**Responses to in-class questions October 2**

Asad Abu Khali said that Arabs deserve their share of crazy people – i.e., the Bin Ladens, Husseins, and Khomeinis don’t represent the Arab community. Can you speak about othering of Arabs post 9/11?

……….There’s no doubt many Westerners, especially Americans, are much more likely to stereotype and express prejudice against Arabs since 9/11. I agree that every group has its crazies, though I don’t know whether I would include people committed to systematic, long-term violence (like bin Laden) in this category. There is no evidence that he was crazy, in any psychiatric sense. That said, I don’t take bin Laden as the basis for assessing Arabs in general, nor should others.

When analyzing a classic study (e.g., Bogardus), is it safe to address different ethnic groups or might we risk a social generalization – e.g., French Canadians don’t like Pakistanis? Shouldn’t we consider other factors?

……….. We should do both: recognize that different groups have different histories of prejudice, and recognize that other factors (such as economic competition or class domination) enter into discrimination and prejudice as well as cultural history.

You argue that the racial differentiation of people takes place through tribal differentiation. You also argued that too much focus is put on colonization when it comes to racial differentiation. I’d argue that differentiation via tribal difference and via colonial processes are very different. Western nations deliberately construed people of colour as “inferior” and back these ideas up with so-called scientific methods to justify their colonization – their pillaging of other lands and people. Our dominant understandings of race trace back to this period – that is to say that our understandings of race today are still linked to problematic colonial understandings. These understandings are shaped by European world-views and the construction of whiteness as much as they rely on construction of people of colour. Whiteness dominates. And the unequal power relations shaped by colonization persist to the present, and have very real effects, not only on people of colour in Canada, but for the majority world. Colonization and its racist justification have been spread throughout the world on a vast an unprecedented scale. In those ways, colonial differentiations of people – in order to justify colonization – are different than tribal differentiation. Your presentation lacked this critique of power.

………..I don’t think you are correct in supposing that human racism began with colonization by Westerners after 1492. Vilification of “the other” is always an important part of attacking and subjugating other people, and this has gone on as long as people have made wars. Racism before and after 1492 has always been used to justify violence, exploitation, and domination.

Also, why didn’t you talk about racism in this lecture – a lecture on racial and ethnic inequality?

………..I didn’t get to it. You can see material on this topic in the posted slides, also in the textbook reading assignment.

In all the readings, do we have to remember the names in brackets?

…………No

What is critical race theory?

…………Here is the definition of CRT from the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (2005):

A radical movement within jurisprudence that traces its origin to a conference held in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1989. Sometimes called outsider jurisprudence, it sets out to challenge the conventional liberal approach to civil rights issues, in particular the notion that there can be a colour-blind view of social justice. CRT regards the privileged position occupied by mostly White, middle-class academics as a major obstacle to a comprehensive exposure of the racism that is seen to permeate the law, its rules, concepts, and institutions. Adherents generally argue that only those who have themselves suffered the indignity and injustice of discrimination can be the authentic voices of marginalized racial minorities. The law's formal constructs reproduce, it is claimed, the reality of a privileged male White elite, whose culture, way of life, attitudes, and norms constitute the prevailing “neutrality” of the law.

As stated above, CRT is a special case of “Standpoint Theory” in sociology, which argues that only disadvantaged people are in a good position to see and assess the lived reality of inequality. Most particularly, Feminist Standpoint Theory claims that women are in the best of all positions to do so. Karl Marx, for his part, thought that only intellectuals were well situated to judge social reality (including inequality), since they had no class interests to defend.

In general – perhaps because I am a white male, or perhaps because I don’t like dogma – I find this line of argument wrong and repugnant -- a type of special pleading that aims to invalidate the systematic study of social reality by anyone who is not among “the elect.” I say, let everyone look at the evidence, then let’s draw our conclusions – whether we are white or not white, male or not male, and so on. Of course, this is a liberal point of view, and I defend it. There is no free scholarship without this openness, I believe. You are free to believe otherwise.

Do you suggest we focus on statistics and ideas of individual sociologists when studying, or rather the general ideas and solutions conveyed to us in the texts and lectures?

………. Go with concepts, theories, and ideas, but read very carefully.

If ethnicity is a social “imaginary” creation, why do Jews claim the land of Palestine on biblical promises and beliefs?

……….All claims-making rests on selective constructions of reality. There is little doubt the Jews lived in historic Israel a long time ago. But, as I argued in the lecture, the performance of ethnicity always requires narrative leaps and imagination.

Aren’t Jews/Judaism a religion and not an ethnicity?

……….People have argued about this for centuries: some say religion, some say ethnicity, some say race, some say all of the above etc. In my lecture, I highlighted the ways the Jews behave as an ethnic community, not as a body of religious believers. I don’t exclude other interpretations.

Shouldn’t the positive aspects of different ethnic groups be preserved, even if they are imagined? Even inconsequential things like food: should Italian food no longer be Italian food?

……..Of course, I am entirely in favour of preserving the highest accomplishments of different cultures, including their cuisines. I love Italian food, also Chinese food, etc. But that should not require official multicultural funding of group segregation and distinctiveness.

What is your opinion on colour-blindness?

……..If you mean what I think you mean, please read what I wrote about CRT above. If you are hinting that people will stop behaving in racialized and racist ways if sociologists simply stop talking about the topic, I think that view is absurd. We must talk about reality as we find it. To reiterate, I believe in free speech and a free exchange of opinions. And I believe you are free to think otherwise.

You said that the Palestinians faced as much trouble from their Arab neighbours as they did from the Apartheid state of Israel. This is completely false as any study of history would show.

……… Any statement that ends “This is completely false as any study of history would show” is almost certainly wrong. In any event, my goal was not to establish a scoreboard of wrongs done to the Palestinian people. They have been wronged by many, and I was merely noting this fact in my introduction to the work by E. Said.

For the test, are we expected to know the sections “What people are talking about” and “New Insights” from Starting Points?

………Yes

Multiculturalism sustains group identity in a hostile world environment. Why are we not questioning and challenging racism as it persists in Canada?

………We are questioning and challenging racism. I think there is no stronger challenge to racism than my repeated observation that all racial and ethnic distinctions are based on imaginary communities and fantastic assumptions about outsiders. Did you miss that in my lecture? That said, I oppose multiculturalism because it maintains distance between groups, hence maintains distrust and misunderstanding.

What is the difference between ethnicity and racism?

………Ethnicity is membership in an imagined community based on common ancestry. Racism is discriminatory behaviour or prejudiced thinking aimed at people who are perceived to belong to a particular racial group.

You said ethnic groups are “social constructed” and “socially performed.” Couldn’t one argue that all groups are socially constructed and performed?

…….Yes, that is entirely correct.

Will you discuss biracial/multiracial people, their process of creating an identity, and their place in society re racialization?

……….Regrettably, time does not permit me to discuss this. There is some literature on this, but not a huge amount, especially (I think) in Britain. My sense is that, with more intermarriage taking place all the time, the problem of biracial or multiracial identity is far less difficult in Canada today than it was a generation ago, let alone two generations ago.

Could you go into how the Anglo standard of beauty has affected modern day minority communities?

…….Regrettably, time does not permit me to discuss this at length. I believe there is a literature on this topic – for example, around hair products for African-Americans and skin bleaches for East Indians. I know that, in past generations, this Anglo standard of beauty caused minorities a great deal of stress and unhappiness. I don’t know what the current evidence is showing and would recommend you search the literature on this topic.

Do you consider the work of a U of T student as “alienating”? Do you believe that assigning large amounts of reading contributes to alienation? What can I as a student do to gain “consciousness” and be happier at the U of T?

……..What you describe does not satisfy the Marxian definition of “alienation” which is about estrangement caused by capitalist exploitation. In Marxist terms, I am not exploiting you, I am educating you.

Is the statement “Elites of the dominant group are dominant in society” true in a place like Canada where minorities are becoming majorities and vice versa?

……. This statement, made to summarize John Porter’s finding in 1965, is harder to justify in 2012, for the reason you mention. That said, I haven’t seen a good Canadian study on the ruling elite for several decades, so I don’t know the current situation.

What are your thoughts on race, considering it’s something that was put in place to give reasoning behind why Caucasian people are superior, and the reason behind racism?

……. I don’t grant the premise of this question, for reasons that are clear in my answers to earlier questions. History did not begin in 1492, contrary to what some would like to believe. If we continue to think this way, we will have trouble explaining racism in the future, when Caucasians will foreseeably be a small fraction of the world population. I hope you are still around to see if racism has disappeared then, through the (mere) disappearance of Caucasians.