Decolonization: navigating different paths together

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Agenda

- Invitation: experimenting with a different kind of space
- Recognizing normalized imaginaries, dispositions of engagement and different theories of change
- Engaging with the complex and contested framings of identity
- Supporting alternatives and life-sustaining solutions
- Re-calibrating expectations: decolonization as life-long-and-wide journey (with no end in sight)
Limitations, Tensions

- Not a cure for all, nor an easy fix
- Ambiguous solutions
- Risk of paralysis, feeling overwhelmed
- Challenges of necessary time, will, spaces to learn deeply
- Our own limitations and conditions: schooling, experience of race / gender / ableism / orientation, capacity, our own patterns of behavior, investments, our own biases, our experiences in this work
- Unrealistic expectations of speed, pace, point of arrival and support required for change
First (most difficult) steps

Learning to “breathe” differently together as we travel in a foggy road, experiencing, experimenting, stumbling and learning from failure, requires …

• spaces for sober, holistic, multi-voiced and socially accountable engagements
• transitional frames: vocabularies, mappings, tools that enable us to expand and deepen conversations and relationships
Experimenting with a different space

the stories we tell, what we want them to do, what they show and what they hide, where they come from, where they lead us to, how they enable or constrain possibilities for co-existence and change...

opening our imaginaries for other possible ways to tell stories, other beginnings, endings, framings, other ways of knowing, being, relating, walking...

in *non-coercive* ways.
Experimenting with a different space

hosting

ourselves, each other, conflict in the face of complexity, uncertainty, ambivalence asymmetry, vulnerability, incommensurability with courage, humility, sobriety, discernment

Learn to host our own resistance and to be taught by it.

I lovingly don’t care “what” you think...

... but I care deeply about our responsibility to think, relate, feel and dream deeper and wider.
Dispositions of engagement

What disposition is manifesting right now for you?

What disposition do you normally encounter in your context of work for conversations about diversity?
“Normalized” Imaginaries
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Not what we don’t imagine as an extension of our knowledge, but what we CANNOT imagine from within our realms of intelligibility (normalized imaginaries).
“Normalized” Imaginaries

- Hegemonic (reinforce/justify status quo)
- Ethnocentric (project one view as universal)
- Ahistorical (forget historical legacies and complicities)
- Depoliticized (disregard power inequalities & ideologies)
- Salvationist/Self-serving (invested in congratulatory heroism)
- Un-complicated (offer ‘feel good’ quick fixes)
- Paternalistic (waiting for a ‘thank you’)

engagement
“Normalized” Imaginaries

tokenization
(you were brought here so that business can go on as usual)
display
(you should be available for an equity photograph)
debt
(you have your place, you should be grateful)
burden
(your job is to meet all needs)
trap
(if you articulate a problem, you become the problem)
betrayal/cost
(your investments must align with ours)
subservience
(your body is an extension of our entitlements)
“Normalized” Imaginaries

Self-awareness

Self-reflection

Self-reflexivity

our inherited referents for knowing and being

our personal journeys

what we think, say and do
“Normalized” Imaginaries
Normalized Imaginaries of Change

Soft Reform
To make the same world a little bit better through personal transformation and individual action
(MAKE A DIFFERENCE)
Individually focused analyses, single story, simple solutions, self-affirming, comfort
SAME QUESTIONS, SAME ANSWERS

Radical Reform
To make the same world a lot better by including more people, voices and perspectives in collective action.
(RETHINK, INCLUDE)
Systemic & historical analyses, multiple perspectives, self-implicating, complex solutions, discomfort
SAME QUESTIONS, DIFFERENT ANSWERS

Beyond Reform
To disinvest in the current unsustainable world and to walk with others into the possibility of new worlds.
(IMAGINE the IMPOSSIBLE)
Systemic & historical analyses a step further, realizing the hidden costs of our investments in the current system, disinvesting
DIFFERENT QUESTIONS, DIFFERENT ANSWERS
A few helpful practices

• Spend time radically envisioning. Be aware of how you hold creativity back, and where. Interrupt the barriers you place on yourself and others.
• Broadly, value and embody healthy and healing spaces for growth, innovation, love and empathy
• Encourage critical thinking and dissent
• Create conditions and structures that lead to positive cultural identity for people experiencing injustices
• Bond emerging alternatives with necessary structures and resources to support them.
Thank you!

Resources:
Sonali Balagee: “Equity Lens”
Andreotti: “Torpor and Awakening”
& “Multi-layered Selves and Decolonization”