

RADICAL TEACHER

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Mobilizing BIPOC Student Power against Liberalism at Soka University of America: A Collection of Voices

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We write as a collective of BIPOC undergraduate student organizers and professors dedicated to Black, Third World, and Indigenous liberation through feminist analysis at Soka University of America (SUA). We contend that SUA prominently epitomizes liberalism in its most counterrevolutionary form today. We highlight through a brief chronology of our communal, epistemic, and physical struggles against hegemonic power exercised by our Small Liberal Arts College (SLAC) the ways in which liberalism acts as counterrevolutionary ideology. We offer critical reflections/interventions on our struggles against white supremacy at our SLAC, as well as on how our university administration utilizes liberalism as a technology of imperialism. We come together to resist the imperial university from where we stand. We believe in the pedagogical possibilities of resistance and in working toward liberation. We share our communion as a gesture of solidarity and in anticipation of forging solidarities.

The SUA Masquerade or the Pristine Façade

SUA is a 20-year old private SLAC, uniquely founded on “the Buddhist principles of peace, human rights, and the sanctity of life.” Soka is “a Japanese term meaning to create value.” SUA’s mission is “to foster a steady stream of global citizens committed to living a contributive life.” SUA boasts an almost 2 billion dollar endowment for a small student body of around 400. “Its primary source of funding is Soka Gakkai, a member-supported lay Buddhist organization founded in Japan” (Soka). Students come from all over the US and world, many lured by what they perceive to be the promise of SUA, the chance to dream up and work toward liberatory futures, and/or its substantial financial aid program. Nearly 50% of SUA students come from outside the US, making it the liberal arts college with the most number of “international” students (“Most”). The overwhelming majority are traditional-age students. As a rule, all students are required to live on campus, a grand resort-like gated community overlooking canyons on three sides in suburban Orange County in California, in order to engage in dialogue with each other and learn how to get along. But on whose/what terms? Toward what ends?

Through a case study of sorts of the fight for Critical Global Ethnic Studies (CGES) at SUA, we note the specific ways liberalism as counterrevolutionary ideology plays out at our new but already very highly-ranked private SLAC that boasts a utopian mission premised on global citizenship. Global citizenship in SUA terms is achieved by its “diverse” multicultural almost 50 percent international student body and a marketed commitment to peace and human rights. In fact, there are few Black students (constituting less than three percent of the student body) and virtually no full-time Black faculty trained in critical Black studies on our campus or representation of African Studies in the curriculum. Incredibly, SUA’s almost two billion dollar endowment is the second largest endowment per student in the US (“Endowments”). Given its proclaimed commitments and mission and endowment, we ask why it is that when BIPOC working-class students ask for the fulfillment of their needs, interests, dreams, desires,

demands, well-being, our incredibly wealthy university is always unable to find resources for working-class and/or BIPOC students. Since its founding, there have been and continue to be no resources specific to working-class and/or BIPOC students, whose needs and demands are viewed as “special-interest,” with suspicion, as threatening, as too divisive, met with derision, and continually dismissed, ignored, rejected. Resources though are readily available for plays that supposedly have a bearing on advancing SUA’s standing in the *US News and World Report* education rankings, such as the stellar performing arts center that opened on campus in 2011 amid much fanfare at a cost of \$73 million.

We work at SUA in cluster areas called concentrations rather than conventional departments/programs. SUA recently spent an extraordinary amount of money erecting a new concentration in the Life Sciences with its own new multimillion dollar building. However, when students and professors came together to ask for an additional concentration in Critical Global Ethnic Studies (CGES), a modest proposal that didn’t involve the construction of an extravagant new building, to address/engage what consistently gets erased at SUA, our BIPOC lives, we were consistently rebuffed. Even though decisions at SUA are typically made hierarchically by the president and the dean often in disregard of faculty expertise or conviction, we were told the university’s hands are tied; it has limited resources; it can’t move forward without faculty support (despite considerable faculty support); it can’t move forward without expansive faculty approval (read: the same faculty who teach imperialist frameworks must approve of our pedagogies of resistance); Life Sciences is “a totally different beast”; concentrations must have broad appeal despite broad student support; etc., etc. Since its founding, there has been no concerted effort by our SLAC to question its reproduction of whiteness. Apparently, the university’s human rights mission does not extend to the lives and needs of BIPOC students.

A student petition for a proposed Critical Global Ethnic Studies concentration along with the establishing of a center dedicated to Critical Global Ethnic Studies yielding over 1000 signatories receives no response from university administrators. Then, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, after most students have been unceremoniously sent away from campus into the uncertainties of their own communities (if students are fortunate to have communities to return to), the university announces the founding of a Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights. Five months after students circulate a petition and present a detailed proposal to faculty and administrators for the creation on our campus of CGES, an administrators’ center is mysteriously born.

While SUA public relations campaigns have long maintained a pristine facade of no conflict at our university, there is a long history of important student movements swept under the rug (“We want”). The demand for African Studies dates back ten years at least. As recently as 2016, students mobilized around the plight of “undocumented students,” brought to light when applicants were routinely denied admission to our SLAC committed to human rights on the grounds that they would not be able to “study

abroad”—a requirement for graduation. These and other student movements were derailed and silenced or quickly co-opted, students and professors who invested time and energy in the advancement of student care as well as critical pedagogy attentive to the needs and dreams of BIPOC and/or working class students punished, as they/we have always been punished.

Contexts/Discontents or A Chronology of the Movement for Critical Global Ethnic Studies at SUA

The “televised” struggle begins where much radical academic change has erupted: with the Black students. In spring 2018, the thirty-odd SUA Black students decided to do what so many before attempted to do: create a Black Student Union (BSU). The BSU would be a safe, exclusive space for Black students to build community and help each other survive the university. The proposed BSU is instantly rejected by the university on the grounds the group is too exclusive. Without institutional recognition, the BSU is consequently barred from receiving funding and other resources. Translation: The majority white and Japanese student population might view an all-Black student space as an affront to the centrally-held SUA belief of “dialogue” in order to “better understand” those from different backgrounds—solution to all problems. For the Black students, exclusivity is the only way to avoid becoming a racial zoo with free general admission.

Despite not receiving university recognition, the Black students move forward and establish the BSU to create networks and find resources for themselves. The founding of the BSU paves the way for other so-called exclusive, identity-based student groups. The sharp increase in identity groups and demands spearheaded by the formation of the BSU force the university's hand to create a new caste of student clubs known as “affinity” groups. This new status includes meager funding and limited support, revealing the obvious reluctance of SUA to support BIPOC student communities. A subsequent interest in Ethnic Studies (anti-imperialist) in opposition to Area Studies (imperialist) arises from Asian diasporic students as a scholar/professor arrives on campus, appointed in a one-year post-doctoral position to teach Ethnic Studies classes (likely the first classes expressly designated as such at our university) during the 2018-19 academic year. This culminates with the (re)formation of the Students of Color Coalition (SOCC) that, along with the BSU, begins actively organizing for African and Ethnic Studies and agitating for a number of other initiatives to address the white supremacist campus culture both in and outside the classroom at SUA (Inema).

In the fall of 2019, while the BSU and SOCC are vigorously continuing their efforts for critical pedagogy and transformation of our campus culture, a recently arrived in the US non-Black SUA student shares a post with the n-word on social media. This moment unearths yet again the hardly buried racist SUA student culture. It serves as trigger and catalyst for a series of public events on campus (Malabuyoc). In November, the BSU organize a month-long town hall series in an attempt to articulate their Black

humanity and traumas. Black students put their traumas on display via teach-ins on crucial topics such as microaggressions, tokenism, and cultural appropriation. The initial reaction among a number of students, faculty, and administrators is to frame BSU members as being angry, overly sensitive, as fear-mongers and terrorists. There is much work that needs to be done at our SLAC. BIPOC students organize protests at well-attended student-recruitment university events for potential students and their guardians (“Students protest”) and student festivals. This is the beginning of the BIPOC-crafted infrastructure intended to disassemble white supremacy. University administrators subsequently wake up, cancel classes, hire and fly out a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion specialist, and put Black and Brown students on the main stage in the performing arts center for a town hall meeting, including the student authors of this piece. Classes are canceled and all members of the campus community (students, staff, faculty) are encouraged to attend. The moderator, the DEI specialist, asks only one question: “What happened?” This question is all it takes for BIPOC students to fall apart. BIPOC students recount traumas and convey grievances that result from attending SUA. Upper-level administrators claim they are listening and learning, shake BIPOC students’ hands, apologize to BIPOC students’ faces, promise they will make changes.

In December 2019, Victoria M. Huynh and Kristen Michala Storms co-write and present the first proposal for Critical Global Ethnic Studies (CGES). It outlines three central tenets: student self-determination, lived experiences, and a critical global praxis. These tenets are meant to equip BIPOC students with the opportunity to learn about their erased histories and engage their material realities in order to ground themselves in the communities they hail from, as well as to center activism and praxis in academic spaces with the aim of dismantling global imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (following bell hooks) and its long standing hegemonic impacts. Unabated, the BIPOC-student led movement continues to organize for BIPOC student needs actively outside of the university, most poignantly in the form of the February 2020 1st Annual Students of Color Conference: Building a World without Empires (“This is”) that brings together a gathering of community leaders, organizers, scholars, activists, student activists, professors to offer workshops, panel discussions, and keynote events for SUA and off-campus communities. The conference, with over 200 attendees at our university of 400 students, is a student-crafted, deinstitutionalized space for BIPOC students to reclaim their communities’ lived experiences as sources of learning, build community, disrupt institutional norms, and teach themselves to be critical of institutional power. Student power creates the means to learn from students’ lived experiences, for students to learn from each other and to speak in direct resistance to white supremacy at SUA.

For over a year at this point in time, BIPOC students have made significant intellectual and infrastructural contributions to campus. BIPOC students have created meaningful programs often working with off-campus communities; organized complex teach-ins far exceeding

the expectations of any DEI trainer; seen through a successful conference; created a working proposal for a new CGES concentration; successfully defended the necessity and rigor of the concentration. The impact this movement has on campus is undeniable and seeps into every aspect of student and overall campus life. Even SUA faculty who were initially not supportive of the BIPOC student demands alter or shift their curricula in response to the growing student desires for CGES. Students and faculty allies demand that university administrators respond to this pressing need by seriously working to implement the concentration via a cluster hire of six faculty members. This demand brings BIPOC students to present their ideas for a new CGES concentration at a meeting for all faculty, where BIPOC student presenters are simultaneously commended and attacked.

Finally, students take matters into their own hands on February 28th, 2020 by demanding actions from the SUA board of trustees ("1, 2, 3, 4"). BIPOC students communicate how serious SUA's neglect has been of BIPOC students and the dire necessity of a CGES concentration through a series of actions: "trespassing" in the boardroom during a meeting, making a presentation to the trustees, staging a die-in, blocking a road. Despite every effort from BIPOC students to convey the severity of the crisis at our SLAC, the board of trustees evade, cower, refuse to engage with students, treat the students with alarming disrespect, and, along with the university president, ridicule and ignore student demands for CGES and additional infrastructures/resources. University administrators go so far as to punish students by having students cited for actions students did not commit.

In the summer of 2020, amidst the prevalent COVID-19 (dis)handlings by the United States, ongoing anti-Black state violence, and the relentless repression of BIPOC student demands, the former SUA president retires from office and the then vice president is speedily promoted to the presidency. On the one hand publishing messages of solidarity with the national movement for Black Lives while on the other abandoning contact with BIPOC student leaders, the newly appointed president announces he has established a Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights and assembled a council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with no consultation with or guidance from the BIPOC student leaders.

This newly established Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights turns out to be a hollow emulation of the students' vision. It is established ostensibly to showcase our university's dedication to diversity, but without the involvement, let alone leadership, of the students and professors engaged in the struggle for CGES who understand that the push for Critical Global Ethnic Studies as concentration and center must not be a mere theoretical showcase but must be grounded in lived experience and community praxis, redistributing university resources to build sustainable and anti-imperialist presents/futures. It is divorced from long-standing commitments to working with and developing relationships with working-class Chicax and Southeast Asian community organizations to create support networks for undocumented people and students within and outside the university, mobilizing on multiple

issues and fronts, including the contribution of labor in support of the Acjachemen Nation, the Indigenous peoples whose land SUA sits on. The administrators' center does not seek to undertake this kind of work: developing solidarities, relationships, and networks of working-class communities of color in Orange County and beyond. The administrators' center functions in effect to undermine and derail BIPOC students' CGES initiative—self-determination for BIPOC student education and s liberatory objectives.

In short, the president has co-opted BIPOC student labors and ideas, appropriating and domesticating the notion of a center directly from the students' CGES proposal. This thus illegitimate center, born out of co-optation, not only denies student self-determination but also offers no tangible changes in meeting the concrete needs of working-class, first-generation BIPOC students. It forecloses any possibility of student-led roles in key decision-making processes (read: BIPOC student self-determination) at SUA. The president's maneuver (typical increasingly even at supposedly progressive SLACs in the US?) exposes the violence liberalism poses to students and academics committed to Black, Indigenous, and Third-Worlded liberation. By making representational concessions on the outside and leaving out student voices behind closed doors, the maneuver cloaks its violence with optical progress.

Since BIPOC student leaders have rejected all of the president's unilateral initiatives taking over and reframing BIPOC students' work/ideas in service of the university's liberal agendas, university administrators have made no contact with student leaders and faculty allies as they host talks on race relations and meetings with its council—without the involvement of any of the student movement leaders, siloing and marginalizing the professors in support of the movement.

This is the point at which we find ourselves now, still in struggle, still in communion, still in solidarity, still in resistance, still, to invoke Gloria Anzaldúa, "making face, making soul." In the sections that follow, we offer our individual reflections on the struggles at SUA, emphasizing in these fractals of our communion our unwavering commitment to one another and/or the communities we hail from, to solidarity and liberation.

I am Power

Kristen Michala Storms

I am not difficult. I'm exacting. Precise.

—bell hooks

I hold to Angela Davis's definition of radicalism: "grasping things at the root." Radicalism serves as [one such] avenue to disrupt power and to create confrontational spaces for counter[authors: is there something missing after "counter"?] . As a young Black woman student activist at a SLAC, I have been positioned as a change agent by virtue of my existence, which I liken to a sort of latent power. My work has been the recognition, coaxing, and utilization of all that I am. SUA (and many other liberal arts

schools like it) are masters of domestication and “inclusion.” “Diversity,” “liberalism,” “multi-culturalism,” and other similarly coded rhetoric espoused by such institutions are a coalesced dog whistle politic that maneuvers BIPOC students into a passive, receiving status in the scheme of our education. Talks of “inclusion” amount to the disappearance of our [BIPOC student] radicalism into the dominant university power structure. This domestication renders us “safe” enough to be patched onto the university’s prized diversity quilt and restricts us to “food festivals” and “diversity fairs” in which “dialogue” can occur on our sanitized histories. If we are good Black and Brown children, the schools will add us to the campus culture but will do everything in their power to stop us from *changing* it. This has been my fight, my struggle for over half of my undergraduate career. Equipping myself with the knowledge of my people and peers to provide *myself* with the education that SUA would never give me: critical pedagogy.

Hence, I am the co-creator of CGES pedagogy. I have dedicated myself to such a radical academic pursuit in the face of the racist and powerful institutions instilled in liberal arts universities because *I* am powerful. My power cannot be conceptualized by the traditional language used to define “power.” Power is directional. It is not restricted to one direction (top-down) but comes from *all* directions. My directional power is comprised of the love and pain of my ancestors in me incarnate. It resides in the countless hours spent late at night organizing protests, demonstrations, and teach-ins to speak with the voices we were given at birth. It is imbued in the tears shed in hallways after verbal assaults from administrators and university presidents. I cobble my power because I believe all students should be able to hold their power with their own hands, uncompromised by the institution. CGES became an opportune project that is providing students with the language and frameworks that centralize and honor our BIPOC lived experiences as *knowledge* that has been simultaneously taken from and restricted to our communities. Such BIPOC student-dictated curriculum challenges the entire SUA community and most pointedly scared faculty, staff, and administrators. We did not wait to be given “approval” to implement and teach CGES. CGES strives to endow students with the self-means to confront and dismantle the structures which substantiate the reason why radical pedagogy is even needed. SUA believes itself to be a non-combatant in the inherent hegemonic university structures of power. SUA believes their flaccid notion of “peace” and “global citizenship” instead somehow absolves them of all responsibility to change the world. The *ideas* behind SUA are, is, and will only be a billion-dollar shoddy facade to direct attention away from what lies beneath the fringed peace without tangible, decolonial action. SUA’s values are used as a means to avoid *naming* the world in favor of romanticism and idealism that possess no praxis to lead this philosophy into reality. The single most pointed danger to SUA’s fringed peace is me. The students who mobilize their self-power to *name* and *name* over and over again. To grasp at the roots of our dreams and to *pull, pull, pull*

Disciplining Diversity / Refusing Discipline

Aneil Rallin

History shows us that the modern Western university was erected as an institution fundamentally antagonistic to every-day people in general and people of color in particular. In a way, then, you and I are the children of this institutional inheritance, the beneficiaries of a history that—as far as this place is concerned—has always presumed the inferiority of various constituencies of “the people,” constituencies based on differences of ability, class, race, gender, and sexuality. And so we find ourselves in institutions that—for the most part—have never cared to fully imagine us.

—Roderick Ferguson

A world in despair, poor marginalized BIPOC communities disproportionately affected by the pandemic in this settler-colonial nation-state that I call “home,” a global vaccine apartheid unfolding, pervasive anti-Blackness on the rise even as the Black Lives Matter movement continues to galvanize, the resurgence of anti-Asian racisms and xenophobias, a university machinery that has never cared to fully imagine us and churns on. I am writing in the ruins of the grim futures before us to reflect on the ongoing student resistance and rebellion calling for the demolishing of imperialist capitalist white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy at our SLAC that prides itself on its “peace and human rights” mission and on “fostering a steady stream of global citizens committed to living a contributive life.” I find myself thinking of Roderick Ferguson’s *We Demand: The University and Student Protests*. In his introduction Ferguson notes: “I wrote this book because it is time we begin to see student protests not simply as disruptions to the normal order of things or as inconveniences to everyday life at universities. Student protests are intellectual and political moments in their own right, expanding our definitions of what issues are socially and politically relevant, broadening our appreciation of those questions and ideas that should capture our intellectual interests: issues concerning state violence, environmental devastation, racism, transphobia, rape, and settler colonialism” (10).

When students rise up to upend systems of oppression/disenfranchisement and decolonize education, we professors committed to liberation must rise up with students. We must unravel how universities function as institutions of imperial power and have adapted and continue to adapt “to the challenges of student activists with the discourse of diversity” and “promote the ideology of diversity as a way to construct student protests as the antithesis of diversity and tolerance rather than as calls for meaningful social transformation” (Ferguson 10). We must contest how discourses of diversity “have allowed the university to establish not only diversity initiatives designed to protect the campus against the ostensible disorders produced by activists but also police forces [‘public safety officers’ at our university] that will supposedly do the same” (Ferguson 10-11). We professors must refuse the lure of university schemes and banquets and felicitations and

rewards designed to control us, to constrain us from working in solidarity with engaged activist students against the university as imperial project and from allying with students striving to lead us into dismantling university structures that sustain global capitalist white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy and its yearnings.

My SLAC has a documented history of persevering anti-Black and other racisms and promoting white supremacy. BIPOC students at my SLAC finally catch our campus administrators' attention when they carry out a direct action in November 2019, a silent protest during a recruitment event for high school seniors and juniors, an anguished cry expressing the suffocation BIPOC students experience on our campus and calling for immediate revolution ("Students protest"). The university shuts down for an afternoon of soul-searching. My skepticism about such predictable gestures prevents me from attending the soul-searching. Upper-level administrators shed tears, vow to do better, pledge to listen to the students. These empty gestures turn out to mean asking BIPOC students to repeatedly explain/relive the causes of their anguish and justify their demands for curricular and other reforms. The students organize potent presentations and consciousness-raising sessions, direct actions and protests, an unforgettable students of color coalition conference, linking these particular struggles with the long history of liberation struggles across the world, inviting professors to join their struggles. A number of us professors join forces with the students only to have BIPOC student demands and labors categorically dismissed and/or co-opted by administrators and more than a few faculty colleagues.

Telltale signal of how our supposedly progressive SLAC seeks to maintain the liberal white supremacist imperial project comes courtesy of the announcement of a new Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights on our campus. This Center is established top-down quickly by the newly ordained president in response to the student uprising on our campus, but without consultation with (actually with hostile disregard of) the BIPOC students or professors working in solidarity with the students. The university conspires with some faculty to co-opt BIPOC students' demands/labors and domesticate BIPOC students' radical agendas under the pretext of promoting diversity through the form of this Center. The president appoints two co-chairs of the Center—a white male faculty member with a reputation for faithfully backing the president's wishes and the university's neoliberal mission (platitudes around human rights and global citizenship) and a newly hired (without an open search) Black male administrator (installed also as "vice president for mission integration") with as far as one can discern no prior work-related history on critical issues around race.

Statements issued by the co-chairs tell us everything we need to know about the Center's domesticated agendas: "race has been a problem in every single country, but people don't know about it...we have the opportunity to remind those who wouldn't have any idea...when you talk about things as entrenched as racism or sexism, the way to start to turn the tide the other way is to create institutions that live on and educate people regardless of their background" ("Soka's Center"). *Really?* Ah, yes, the benign

promotion of any and all education as liberation rather than liberation as political project—intellectual and material. The revolution that BIPOC students are demanding and deserve—that we all deserve—gets transformed into the palatable form of a Center that will, the university president proclaims, "carry out dialogue." It will function (like most such centers) largely as a programming body, a mechanism that conjures up change while keeping intact the university's white supremacist structural underpinnings.

The BIPOC student activism on our campus have laid bare the lies of liberalism and our SLAC—how it preserves the status quo through its embrace of global racial capitalist interests under the guise of global citizenship and via the white imagination of university stakeholders, including many of my shameful faculty colleagues. "The pressing task," Denise Ferreira da Silva reminds us, "is to engage the racial as a modern political strategy" (xxxv) that seeks to regulate BIPOC lives. As our BIPOC student leaders are teaching us, we have to completely reorganize the world, and that means reorganizing our university. We who are committed to this work may be beaten and weary but we will not succumb to the machinations of our SLAC that strives to discipline our BIPOC minds/bodies/lives into submission, sustain empire, regulate and defang our demands for transformative structural change.

Anti-Imperialist Praxis through Communion

Jordyn Solidum-Saito

Despite the edge, there is still joy and laughing. There are always children running around—always laughing. Always talking. We are connecting and speaking as family. It is this which sustains us. Part of this occupation is the refusal to believe they will win, a refusal to let this place be anything, but joyful

- From my journal dated July 17th 2018, at Pu'u'honua o Pu'u'huluhulu, Mauna Wākea, the day 17 kupuna, Native Hawaiian elders, were arrested by the State of Hawai'i for protecting Mauna A Wākea from desecration.

I return to SUA in the fall of 2018, feeling like a shell of a person. The prior school semester, the university space felt almost promising. I forged deep political bonds, something I had never known on campus, which gave way to a pulse. This new sense of possibility worked contradictory to the dominant feeling of alienation. Having spent the summer organizing in deep communion with the masses of where I come from—Hawai'i—I feel an acute rage for the university's stringent investment in imperialism, settler-colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. This is a familiar feeling to most students who come to elite schools carrying the chasm of class difference between their shoulder blades.

For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity.

— Frantz Fanon

The summer of 2018 commanded me to view the world within its formulaic contexts. It was spent organizing, a labor that is deeply devalued in the academy as it contradicts the values of individualism and threatens the organization of power. My mentor and I immersed ourselves in the lives of the most marginalized women in our community. We visited prisons, remote domestic violence sanctuaries, and outer islands to learn and center their needs within the metropole. This work was heavy and intense, although it was only the beginning. On July 16th I found myself in a pickup truck on my way to Mauna A Wākea. I traveled out to deliver a dear friend of mine thermal clothing as she was one of the first to travel to the sovereign Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu, where Native Hawaiians had set up a community to block the construction of a 30 meter telescope which would desecrate a sacred sight and destroy an entire ecosystem. The days I was present marked the largest police operation in the history of Hawai'i (Inouye). I was there to witness the mass arrest of beloved elders and present when an entire community was threatened with the use of an LRAD, a military grade weapon capable of breaking eardrums. Witnessing this violence solidified within me what I only knew intellectually: *that the interest of two classes will ultimately result in violent struggle, and that the ruling class will spare none in their quest to monopolize power.*

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.

—Karl Marx

My mentors from home always reminded me that while academics can “spit theory all day,” if they cannot use their theory to change the terrain of struggle, they are not revolutionaries. My work grounded in Hawai'i lay bare the truth of our movement at university: that nothing we wanted would be given to us and every point of contention would be met with conflict and standoff. The logics of liberalism will always obscure class relations. These logics tell us that if we ask politely, say the magic word, and beg the ruling class might spare us our lives. Liberalism both obscures and deeply entrenches us into social systems, convincing us that one day we will be granted freedom by our oppressors. If you speak to organizers in the community, those who are most marginalized, those who have little left to lose, they will tell you that these theatrics mean nothing.

Grounded in this reality, it is our responsibility as student organizers to create economies of care and intellectualism (grounded in those who came before us) as we ourselves would never be legitimized by the apparatus which wanted us lifeless. And that is what we did. Every available opportunity, including the majority of our meals and evenings, was spent in communion with one another. This sometimes meant planning, analyzing, and principled debate. Praxis demands we bring our people in. It is a laborious intelligence that requires trust in one another. We work to include every student and all of our people into this intelligence. Our tenacity was visible by the huge risks we took: occupying the board of trustees room,

blocking a room, and other forms of direct action. Yet the vast majority of our labor was unseen. Despite the further marginalization of this work, we knew that in the midst of an economic and ecological collapse, when the university sent students home back into communities ravaged by empire's necropolitics, the knowledge of how to build a resistance premised on an economy of care were the skills students needed. The reality of a bloodthirsty empire demands we be ruthless with our survival, and by extension our communion.

Activism and Participatory Activism

Professor X

The demands raised by our students targeted and exposed one of the sites of power of the university administration—decision making. Our university's mission and programs encourage students to voice their opinions, to “express themselves,” to become “global citizens,” but the administration has systematically kept students from key decision bodies. Such stonewalling reads as hypocrisy at best, and as a concerted effort to disempower students at worst. We have seen students heralded as agents of change until they question the foundations of our failing empire and its institutions. Faculty allies firmly believe that educational institutions should provide the necessary spaces for participatory decision-making in order to support each individual's right to political expression and/or their demands for change. The scholarship and documentation of the Civil Rights Movements (often celebrated on paper by neoliberal administrators) should serve as guiding principles in classrooms to craft strategies to fight against injustice and systemic racism. The writings of Black and Latinx activists have always given teachers the necessary historical grounding to advocate for social change, for economic justice, and for the end of white supremacy. By repressing this legacy, or by commodifying it, the neoliberal university hinders students who might strive to conceive of alternatives to the dire reality that condemns millions to poverty.

Students' activism has challenged, and continues to challenge, the positionality of faculty, who do not represent students' diverse histories in their classrooms, nor their aspirations and urgency to change the world. Students are often not treated as scholars, researchers, peers, or members of a collective, seeking to find urgent answers to the needs and demands of their communities. On the contrary, more than once during the protests on our campus, students were reminded in meetings with faculty and administration, of their “responsibility” to conform to often nebulous definitions of “appropriate behavior”: in other words, a student who listens and learns but does not question or challenge; a student who celebrates the institution's accomplishments but does not demand curricular changes nor question allocations of resources; a student who respects (uncritically) an instructor's “expertise” to the subordination of their own.

During the last two years, as a group of students worked tirelessly to build a Critical Global Ethnic Studies concentration, they were made painfully aware that

university programs are not shaped by the needs and desires of a new generation but by the structures of power which uphold a vision of the university according to financial interests and public reputation. As David Harvey reminded us, neoliberalism is only interested in granting rights or freedoms to those “whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing” (38). Neoliberalism represses solidarity movements by championing the fear-based discourse that there is no alternative, that there is no other way of doing things. The neoliberal university is committed to domesticating a new generation of scholars, many of whom come from communities who have experienced the violent occupation of their lands by colonial or imperial forces, who are angered by the strategic inaction (or cultural and material appropriation) of administrators and faculty who profit from backroom negotiations, corrupt promotion proceedings, and unilateral decision making.

The neoliberal university undermines its students’ academic and personal growth by not letting them devise new strategies for survival. As the university was beginning to plan the twenty-year celebration of its founding, students mobilized because they wanted to be part of a much-needed transformation, one that could prepare the institution to respond to an ongoing crisis of inequality, poverty, and racism facing all but the most wealthy in the US. Their demands and hope, voiced insistently and with all the weight of their historical precision, were given lip service but, ultimately, the response was received by student activists as timid, insufficient, and disingenuous.

What’s more, the marginalization of and disciplinary threats against activist students, when their activities intensified, were deployed on our campus. Administrators used hurtful and traumatizing language to discourage students from publicly restating their demands, attempting to break up the often frail solidarity that characterizes social movements. Ploys to recruit supporters to defend the “status quo” were also utilized, and those loyal were rewarded to the detriment of the university’s social justice mission. Students have stated that: “We know and have re(lived) the reality that our liberation will not be found with the neoliberal university.” They are right! The historical validity of this affirmation is undeniable. It appears that students will only be able to conceive of worlds in which large portions of the population have a voice only outside of the neoliberal university. Cornel West has sharply described the dangers of corporate management in all facets of life, including academia: “Corporate power—with its plutocratic, patriarchal, and pigmentocratic realities—lessens the abilities of citizens and workers to have a meaningful voice in shaping their destiny” (viii).

Choosing to Inherit Our Foremothers' Internationalism through Third World Studies

Victoria M. Huynh

To arrive at proletarian class positions, the class instinct of proletarians only needs to be educated; the class instinct of the petty bourgeoisie, and hence of intellectuals, has, on the contrary, to be revolutionized.

—Louis Althusser

When daughters of Third-Worlded peoples enter higher education, they must confront their role in US academia, the largest think tank for manufacturing consent for US aggression on their people. On one hand, to be *given* (un)freedom at the university, they must disavow the revolutions their people fought for and assimilate. On the other hand, the daughter who chooses internationalist struggle as her teacher, inherits an (im)possible task (Boggs 148). Dubbed the “guerilla intellectual” by Walter Rodney or the “new intellectual” by Antonio Gramsci, they must face the contradiction that is education for liberation or liberal reformism.

I am one of those daughters, and in our time co-leading this movement, my peers and I chose education for liberation. A daughter of the US war in Viet Nam and Cambodia, I searched for the work of revolutionaries amongst my people, who taught me that “there can be no revolution without revolutionary theory.” That we should not allow US academia to antagonize us from theoretical study—which is not confined to the university setting but is inseparable from struggle amongst the people—which centralizes struggle for concrete transformation outside of the university. Instead, I learned about the ways internationalist women before me repurposed education to create classrooms in every pocket of society for struggle. In particular, Viet, Cambodian, and Lao women studied political economy through underground workers-led classrooms, literacy campaigns for the youth, and political agricultural programs, all as the safekeepers of revolution from the home, hidden from the US-backed compradors. The Viet victory, in alignment with China, Korea, Cuba, and the anti-imperialist Global South over the American imperialists is the (feminist) internationalist legacy I chose to inherit.

Lesson #1: Student Movements Must Confront US Imperialism.

My quest for knowledge was not one for individualist class ascension as the university would have it; it was the study of how to get each other free. In an Asian American Studies course, our first (and only) Ethnic Studies professor asked us to interrogate our placehood as diaspora-settlers of the US *empire* (and not the US as a nation). I learned that when Black, brown, and indigenous students before me dealt with this same reality in the 1960s, they articulated an internationalist response, calling for students to fight for self-determination in the internal colonies of the US and abroad. Rather than study to reify our belongingness to US empire, to the US university, we should study to challenge US imperialism altogether. It was not enough to live these experiences; we had to actively organize against the conditions that forced Americanness onto us in the first place. As a result, together my peers and I created deinstitutionalized underground spaces, finding political haven in cross-campus conferences and

community organizing meetings. We spent time building community with imperialized, communities of color organizers in Orange County and more. So that when our own student leadership of Black and Third-Worlded women converged, we made explicit that the push for Africana and Ethnic Studies needed to yield self-determination. We heeded Okiihiro's call for Third World Studies, not for "identity politics, multiculturalism, or intellectual affirmative action. Third World studies is not a gift of white liberals to benighted colored folk to right past wrongs; Third World studies is not a minor note in a grand symphony of US history" (1). Our Third World Studies would seek to redistribute resources to the communities and utilize knowledge to grow the power of the people, rather than build up individuals for class ascension.

Lesson #2: Student Movements Must Confront US Liberalism.

But coming face to face with an institution practiced in its ability to strategically resolve what they reduced to "conflict" between administration and students, we watched the liberal SLAC dilute and gradually **(dis)recognize** our demands for CGES, Critical Black Studies faculty, and material BIPOC resources. I borrow from what Elizabeth Rubio calls liberal (mis)recognition, which describes how liberalism cannot make sense of organizing that exposes the violence of itself as the foundational ideology of capitalism, in which it reifies racialized, gendered categorization of people to dominate them. As the US did post-World War II to preserve the image of the benevolent US empire, the shift towards multiculturalism domestically also defines SUA's relations. While the liberal SLAC may recognize student demands for inclusion, equity, and representation, anything that challenges the violence of liberalism in itself, particularly when they are embodied by racialized, gendered actors, is (dis)recognized and diffused. Hence, to delegitimize our demands for a self-determined CGES concentration and center, they employed the violent caricaturization of the Black women in our leadership. In meeting rooms and in public announcements, they obligated leadership to empathize and tend to the administration and their "shortcomings," to help them "understand." Staff, faculty, and administration reassured us that they "appreciated" our labor. But our "inability" to pacify and *liberalize* ourselves to predetermined, domesticated liberal subject-caricatures of the "nonviolent" Mammy; the assimilated, docile Model Minority; and more... in turn, reeled in criticisms of our leadership's "violence," "terrorism," "overdramaticism," "irrationality." It reached the point that when the president announced his "new" initiatives in the summer, those around us encouraged us to celebrate... the violent appropriation and exploitation of our racialized, feminized labor without question or protest.

Lesson #3: US Imperialism is Not Safe from Femme-led Student Movements

As principled self-criticism requires, there are endless ways we could have done differently. We confronted liberalism and watched it visibilize us for its needs—until we had strayed too far away from their offer for paradigmatic liberal belonging. But because we approximated the rejection of the settler university—identifying it for its roots in stolen land, imperialist knowledge production to sanctify war, the militarization of our communities, and more—we positioned ourselves as new intellectuals, as guerilla intellectuals. We came to understand that our fight for people's liberation can never be won within the university. Because we chose our foremothers' struggle against imperialism and its manifestations in this space, we most importantly—and unforgivingly—chose love for our people. There is a stronger front that has yet to [dialectically] emerge, as we did from the anti-imperialist pre-consciousness we inherited.

And time and time again: we would still choose liberation.

Grounding Movement in Community, Generating Power

The tranquil and placid publicities of Soka University of America obfuscate a terrain of revolutionary struggle against a reactionary hegemony. In the current world order, where liberal multiculturalism and "non-confrontational" notions of peace are hailed as the penultimate markers of progress, our struggle, the struggle against a capitalist-racist-imperialist-heteropatriarchal university/empire, is that of the world's people. Although the specificities of our material conditions (a newly-built 20-year old already highly-ranked private SLAC with the second largest endowment per student in the US and a uniquely almost 50% "international" student demographic) may be distinctive, our struggles and experiences may nonetheless stimulate pedagogies of resistance under any number of conditions.

Although our ultimate goal of creating the Critical Global Ethnic Studies concentration at our SLAC was not realized, we were able to accomplish a great deal with our pedagogies of resistance. Our revolutionary power can be concretely measured by the changes we made in our university and the ways in which we forced our university to respond to demands. Our coordinated efforts garnered broad-based student and faculty support. Our student-organized conference had a turnout of over half the SUA student population; students' direct action shut down classes for a week and caused broad anxiety, especially among administrators and faculty; students were presented as intellectual authorities in front of the campus/administration/faculty on multiple occasions; our work resulted in the reorganization of student affairs, the hiring of a "manager for diversity initiatives and community building," a change in hiring protocols, and mandatory

implicit bias training. Even the erection of the illegitimate administrators' Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights is evidence of the threat of our revolutionary power.

Our highest valued returns however are non-material. Reviewing our institution as a stable entity rather than dialectically, or in constant flux between liberatory and reactionary forces, might give the illusion of an unmovable subjugation. Yet this could not be further from the truth. While the administrators' center is an effort to divert liberatory praxis (as are the moves to mandate implicit bias training and hire a diversity manager, discredited increasingly as superficial tools that improve optics rather than effect necessary revolutionary change), our ability to generate power can never be surrendered. The exercise and generation of power is one that took practice but amalgamated over time. First, in the exercising of our self-determination and the expression of our subjectivity as colonized subjects. Second, in the intentional building of networks and coalitions which linked struggles amongst students of multiple oppressions and backgrounds as well as faculty of different standings. Third, in the grounded praxis inspired by the love for our people—within and without the university. At each level, we risked our standing with the university. For many of us who attach our livelihood to the university, retaliation meant pushing the boundaries of our disposability. Still, we students and faculty chose solidarity and liberation. We made choices rooted in our own dignity as colonized subjects and in honor of our peoples. We forged practices grounded in our political ethical commitments and the love of our peoples. Our generation of community is neither bound to the university that has never cared to fully imagine us, nor does it end here.

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