

CHAPTER 34

Tracing Dollars, Mapping Colonial Feminism: America Funds Women's 'Democracy' Training in Iraq

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An encounter

In 1997, I attended the meeting of the Women in Conflict Zones Network, a consortium of researchers, activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), representatives of UN organizations, humanitarian aid agencies and human rights groups.¹ Each one of us, located in a different region of the world, was trying to make sense of women's experiences of war, militarization and violence. In this meeting, half-way through going around introducing ourselves, a woman representing an NGO started her remarks by calmly saying: '... before continuing further, I need to pause for a moment and ask the woman who identified herself as an adult educator to explain to me what does it mean to be an adult educator and what do they do?' I was both perplexed and intrigued by the question. I tried my best to define our 'elusive' field. She interrupted me and continued, this time in a frustrated voice:

in my organization, we have been inundated with flashy consultancy products which all claim to use adult education principles and philosophy to provide training programs on conflict resolution, peace education, team building, participatory decision-making, creating consensus in war-torn communities, participatory human rights fact-finding missions, community need assessment, planning, evaluation, and much more.

In brief, she was wondering what adult education had to do with 'managing conflict in war zones', as she put it. This encounter put me on a path for discovery; to search for new places and spaces where adult education acts in unison with imperialism to create the ideological conditions for the perpetuation of the social relations of submission.

The US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan provided an opportunity to study relations between imperialism and adult education in a contemporary and concrete context. The 2003 American project of 'regime change' in Iraq was violent and destructive, and led to more violence and destruction. The war has continued to this day, and it is difficult to talk about *post-war* reconstruction. The USA has in fact launched a number of projects ranging from (re-)training security and armed forces to 'democracy training' of elite women activists. In this chapter, I analyse 'democracy' training programmes in Iraq as the ideological practice of the 'post-war reconstruction' of an imperialist power. I argue that a careful analysis of the pedagogy, practice and politics of 'democracy' training programmes directs us to indistinct places where adult education ideas and practices converge with imperialist relations of domination. My goal is to make visible the process of this convergence and, thus, to contribute to the theorization of the relationship between ideological practices of adult education and capitalist social relations in the age of imperialism. The Marxist dialectical and historical materialist approach, as articulated in the work of educators such as Allman, Au, Colley, Rikowski, and Youngman,² informs my analysis. Marxist-feminist analyses of genderized and racialized imperialist social relations constitute the conceptual core of this chapter. This perspective is being articulated by a critical adult educator collective based in my department at the Ontario Institute for Studies of Adult Education at the University of Toronto (this collective is working on a forthcoming book to be co-edited by myself and Sara Carpenter and it is tentatively entitled *Building From Marx: Race, Gender and Learning*).

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The empirical evidence for this chapter draws on my extensive fieldwork in the Kurdish region of Northern Iraq in 2005, as well as publications of the US and Iraqi governments, NGOs and media reports; the chapter also builds on the critical feminist literature on women's NGOs, war, militarization, 'post-war' reconstruction and women's learning. I examine the relationship between imperialism and US women's NGOs and their symbiotic relations by focusing on US projects of 'democracy training' in Iraq.

The context³

The first US war against Iraq in 1991 led to considerable chaos in the country and the region. Iraq was divided into a semi-independent Kurdish region in the north and a devastated Arab south subjected to devastating economic sanctions. The second US war in 2003 overthrew the Ba'th regime and replaced it with a US occupation administration. Although a fledgling Iraqi government has replaced the US colonial administration, the state of political, military and economic chaos continues to destroy the lives of Iraqi people. Failing to find a strong social base to maintain its domination over the country, the USA engages in a variety of strategies including training leaders loyal to the occupation project and capable of keeping Iraq in the US orbit. One of these strategies is a comprehensive 'democracy' training programme, involving women in particular. A careful analysis of the pedagogy, practice and politics of 'democracy' training programmes throws light on the ways in which adult education ideas and practices converge with imperialist desire and design. The purpose of this chapter is to trace and explain the process of this convergence.

The imperialist wars of recent decades have raised serious challenges for adult education. The wars led by the United States, as the super-military force among Western powers, have created new social/educational needs. National and international policies shaped by the 'war on terror', 'clash of civilizations' and 'security culture' demand new mass-based formal and informal learning strategies. At a global level, war has also turned into a 'development' process under the rubric of 'post-war reconstruction'. The training of large cadres, from NGOs to peace or aid workers, to community developers, and other more specialized bureaucrats and technocrats, all are involved in adult learning, training and education. Learning plans, the development of curricula and pedagogical techniques, to sell the ideology of 'post-war reconstruction' using notions such as 'empowerment', 'democracy' and 'freedom', are emerging examples of the response of adult learning to the social conditions created by imperialist desire for expansion and occupation. US military analysts have theorized this process by arguing for a closer link between post-war 'reconstruction' projects or humanitarian-aid effort with the military.⁴ Although ties between military and development, military and war/peace propaganda, or the idea of 'humanization' of military, do not constitute a new 'strategy', the concerted effort in legitimizing the link through thick theorization is astonishing. In September 2002, the Bush administration released a National Security Strategy in which development was one

of the ‘... three strategic areas of emphasis (along with diplomacy and defense)’.⁵ The release of this document put the spotlight on the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the major player in the ‘post-war reconstruction’ projects in Afghanistan and Iraq. Andrew Natsios, a retired Lieutenant Colonel, with extensive experience in development work and aid policy, has articulated ‘Nine principles of reconstruction and development’:

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At a basic, theoretical level, the Nine Principles of Reconstruction and Development are inspired by the Nine Principles of War, which are inscribed in modern Army field manuals. In the past decade, the military has attempted to forge a closer theoretical link between post-conflict development work and military interventions.... More recently, especially since 9/11, there has been a growing recognition that conflict should be defined in more fluid terms; that the line between formal military engagement and informal insurgencies is increasingly blurred. As a result, military thinking has evolved and now incorporates the phrase ‘stability operations’ as a term of art to describe post-conflict nation-building efforts.⁶

This is a recipe for conducting successful ‘stability operations’ through links between ‘development’ and ‘military intervention’. Education is called on to be an actor in the hyper-militarization of the post-conflict agenda which includes ‘nation-building efforts’ such as the rebuilding of armies and police forces, patrolling by international forces, ongoing combat between security forces and insurgent groups, and especially increased dependence on militarized humanitarian and development aid.

In August 2005, at the time of my visit, almost all women’s NGOs were preoccupied with discussing the draft of the Iraqi Constitution. They complained about ‘being workshopped out’ of the constitution. This constitutional rousing was a response to the US administration plan in legitimizing its own rule in Iraq. The then Secretary of State, Colin Powell, in announcing the recipient of grants for reconstruction of Iraq, said that each of the grantees ‘will work with Iraq partners on the ground to prepare women to compete in Iraq’s January 2005 elections, encourage women to vote, train women in media and business skills, and establish resource centres for networking and counselling’. Since the 2003 occupation, I have undertaken a forensic ethnographical cyber-based investigation of the funding process of women’s NGOs in Northern Iraq, an investigation which I have called ‘Tracing dollars, mapping feminist-colonial relations: US State Department funding for women’s democracy training in Iraq’. On International Women’s Day, 8 March 2004, then Secretary of State, Colin

Powell, announced a \$10 million, Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative (IWDI), and inaugurated the 'U.S. Iraq Women's Network' that would help to administer the fund.

The Network is modelled after the 'US-Afghan Women's Council' whose main activities centre on job training and 'other economic opportunities'. The six first grantees were the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, the Independent Women's Forum, the Art of Living Foundation, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and Kurdish Human Rights Watch.

In 2006, a fact sheet released by the Office of International Women's Issues stated that along with NGO partners, the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative grantees provided 'civic training' to over 60,000 Iraqi women, whereas in 2005 the official number of Iraqi women trained through the IWDI was only 2,000. In 2007, yet another initiative was announced, with a mandate similar to the US-Iraqi Women's Network, and the Iraqi Women's Gift Fund, called the US-Iraqi Businesswomen's Partnership (USIBP). According to a fact sheet, the partnership would bring American women entrepreneurs together with Iraqi counterparts in a virtual mentoring programme through to December 2007. For 2008-9, an additional \$10 million has been allocated by Congress for a third phase of human rights and democracy programmes for women, in addition to the initial \$10 million in 2004 and \$4.5 million in 2006.

One of the groups funded under the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative is the Independent Women's Forum (IWF). According to an IWF press release, it was granted these funds in order to 'provide leadership training, democracy education and coalition building assistance' to Iraqi women. The IWF's mission statement says that it was 'established to combat the women-as-victim, pro-big-government ideology of radical feminism'. It also states that 'IWF fosters greater respect for limited government, equality under the law, property rights, free markets, strong families, and a powerful and effective national defense and foreign policy'. Some of its main struggles in the USA have included lobbying against the Violence against Women Act, and opposing the enforcement of the Equal Pay Act on the grounds that the wage gap between men and women is a myth. Further, the IWF sponsored a study that criticizes women's studies curricula and assigned readings in the USA, saying that women would learn more about gender construction by reading Shakespeare's play *The Taming of the Shrew*. IWF's board of directors has included Lynne Cheney, wife of Vice President Cheney, Wendy Lee Gramm, wife of former Enron board member, Texas Senator Phil Gramm, and Kate O'Beirne.

Kurdish women were seriously concerned about the 'religious nature' of the constitution. Despite their effort in lobbying the Kurdish regional government in writing to the drafting committee, and discussing it in the Kurdish media and women's press, the final version of the constitution is based on Islamic canonical law (i.e. *sharia*), which advocates the union of the state and mosque. The Kurdish leadership, preoccupied with maintaining self-rule under a federalist regime, made concessions on the issue of women's rights vs. federalism. Isobel Coleman writes:

As the arguments dragged on, US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad finally intervened to avoid a stalemate. To gain concession in other areas, he supported provisions that strengthened Islam's influence. Ultimately, the Kurds acquiesced too, both because they had other priorities to defend and because they recognized that conservative Shiites were not going to capitulate [on limiting women's rights].⁷

Article 2 of the constitution makes Islam the official religion of the state and the basic source of legislation. What became apparent was that the presence of women in the public sphere, such as NGOs, does not necessarily guarantee a progressive change in gender relations; there is a need for feminist consciousness, women's movements and collective struggles. For Kurdish and Arab women of Iraq, this is undoubtedly a long and arduous struggle.

Most of the Kurdish women in the leadership of NGOs have taken part in conferences, meetings or workshops organized by the IWF in Kurdistan, Iraq, or Amman, Jordan. The question we need to ask is: What 'democracy' lessons do Kurdish women have to learn from an anti-feminist organization? Why should Kurdish women's national and feminist aspirations be harnessed by colonial, racist and anti-feminist agendas? I am seriously pondering responses to these questions and I think as long as Kurdish women remain devoted to the cause of nation/nationalism and its dream of building a masculine, patriarchal and bourgeois modern state, they will have to compromise the cause of women's emancipation. It is already known that women in the leadership position of NGOs are not leaders of women's movement; they, rather, constitute a new transnational technocratic elite class with the power to create the best local conditions for transnational capitalist reconstruction projects.⁸

A democracy promotion⁹

While visiting women's NGOs, I collected documentation on the funded projects as well as the curriculum of diverse training programmes for women. My intention was to review the content of their training curriculum in order to probe into the ideological underpinnings of the 'democracy training project'. One of the documents, *Foundations of Democracy: Teacher's Guide*,¹⁰ was intended as a reference for democracy and civic education training in Northern Iraq. This curriculum is produced by the Center for Civic Education, based in the USA and funded by a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) as well as a grant from the Danforth Foundation. The OJJDP works from the premise that 'Juveniles in crisis – from serious, violent, and chronic offenders to victims of abuse and neglect – pose a challenge to the nation', and that they have to be policed and controlled.¹¹ This pathologizing logic of the individual as the source of social problems has been problematized in the work of Colley, Eccelstone and Pupavac.¹² This logic serves to reproduce social inequalities by separating the individual from the objective social reality of inequality.

The curriculum is organized around four concepts of authority, privacy, responsibility and justice. It instructs teachers to promote compromise and consensus. The 'Bible, Koran, or Torah' are presented as examples of sources for moral authority.¹³ These religious texts have, however, been critiqued for their promotion of patriarchal models of authority and for offering a blueprint for the subordination of women. The gendered, Orientalist and colonialist ideological underpinnings of the training manual, *Foundations of Democracy* (1997),¹⁴ is best manifested in one of the lessons it offers – the story of 'Bill Russell and Red Cloud'. In this story, Bill Russell and Amy Clark, two 'pioneers', are sent to 'negotiate' with Red Cloud and Morning Sun, two indigenous persons from the Cheyenne tribe. Following the story, there is a set of questions about where each of the four characters derived their authority. It is interesting to note that the only person who derived authority from consent is Bill Russell, representing the white-male-rational thinker. In other words, the settler or occupier is presented as the authority. The other pioneers 'consented' to send him to negotiate. His female counterpart derived her authority directly from Russell, who chose her as an assistant. In other words, she derived her authority from the male authority with power over her. Red Cloud derived his authority from 'custom', and Morning Sun derived her authority from 'morality' because 'she possessed great wisdom' and was the spiritual leader of the

tribe. This portrayal of legitimate female authority is consistent with the patriarchal, feudal, religious nationalism that perceives women's role as the pillar of moral strength in both the family and nation. The story normalizes the genocide of the indigenous peoples of North America carried out by European settlers by labelling it as 'conflicts created by the westward migration'.¹⁵ It portrays the 'conflict' as one between two groups having equal say and power to negotiate, as opposed to the disparate power relations that characterize colonialism and occupation. In the story, consent is associated with the colonizer and custom with the indigenous man. In this context, the occupier is represented as the mediator of conflict and the occupied as the guardian of old conflicts. I should note that the Red Cloud example has been replaced with a narrative about 'Bubble Land' in the 2000 edition. Bubble Land is a fictional location with non-human characters. In this fantasy land, nonetheless, it is important to learn that 'authority' is necessary or else chaos ensues. The curricula are presented as non-'conventional texts which focus on facts, dates, people, and events. Rather *Foundations of Democracy* is about ideas, values, and principles fundamental to understanding our constitutional democracy'.¹⁶ This claim is an explicit rejection of the historical development of democracy in favour of an idealist notion of the term. It is also a rejection of the learners' history as an always historical and changing experience. The idea here is that democracy is not about what actually happens, but rather principles that float above the 'conventionality' of history. The curriculum also describes how one should use authority. It states that we use authority: (1) to protect our safety and our property; (2) to help manage conflict peacefully and fairly; (3) to distribute the benefits and burdens of society; and (4) to maintain order.¹⁷ Authority in this context is constituted as the arbitrator of equality. This is a characteristic of the capitalist notion of democracy. In this form of democracy, Allman explains, citizens alienate their political power and capacities by handing them over to elected representatives, over whom they have little or no day-to-day influence or control.¹⁸ In order to establish this bourgeois model of democracy in Iraq, occupation was soon followed by setting up an election process.

Conclusions

Rejecting the colonial feminism of the USA, I insist that a feminist, anti-imperialist framework must simultaneously challenge the cruelty and misogyny of native or national patriarchies alongside the racism and

sexism of the imperialist powers. My own experience of participating in the women's movements in the Middle East has convinced me that colonial and native patriarchies and their 'feminisms' constitute not a contradiction but, rather, symbiotic relationships. Instead of contributing to this symbiosis, feminist scholarship should challenge the two patriarchal regimes and the global imperialist order that thrives on them. From this perspective, post-conflict recovery involves, among other things, organizing highly politicized feminist and women's movements that challenge local and imported patriarchies, fundamentalism, racism and imperialism. Resisting colonial feminist projects requires pedagogical theories and practices that cross the boundaries set by cultural relativism, nativism and nationalism.

Notes

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1. For an overview of the objective and history of the network, visit www.yorku.ca/wicz.

2. Paula Allman (1999), *Revolutionary Social Transformation: Democratic Hopes, Political Possibilities and Critical Education* (Westport, CT and London: Bergin and Garvey); Paul Allman (2001), *Critical Education Against Global Capitalism: Karl Marx and Revolutionary Critical Education* (Westport, CT and London: Bergin and Garvey); Paula Allman (2007), *On Marx: An Introduction to the Revolutionary Intellect of Karl Marx* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers); Wayne Au, 'Epistemology of the oppressed: the dialectics of Paulo Freire's theory of knowledge', *Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies*, 5(2) (2007), 13 pp.; H. Colley, 'A rough guide to the history of mentoring from a Marxist feminist perspective', *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 28(3) (2002), pp. 257–73; Glenn Rikowski, 'Education for industry: a complex technicism', in *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1) (2001), pp. 29–49; Glenn Rikowski (2002), 'Fuel for the living fire: Labour-power!' in Ana C. Dinerstein and Michael Neary (eds), *The Labour Debate: An Investigation into the Theory and Reality of Capitalist Work* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited); Frank Youngman (1986), *Adult Education and Socialist Pedagogy* (London: Croom Helm).

3. The analysis on this section is based on my chapter entitled 'Imperialism, "post-war reconstruction" and Kurdish Women's NGOs', in Nadjie Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt (eds), *Women and War in the Middle East: Transnational Perspectives* (London: Zed Books, 2009).

4. Andrew S. Natsios (2008), 'The nine principles of reconstruction and development', *Parameters*, US Army War College, Summer, pp. 4–20; Ryan 2008.

5. Natsios, 'The nine principles of reconstruction and development', p. 4.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

7. Isobel Coleman, 'Women, Islam, and the new Iraq', *Foreign Affairs*, 1(85) (January/February 2006).

8. Williams Robinson (1996), *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

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9. I am currently working on further theorization of the 'democracy' training programmes and have named this process 'learning by dispossession', borrowing from David Harvey's conception of accumulation by dispossession.

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11. OJJDP (n.d.), 'About OJJDP', available at www.ojjdp.gov/about/about.html, accessed 30 July 2013.

12. K. Eccleston, 'Learning or therapy? The demoralization of education', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 52(2) (2004), pp. 112–37; V. Pupavac, 'Therapeutic governance: psycho-social intervention and trauma risk management', *Disaster*, 25(4) (2001), pp. 358–72; Colley, 'A rough guide to the history of mentoring from a Marxist feminist perspective'.

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13. *Foundations of Democracy* 2000

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14. *Foundations of Democracy* 1997

15. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

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16. *Foundations of Democracy* 2000, p. vi.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

18. Allman, *On Marx*, p. 36.