictures are being taken.

There are three types of development: 1) Human development: i.e creating a human being with integrity, morality and who knows what it is to be human. Hence at the university we need subjects that develop the human being morally, spiritually, religiously so that you fear the commandments of God and respect life. We therefore need subjects or approaches that humanize. Even the computer and technologies can be used to humanize. 2) Economic development which benefits the people and not the kind which just creates wealth and then is used to destroy human beings. 3) Scientific development so that it can make technology that can humanize our world.

Claude: Is it easier to get white people out of your land or white people out of your head?

Vimbai: It is true that the white man has also entered our head. General Smith once said that ‘Africans will never rule themselves, not in a thousand years’, because the structures that he put into our societies to support white interests have been internalized by us and they have become our world view. That ghost is difficult to exorcise.

Vinay: I want to make two very brief observations. One is in response to the comments about Edward Said whose name has been mentioned several times in this discussion. We must keep in mind that Said had a number of limitations which are important for those who do critical work. Said was very clear in his political choices. He was often oblivious to other kinds of injustices and he had no interest, fundamentally, in the voice of the subaltern. Let us be clear about these things lest we try to fetishize Said as one who said the last word on this subject.

My second comment is with regard to Wasif’s story about the story teller. I agree with the inference that Wasif draws, namely. that these people are repositories of different kinds of wisdom that we are not in touch with, but it would be important to add a slight analytical edge to what this really means. By way of illustration I would point to a man who lives in Kentucky who is a rain maker i.e. a person who makes his living by going from one place to another which has been struck by draught. He is a man who is heavily in demand in a country where rationality is the last word. So he stands for the space of the non modern. We have been extremely reticent in our discussions so far, in drawing in those who stands in opposition to modernity i.e. the pre-modern, the non-modern, the a-modern.

Syed Arabi (from the Islamic University of Malaysia): I would like to look at two issues: one, the role of universities in general and two, the role of social science in particular. We have observed in our discussions the changing roles of universities. Universities must change from one age to another, or else they would become dinosaurs. In Malaysia, the role of universities is assigned by the stake holder i.e. the government, with a clear mandate, namely, that the university has to be relevant to society and it must produce skilled workers. The university is part of national development and part of the social integration of society. Since the government has invested very heavily in the universities to the tune of one billion operating costs alone, it demands a lot from the universities in terms of the returns. The returns may be intangible in terms of the extent to which it contributes to the well being of the country, but it is obvious in terms of providing skilled workers. So it is obvious that the university must pay heed to the demands of the stake holder if it is to continue receiving its patronage.

Social Science undoubtedly must make itself relevant but it must also fit in with the role assigned to the universities. So whatever we have discussed here about getting the white man outside, it must be clear to the stake holder that we are doing something which fits in with the role of the universities. Today for e.g. the stake holder imposes a demand that the percentage of science to liberal arts is 70/30. Govt. emphasis is today on the hard sciences - engineering, medicine etc. Social sciences come very poor in their overall

calculations. Already, we can see a dwindling presence of social science in the university and if social science does activities that the stake holder considers irrelevant it may be scrapped altogether.

The second question is to what extent do we have autonomy in changing the curriculum in our universities? We have already changed considerably. We now call it human sciences not social sciences. We can recommend texts, references, topics. But when we recommend changes we have to be able to convince the stake holder that these changes will make the curriculum relevant to society.

Thirdly, what is the role of research? We have talked a lot about making our curriculum relevant, but we have not talked about the benefits of research, the areas of research or the emphasis on research. How can we change our curriculum if we have not done adequate research. We will always continue to be dependent on Western scholars because they have done research. Their research is published in journals and books and we are forced to quote from them because we have not done enough original research ourselves in the areas that are relevant to us. So in the absence of that contribution we will always be dependent on the West for the ideas. Therefore we must move beyond curriculum into avenues of research.

Wasif: Much to my dismay, the term ‘vacate the space’ which I particularly liked, has got misused. For me, to vacate the space means to make this monolithic dehumanized form of knowledge centre, which we call universities, irrelevant or at least to bring the relevance down, demystify them. We cannot continue to look at universities as avenues where the change is critical to be able to change society, because in its very essence the institution does not have that function. So vacating the space, as far as I am concerned, is to make it irrelevant, to disengage with it, in order to get on with the process of recreation and regeneration.

Second, this entire concept of research and methodology and what is legitimate and acceptable knowledge and what is not, are all are tools of subjugation and hegemonisation. Why do I have to subject myself to a particular method and framework of research in order to understand and validate my own knowledge form? Why is my tradition, my understanding, my anecdotes, my history not considered a valid body of history and knowledge? So it’s not just a question of changing the curriculum or doing more research. It’s the entire frame work within which knowledge is considered acceptable which for me is flawed and pathological and within that framework this entire game of superiority is played out. So disengaging with that framework and vacating that space is a perfectly valid strategy. Further, to actually look at other sources of understanding and community interaction and regeneration is a valid option.

END

