

notes in massa revoltante, 2016

the project, massa revoltante seeks to ask:

what is the place of protest in today's globalised, highly efficient system to either co-opt, ignore or actively silence the demands of those on the margins of society calling for living standards equal to those experienced by our elites?

our purview is that of agents seeking a change in socio-economic relations in the global south. in this regard we must recognize that whereas the global struggle against colonialism during the 20th century engendered a need for solidarity networks to form across the materially rich-yet-colonized global south in order to combat colonialism and its effects, these auspicious links between struggles have to some extent since become severely obscured, if not lost altogether.

my visits to brazil on previous occasions helped to elucidate the many societal ills and similarities shared between that country and south africa:

bound they are by a similar trajectory of history, firstly, signified by waves of violent attacks launched by european settlers intent on usurping territory for economic and other purposes, and where, secondly, slavery and rabid colonialism were effectively instituted to contain, dilute and even decimate the numbers of native inhabitants. these two countries, in particular, appeared at first glance to be like twins separated at birth.

my initial impressions were that social realities in both countries were entirely consonant with one another. as examples, I noted on countless occasions how the nature of the violence perpetrated by various actors in contemporary society - gang members against their neighbours, the police against any suspected criminals, macho men against irrepressible women, conservatives against homosexual folk, the rich against the poor - these examples seemed to indicate the states of both these nations could be interchangeable at various analytical levels.

however the complicated truth began to dawn on me as to some fundamental differences in these near-twin realities on the occasion of my latest immersion in massa revoltante. that difference being that while both brazil and south africa carry a certain air of conviction about their own exceptional place, each within the context of their respective region, they also each portray vastly different patterns of behavior when it comes to relating to their erstwhile colonial masters in europe.

on the one hand we detected reverence for portugal by some of the population of brazil; while on the other hand we sensed revulsion for holland, and britain by certain citizens of south africa.

to a large extent, these opposing perspectives on "the north" can be said to set the tone for what are the dominant political discourses of today in each of the countries in question concerning matters of decolonization:

whereas in brazil the cry from the margins appears to be for a recognition of an enduring silence about the brutality of colonialism and racial discrimination in contemporary times, the diatribe in south africa seems more about finding strategies to strip whites of their continuing privilege under a black majority government.

many brazilians previously defined themselves as neither black nor white, but rather as living within a spectrum of the many hues of humanity.

previously in south africa, the question of black emancipation was mooted under the paradigm of reconciliation, as championed by the likes of nelson mandela et al;

today there is anger in brazil among those who believe black people are not only being ignored but actively excluded from certain aspects of life;

today in south africa there is anger at the abiding state of black poverty, which anger seems to be reaching a boiling point, threatening to seek more radical ways to redress, including racial violence.

in discussions with collaborators grada kilomba, xenia frança (not graca), mano money's, lello di sarno, giovani di ganzá, karina buhr, ras david, and with colleagues from ecoativa, mitsp, escola estadual fernão dias, baiana system in salvador, sexte in recife and the goethe institut in sao paulo, we attempted to tease out the repercussions, both imagined and actual, of holding these divergent perspectives and modes of engaging with (and sometimes against) "the north" as are held by brazilians and south africans.

our aim was to explore, as much as possible, ways to reflect on questions such as race, feminism and the meaning of dignity in our schools.

what became abundantly clear at times was the fact that these conflicting modes of perceiving "the north", of acting against a global system that privileges some over others needs to, once more, be interrogated and understood from a global perspective. within that, the global south needs to spearhead many more platforms of and for exchange and cross-pollination in order to bring the rest of the world to coalesce around the aim of building new, more equal and compassionate societies.

as cabral suggests, violent confrontation cannot be the only answer to the urgent challenges facing us collectively: we know where such strategies lead and how difficult it will be for the poorest among us to recover from that end.

we propose seduction and persuasion as alternative modalities for changing minds and circumstances.

we know full well these aren't new modalities, of course. however, they have become far too neglected at times such as the present.

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