

Processes of Decolonization

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INTRODUCTION

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. Here is presented the observations of Professor of Psychology and advocate for the integrity of native wisdoms, Virgilio Enriques, a native son of the Philippines, on the process of colonization. The contribution from Professor Enriques is taken from his discussions with the author in Wai'anae, Hawai'i in the mid 1990's. Only portions of these discussions were recorded. Professor Enriques has since passed on. The author confesses to having repeated, expanded and expounded on this conversation over the years.

The process of decolonization described here follows that of colonization. This process is based on the author's observations of his individual Hawai'i experience and those of others as they move from one to the next phase, the broader societal experience on-going in Hawai'i as well as his understanding of the events which have and continue to take place in the Pacific region and the rest of the world.

1. On the process of colonization

Professor Virgilio Enriques has suggested the following steps in the process of colonization:

Step 1) Denial and Withdrawal: When a colonial people first come upon an indigenous people, the colonial strangers will immediately look upon the indigenous as a people without culture, no moral values, 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 new-comers, 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.

Step 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 the burning of their art, their tablets, their god images, the destruction of their sacred sites, etc. At times, the indigenous people themselves may participate in this destruction - some may even lead in the destruction.

Step 3) Denigration/Belittlement/Insult: As colonization takes a stronger hold, the new systems which are 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 Adevil@ worship and condemn the practitioners to physical torture or their souls to hell. Colonially trained medical practitioners will refer to the indigenous doctors as witches if their medicine is successful and ignorant superstitious fools if their medicine fails. The new legal institutions will criminalize the traditional practices, fine the practitioners and may declare illegal the possession of traditionally sacred or healing materials.

Here, even symbols of evil must be imported by the colonizer in order for evil to gain legitimacy within the society. Thus, we find in many colonized societies, the importation of Dracula, Halloween, or other representations of evil through the colonial societies literature or legends, all the while they allude to the Indigenous peoples representations of evil as more ignorant superstitions.

Step 4) Surface Accommodation/Tokenism: In this stage of colonization, whatever remnants of culture have survived the onslaught of the earlier steps are given surface accommodation. They are tolerated as an exhibition of the