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Lance Henson

Bridging the Divide (A Voice from the Other)

So many indigenous voices have risen to the occasion to address you as human beings. Across the years before you were born. The message remains the same. For we are not human beings on a spiritual journey, we are spiritual beings on a human journey. We bring messages from the most powerful consciousness that exists, mother earth.

This day as I speak to you there is no economic or political justice for the poor, the people of colour, women or workers within the framework of global corporate capitalism. Corporate capitalism uses identity politics, multiculturalism and racial justice to masquerade as politics that will never halt the rising social inequality, unchecked militarism, evisceration of civil liberties and omnipotence of the organs of security and surveillance. Corporate capitalism cannot be reformed. Despite continually rebranding itself, corporate capitalism is Supranational. It owns the banks, owes no loyalty to any nation/state. It cannibalises everything it touches to extinction, human, mineral, even the water we drink and the air we breathe.

Bridging the divide. Looking from an indigenous perspective at the monstrous dehumanising objectives of corporate capitalism. It is as if we are viewing our realities destroyed by a living breathing monstrous entity. To confront this entity, I wish to share with you one of the origins of indigenous resistance. Postcolonial Theory from the (other) involves a conceptual re-orientation towards perspectives of knowledge, as well as needs, developed outside the west.

A lot of Anglo theorists, including most recently the attorney general of the United States, don't like the term postcolonial. It disturbs the new world order.

The third world, a postcolonial term was originally invented on the model of the third estate of the French Revolution. It was a political pamphlet written in January 1789, shortly before the outbreak of the French Revolution. The world was divided according to two political systems. Capitalism and Socialism. The first and second world, the third world comprised what was left over. The third world was made up of what was left over; the non-aligned nations. The new independent nations that had formerly made up the colonies of the imperial powers. It was not until 1955, in Bandung (Indonesia) that 29 mostly independent African and Asian countries initiated what became as the non-aligned movement, which constituted an independent power bloc. It was a third world perspective on political economic and cultural priorities. It was an event of enormous proportions. It symbolised the common attempt of people of colour in the world to throw off the yoke of white western domination. However, this third world way was slow to develop and define itself, and gradually became associated with the economic and political problems these countries encountered. Poverty, famine, unrest. Mostly caused by the colonial systems that continued to impede their cultural and political lives. The Bandung conference therefore marks the origin of postcolonialism as a self-conscious cultural political philosophy.

A more militant version of the third world came 11 years later, 1966, the tricontinental conference in Havana, Cuba: the first time Latin America, Africa and Asia, the three continents of the south would gather. This conference produced the journal *Tricontinental* and for the first time it published the writings of postcolonial theorists and activists such as Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Ho Chi Min and Jean Paul Sartre. The journal celebrated not a single political, cultural position but a transnational body of work with a common air of popular liberation. The message stated that the exploited people of the world must eliminate the foundations sustaining imperialism, including cheap labour and raw materials controlled by colonial governments which further deepened indigenous peoples into absolute dependence. As terms both tricontinental and third world retain power because they suggest an alternative culture, an alternative epistemology.

The human community is being challenged in ways that test all the usually supportive foundations of culture, politics and religion. These signalling truths are reminiscent of ancient stories of the hero's journey. We are being asked to enter areas of human history that challenge all our notions of reality. To enter areas of human experience without a cultural foundation, we place ourselves in jeopardy. We are in a world where something that takes place on another continent has a direct bearing on our lives. We are being asked to enter areas of human experience that place us in a highly mythological period. In this often-illusory landscape with no apparent answers, where can we turn? Mythology and metaphorical logic offer a way to question ourselves in ways that do not destroy our soul's true nature. Life is sorrow, life is joy. These are the temporalities of being. We are fortunate if we have a choice as to how to conduct our daily lives. Most people believe they are searching for a meaning for life, what they may really be seeking is the experience of being alive.

Lance Henson is a poet of the Cheyenne nation of Oklahoma. He has published 43 books in 23 languages. An ex-marine and mixed martial artist, he has maintained a cultural indigenous world-view that opposes the mistreatment of indigenous peoples the world over. His literary project *Words from the Edge* has invited poets from endangered tribal peoples to Europe to share their stories and poems. He is an adjunct Professor of the Cheyenne Arapaho tribal college of Oklahoma. He lives in Bologna, Italy.

lancehens@yahoo.com