

11

Processes of Decolonization

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Colonization and decolonization are social processes even more than they are political processes. Governance over a people changes only after the people themselves have sufficiently changed. This chapter presents observations on the process of colonization by the late Virgilio Enriques,¹ a Native son of the Philippines, an advocate for the integrity of Native wisdoms, and a professor emeritus of psychology at the University of the Philippines. The contribution from Professor Enriques is taken from my discussions with him in Wai'anae, Hawai'i, in the mid-1990s. Only portions of these discussions were recorded, and I confess to having expanded and expounded on this conversation over the years.

The process of decolonization described here follows that of colonization. My comments are based on my individual Hawai'i experience, my observation of others' experiences as they move from one phase of decolonization to the next, and my understanding of the broader societal experience in Hawai'i and of significant events that have taken place in the Pacific region and the rest of the world.

The Process of Colonization

Virgilio Enriques has suggested the following steps in the process of colonization.

(1) Denial and Withdrawal

When a colonial people first come upon an Indigenous people, the colonial strangers will immediately look upon the Indigenous people as lacking culture or moral values and having nothing of any social value to merit kind comment. Thus, the colonial people deny the very existence of a culture of any merit among the Indigenous people.

Indigenous people themselves, especially those who develop a closer relationship with the newcomers, gradually withdraw from their own cultural practices. Some may even join in the ridicule and the denial of the

existence of culture among the Native people. They may become quickly converted and later lead in the criticism of Indigenous societies.

(2) Destruction/Eradication

The colonists take bolder action in step 2, physically destroying and attempting to eradicate all physical representations of the symbols of Indigenous cultures. This may include burning their art, their tablets, their god images, destroying their sacred sites, and so on. At times, the Indigenous people themselves may participate in this destruction – some may even lead in it.

(3) Denigration/Belittlement/Insult

As colonization takes a stronger hold, the new systems created within Indigenous societies, such as churches, colonial-style health delivery systems, and new legal institutions, will all join to denigrate, belittle, and insult any continuing practice of the Indigenous culture. Churches will style Indigenous religious practices as “devil” worship and condemn practitioners to physical torture or their souls to hell. Colonially trained medical practitioners will refer to Indigenous doctors as witches if their medicine is successful and as ignorant, superstitious fools if their medicine fails. The new legal institutions will criminalize the traditional practices and fine the practitioners, and they may declare illegal the possession of traditionally sacred or healing materials.

In this stage, symbols of evil must be imported by the colonizer in order for evil to gain legitimacy within the society. Thus, in many colonized societies, we find the importation of Dracula, Hallowe’en, or other representations of evil through the colonial societies’ literature or legends, while the colonizers allude to the Indigenous peoples’ representations of evil as ignorant superstitions.

(4) Surface Accommodation/Tokenism

In this stage of colonization, whatever remnants of culture that have survived the onslaught of the earlier steps are given surface accommodation. They are tolerated as an exhibition of the colonial regime’s sense of leniency to the continuing ignorance of the Natives. These practices are called folkloric: “showing respect to the old folks and to tradition.” They are given token regard.

(5) Transformation/Exploitation

The traditional culture that simply refuses to die or go away is now transformed into the culture of the dominating colonial society. A Christian church may now use an Indigenous person as a priest, permitting the priest to use the Indigenous language and to incorporate some Indigenous

terms and practices within the church's framework of worship. Indigenous art that has survived may gain in popularity and form the basis for economic exploitation. Indigenous symbols in print may decorate modern dress. Indigenous musical instruments may be incorporated into modern music. Supporting Indigenous causes within the general colonial structure may become the popular political thing to do, exploiting the culture further. This exploitation may be committed by Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous people.

Processes of Decolonization

I suggest five distinct phases of a people's decolonization. They are (1) *rediscovery and recovery*, (2) *mourning*, (3) *dreaming*, (4) *commitment*, and (5) *action*. Each phase can be experienced at the same time or in various combinations. Like the steps of colonization, these phases of decolonization do not have clear demarcations from one to the next.

Rediscovery and Recovery

This phase sets the foundation for the eventual decolonization of the society. People who have undergone colonization are inevitably suffering from concepts of inferiority in relation to their historical cultural/social background. They live in a colonial society that is a constant and overwhelming reminder of the superiority of that society over the underlying Indigenous one.

A person or a society may enter the stage of rediscovery and recovery for many different reasons. It may be out of curiosity or desperation, by accident or coincidence, to escape, or because of fate.

As a volunteer member of the US military, I came across a book at a military base library in Hawai'i, written by Queen Lili'uokalani, which started my entry into this phase of decolonization. Whether by accident or fate, I was curious enough to take it from the shelf and examine the words left by Hawaii's queen about fifty-five years earlier, telling of the conspiracy and overthrow of the Hawaiian nation. Having come upon these words, I could not let the matter alone. I had to take up my own study of my history, which I had never known before. I read and interviewed every source of information that I could find on Hawaii's history and Hawaiian cultural foundations.

Hawaiian society has been in this phase since the late 1960s, when greater sensitivity to racial identity and pride as well as growing distrust of the US government developed. The black struggle for equality in civil rights, the American Indian struggle for fundamental freedoms and recognition as the first people of the land, as well as the growing challenge to the righteousness of the US war in Vietnam played a major part in bringing Hawai'i to the recovery and rediscovery stage. Those challenges to

the US government and its society showed us in Hawai'i that the great American society was not so great after all!

Around this time, information began to appear in Hawai'i about the overthrow of the Hawaiian nation in the latter 1800s by the US government: information about US government agents conspiring with residents in Hawai'i, many of whom were American citizens; American military spying while the government pretended to have no interest in grabbing Hawai'i; and US troops landing and acting as the military support for a puppet government. The disbelief and yet the complete inability to disregard the information stunned the general society. This was reflected in an interruption of the first criminal case in modern time that challenged the US court's jurisdiction over a Hawaiian citizen.² When defence counsel read President Cleveland's message to the US Congress³ confessing to a litany of aggressive acts, circuit court judge John Lanham said that it was the most fantastic story he had ever heard, yet he could not deny the events having happened, since the words were taken from the US Congressional Record. Lanham was no neophyte to Hawai'i, having married a Native Hawaiian woman and served in the state legislature for many years and sitting, at the time, as a judge in the state circuit court.

As the rediscovery phase continued, new vigour in Hawaiian music and literature, both traditional and modern, added substantially to the recovery of pride. Social and political activities took on new momentum. Hawaiians were now willing to stand up against members of Hawaii's Supreme Court in their appointment of trustees to the Bishop Estate Trust, a nonprofit entity designed to educate Native Hawaiian students, with extensive assets of land throughout Hawai'i. There were new challenges to evictions of Native Hawaiians from beaches and valleys and challenges to the abuse of the island of Kaho'olawe as a US military bombing range. As this platform of discontent and awareness began to build, a plethora of new organizations emerged, pushing to the forefront the illegality of the overthrow of Hawai'i.

The phase of rediscovery and recovery has not ended. Many people are still "getting up to speed," not knowing many of the details but generally acquiescing to the overall theme of a grand illegality having occurred in Hawai'i 100 years ago – the theft of the Hawaiian nation.⁴

This phase of rediscovering one's history and recovering one's culture, language, identity, and so on is fundamental to the movement for decolonization. It forms the basis for the steps to follow.

One of the dangers in this phase is the elevation of form over substance, of dealing with a traditional culture from the perspective of a foreign culture. Indigenous people themselves can abuse their own culture, especially when they have been so long and completely separated from the practice or appreciation of their traditional culture, which they now see and treat

from the perspective of the foreign one. This danger is evident among those who have taken on the trappings of their "traditional" culture by wearing forests of leaves and flowers on their heads, speaking the Indigenous language (which they learned at colonial colleges), and otherwise playing to foreigners' concepts of the Indigenous person. Theatrics that make good media clips could eventually be mistaken for substance.

The difference, therefore, between the final stage of colonization – *exploitation* – and the initial stage of decolonization – *rediscovery and recovery* – must be carefully distinguished. Caution must be taken in letting media select for the colonized people the leadership or the identification of their cultural roots.

Mourning

A natural outgrowth of the first phase is mourning – a time when a people are able to lament their victimization. This is an essential phase of healing. Even in individual tragedies in which one is a victim of a crime, has experienced the death of a close loved one, or has suffered from a sexual assault, the victim must be permitted a time of mourning.⁵

As a young member of the US military, plodding through the mounds of history and recovering from a loss of Native identity, I experienced great anger, wanting to blow up the colonial system, take up arms to drive that very military out of my Native home. Others have expressed themselves in very similar ways, finding that they had been lied to for so many years while in the "educational" systems in Hawai'i. Their anger and frustration have ranged from throwing chairs across a room to roaming streets wanting to beat Americans to contemplating paramilitary action.

The symbolic mourning of the loss of the Hawaiian nation took place during the centennial observation of the overthrow, held at 'Iolani Palace, where there was a gathering of over 10,000 people. Over the weekend of January 16 and 17, 1993, people came from all parts of Hawai'i and returned from other parts of the world for this centennial observation. It served as a focal point for mourning by most of those touched in one or another way by the overthrow.⁶ Many more people remained at home but were tied to their radios, televisions, or newspapers as reports came in of the events at the palace.

The mourning stage can also accelerate the earlier stage of rediscovery and recovery. People in mourning often immerse themselves totally in the rediscovery of their history, making for an interesting interplay between these two phases, each feeding on one another.

This phase may also be expressed in great anger and a lashing out at all symbols of the colonizer. A sense of justified violence, either in words or in actions, can lull some into remaining in this phase, milking every advantage of the innocence of one's victimization. This abuse of the mourning

phase can turn into an attempt to entrench the colonization in order to continue the mourning, the anger, the hatred, and the division among people. Some people are happy to go no further than mourning, finding sufficient satisfaction in long-term grumbling. People can be "stuck in the awfulizing" of their status as victims. Some build careers on it.

Dreaming

This phase is the most crucial for decolonization. Here is where the full panorama of possibilities is expressed, considered through debate, consultation, and building dreams on further dreams, which eventually become the flooring for the creation of a new social order.

It is during this phase that colonized people are able to explore their own cultures, experience their own aspirations for their future, and consider their own structures of government and social order to encompass and express their hopes.

So crucial is this phase that it must be allowed to run its full course. If the dreaming is cut short by any action plan or program designed to create a remedy for the issue at a premature stage, then the result can prove disastrous.

I liken this phase to the formation of a fetus in a mother's womb. That fetus must be allowed its time to develop and grow to its full potential. To attempt to rush the process, bringing the baby out sooner than his or her natural time, could prove dangerous if not disastrous.

An examination of the Pacific as well as the world's decolonization pattern may be helpful. There are many instances in which people who underwent "decolonization" merely underwent a change in position of the colonizer. Consider, for example, the constitutions of the newly emerged Pacific island nations as well as African nations. Do they reflect more closely the social and legal culture of the immediate preceding colonizer or of the Indigenous culture? Are those documents truly reflective of the hopes and aspirations of the people previously colonized? Or do they represent the colonial mentality that pervades the society at the time of foreign departure? Were they written or advised by colonial experts coming from a mind-set of Western political structures, or were they drafted by the people themselves?

True decolonization is more than simply placing Indigenous or previously colonized people into the positions held by colonizers. Decolonization includes the reevaluation of the political, social, economic, and judicial structures themselves and the development, if appropriate, of new structures that can hold and house the values and aspirations of the colonized people.

In Hawai'i, the dreaming is now vibrant. One ongoing process is called the Native Hawaiian Convention, in which delegates elected only by

Native Hawaiians convene to review all aspects of self-determination and make recommendations to the Native Hawaiian population. This convention will explore the full range of choices, from remaining integrated within the United States to complete independence from the United States.

Other organizations are also attempting to address the question of self-determination. Some have gone so far as to declare themselves the government *pro tem* pending success in achieving international recognition as an independent nation. Others are gathering and forming coalitions to promote continuing discussion of Hawaii's future. Still others are dedicated to remaining part of the United States but having the Indigenous people given formal recognition and equivalent treatment as many American Indian tribes, a nation-within-a-nation approach.

As the debate over Hawaii's future gains greater momentum, there is a matching hunger for solid background information and new visions upon which the dreaming can be built. Some of the areas now being explored include

- (1) ramifications of Hawaiian sovereignty on
 - tourism
 - population control
 - military presence
 - international trade and business
 - diversified agriculture
 - control over ocean resources
 - taxation
 - land relationships;
- (2) international legal principles that apply to the Hawaiian case – in particular, principles of decolonization, Indigenous peoples' rights, and ocean governance seen from new economic, environmental, and political world perspectives;
- (3) review of other cases in which people have exercised self-determination, both as Indigenous peoples' movements and as broader movements of decolonization;
- (4) identification and description of various models of nationhood; and
- (5) methods and processes by which non-Indigenous concerns and contributions can be incorporated into the overall study of Hawaiian sovereignty.

Hawai'i, however, continues to face the threat of rushing the dreaming. Now that the topic of Hawaiian sovereignty has "caught on" as one of the foremost political issues of the day, many are demanding immediate action, believing that reflection and introspection are not worth the time and effort in the development of a new social order. Those expressing

impatience and even ridicule over the dreaming process often call for very short-sighted goals, generally measured by material gains. Thus, there is an immediate call for lands, dollars, and a "sovereign" nation whose jurisdiction and powers are fully within the US Congress or Supreme Court. Long-term planning for the future of Hawai'i in relation to the Pacific and the world is not included in such calls for an immediate remedy.

Commitment

In the process of dreaming, the people will have the opportunity to weigh the voices rather than becoming caught up with counting votes or bullets. They will be able to wade through the cult of personalities and family histories and to release themselves from the shackles of colonial patriotism. They will now be ready for commitment to a single direction in which the society must move. This phase will culminate in people combining their voices in a clear statement of their desired direction. There is no single "way" or process for a people's expression of commitment. In fact, over time the commitment will become so clear that a formal process becomes merely a pro forma expression of the people's will.

It can be difficult to distinguish between an early termination of the dreaming phase and the start of the commitment phase. In Hawai'i, in several corners of the society, we are hearing the call for a Hawaiian convention to create a founding document of the Hawaiian nation. This call is being made by bodies that include the Hawaiian legislature, semi-autonomous organizations such as the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, and even the umbrella organization supporting Hawaiian sovereignty education, Hui Na'auao. All such calls for a process must be carefully scrutinized and questioned as to whether they are consistent with the desire to allow the full process of decolonization to take place or to cut the dreaming short and force a premature resolution of historical injustices, thus limiting the losses of those whose interests are threatened in the decolonization process.

In recent years, the Hawaiian legislature and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs put up funds to conduct a vote among Native Hawaiians on whether or not to elect delegates to a Native Hawaiian Convention to propose a form of Hawaiian governance.⁷ Suspicion was raised over the fact that funding for this process came from the State of Hawai'i and that the process was therefore tainted and not truly a self-determining process contemplated in international law. International policies – well established by the United Nations – do, however, call for governments to provide necessary resources to assist the people in their exercise of self-determination.⁸ A vote was taken in which any person over the age of eighteen was permitted to participate, regardless of their residency or whether they were incarcerated or under other civil disabilities, such as losing the right to

vote in a state election because of criminal conviction. Among Native Hawaiians throughout the world, 22,294 voted yes, while 8,129 voted no – a 73 percent response in favour of electing delegates to a convention. A second step was taken in January 1999 when delegates were elected to a Native Hawaiian Convention. That convention is now proceeding.

Several organizations are claiming that they individually represent the Hawaiian nation. They have gone forward and formed their “national” organizational structures, put in place their national leaders, and now proceed to speak for the nation. They are trying to be “first” in the action phase. Such elitist solutions are quick substitutes for the decolonization process, and they deprive the people of a participatory role in the formation of their own social order.

Action

This phase can be properly taken only upon reaching a consensus of commitment in the fourth phase. Otherwise, the action taken cannot truly be said to be the choice of the colonized people.

But the reality of many situations does not allow for the methodical, patient, time-consuming process of the four earlier phases. When a people are under physical attack, when a people are finding their children torn from their homes for reeducation in colonial societies, when a people are being removed from their traditional lands in droves, action may be called for prior to the society’s completion of the dreaming phase. But that kind of responsive action to colonization’s onslaught is not the action spoken of here. The responsive action is one for survival. The action called for in the fifth phase of decolonization is not a reactive but a proactive step taken based on consensus of the people.

The fifth phase may incorporate the full spectrum from a call to reason on one end to a resort to arms on the other. Under appropriate times and in the appropriate manner, all such actions are sanctioned by international law.⁹ But the decolonization environment has so drastically changed in the past thirty years that the action phase today must include considerations beyond what has been historically undertaken to achieve independence. While the first thought for independence would have been to grab the rifle and march against the colonizer, it seems that the new weapons are dictated by technological development. The fax machine, computer, television, radio, and newspaper are perhaps more effective in executing the long battle plan. These new weapons notwithstanding, the rifle, it’s been argued, may still be necessary to defend those other media of expression.

Not only have the methods of executing commitments changed, but also the arenas in which they are carried out are now not as geographically defined as before. To speak before a national congress or an appropriate

body of the United Nations may be far more effective than to storm a mountain top within one's homeland in an armed battle.

Conclusion

I have presented specific steps in the processes of colonization and decolonization, based on two Indigenous people's observations of their own colonial and decolonizing experiences. For the purpose of illustration, these steps or phases have been presented here as distinct from one another, in a clear sequence. Yet the reality of colonization and decolonization is not so clear. In practice, we often see combinations of these social changes. We see them occur in individuals at different times and likewise in general society – some individuals being far ahead or behind in the process. The process of decolonization, for example, has actually begun in Hawai'i, where the general society has now gone through several years of the phase of rediscovery and recovery. In 1978, during the first criminal trial in which a Native Hawaiian defendant refused to dignify the court by entering a plea of guilty or not guilty to the government's charges, thereby challenging the court's jurisdiction to sit in judgment over Hawaiian nationals, less than 1 percent of the general and Hawaiian public understood his claim or cause. Twenty years later, the subject of Hawaiian sovereignty is on the agenda of almost every politician because both the vast majority of Native Hawaiians and the general public support some form of Hawaiian sovereignty. Even in the face of all this, we can still find individuals who remain in denial, pretending that there was no illegality in the overthrow of the Hawaiian nation, and who refuse to accept the general society's rediscovery and recovery.

Nor are the phases of decolonization such that, once passed through, they are never revisited again. As one goes through the phases of rediscovery and recovery, then mourning, next dreaming, it is at times helpful or even necessary to return to rediscovery and recovery to aid in the dreaming. For example, as the society engages in the dreaming by discussing the future of the Hawaiian nation, the question of who should make up the Hawaiian nation arises. The answer to this question lies partially in the exploration of Hawaii's history and culture, discovering the makeup of the earlier Hawaiian nationals and the cultural principles upon which these earlier national questions were answered.

The process of colonization and decolonization deserves closer consideration in attempting to refashion societies. Otherwise, we may find that we are merely entrenching ourselves deeper in the systems, values, and controls put in place by the colonizer.