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Si Me Permiten Hablar: Limitations of the Human Rights Tradition to Address Racial Inequality

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Si Me Permiten Hablar:[1]
Limitations of the Human Rights Tradition to Address Racial Inequality[2]

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Abstract

In this paper we address some of the major limitations of the human rights tradition (HRT) in addressing issues of racial inequality. We contend that the universalist and individual-based framework of HRT fails to appreciate the significance of society's racial structure. More importantly, HRT ignores how race fractured the world system creating differently valued human bodies. In addition to addressing some of the shortcomings of HRT, we present challenges for those in the tradition and advance several alternatives for academics who want to work towards the elimination of race-based inequality in the world.

Race and the Human Rights Tradition

We are fascinated by how most (white) scholars writing about citizenship, human rights, and democracy ignore the centrality of race – *then* and *now*. They romanticize the emergence of democracy and Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, Hume, and Condorcet. They universalize the ideas codified in the documents produced by the French and the American revolutions when neither intended this to be the case. They seem

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[1] *Si Me Permiten Hablar* is the title of a book by Quiche activist Rigoberta Menchú Tum.
[2] This paper derives from a talk given by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva at a panel sponsored by Sociologists without Borders at the 2006 meeting of the *American Sociological Association in Montreal.*

to forget the fact that the Athenian model of democratic citizenship was quick to exclude Others – the latter threatening "the negation of order and the rule of law."[3] Indeed, it was Aristotle who created the mythical notion of *ius sanguinis* (by blood).[4] On the Enlightenment philosophers, and to refresh your memory, a few quotations will suffice.

David Hume, one of the Scottish Moralists, wrote in his 1753 *Of National Characters* that: "I am apt to suspect the negroes ... to be *naturally inferior to the whites* ... Not to mention our colonies, there are Negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which *none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity*; ... In Jamaica ... they talk of one negro as a man of arts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, *like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly.*"[5]

Or consider that Kant, father of modern moral theory, also fashioned himself an anthropologist and geographer and wrote racialized essays such as "The Different Races of Mankind." In his *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, for instance, he stated that "So fundamental is the difference between [the black and white] races of man ... it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color" so that "a clear proof that what [a Negro] said was stupid" was that "this fellow was quite black from head to toe."[6]

And how can we forget that enlightened liberals in the United States such as Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, and James Madison (the main architect of our Constitution), as well as founding fathers, such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, owned people.[7] And in France, have we forgotten that abolitionists such as Robespierre, Lafayette, and Condorcet compromised and did not extend the so-called freedoms of the revolution to the half million slaves in the colonies?

Hence, as Charles W. Mills has argued, the so-called social contract of modernity was a *racial* contract.[8] Nonwhites were considered savages, primitive peoples, creatures, and barely above monkeys, and were subsequently excluded from the contract.[9] The following description of the

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[3] Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 31.
[4] Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 31.
[5] Goldberg 1993, p. 57.
[6] Mills 1997, p. 70.
[7] Feagin 2000.
[8] Mills 1997.
[9] Mills 1997.

"Negro" from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1798 illustrates the era's 'enlightened' thinking about race:

> …Vices the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race: idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, profanity, debauchery, nastiness and intemperance, are said to have extinguished the principles of natural law, and to have silenced the reproofs of conscience. They are strangers to every sentiment of compassion, and are an awful example of the corruption of man when left to himself.[10]

Rousseau indicated the Enlightenment's attitude of racial superiority when he stated that after years of Europeans "swarming all over the world"… he was "convinced that we have known no other men than Europeans."[11]

As we well know, much evidence contradicted the putative European superiority. As Castles and Davidson point out:

> … [T]he conquest of the Americas changed the western claim to moral and ethical superiority maintained vis-á-vis the Old Worlds, since no matter how awful the Mayan and Aztec civilizations, this time the Europeans were greater in their slaughter than those with whom they compared themselves.[12]

The lands colonized by the West experienced the European warrior-citizen as someone who was a genocidal destroyer of culture and tradition.[13] Yet, the dream of the Western world has remained through today: 'Why can't they be like us?'

There is much to say about the limitations of the human rights tradition (henceforth HRT) and its approach to race. Due to space constraints, however, we will only enumerate some of its major limitations. We follow this critique with a few ideas on what is to be done, and present several alternatives for academics who want to work towards the elimination of race-based inequality in the world.

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[10] Ishay 2004, p. 113.
[11] Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 48.
[12] Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 50.
[13] Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 213.

The (Racial) Limitations of the Human Rights Tradition

1) *Authors in this tradition are still stuck in the bourgeois liberal individualism that created this discourse and, accordingly, reject group-based claims or expressions unless they are relegated to the private sphere.*

The HRT idealizes the autonomous individual who can be located within a universe of abstract rights, devoid of racially constraining social structures.[14] Ironically, this colorblind stance uses the same neoconservative rhetoric that has dominated the racial justice debate since the dismantling of Jim Crow. It focuses on a commitment to formal equality which is structured on legal and political formation. This stance so narrowly interprets the goal of human rights that it precludes concerns with the consequences of real-world racial inequalities. As Guinier and Torres suggest in *The Miner's Canary*,[15] this denial of political race provides a cover for dominant identities which are subsumed in so-called universal categories such as 'the citizen,' 'Americans,'[16] or 'Canadians.'

This colorblind HRT stance, therefore, would solve racial inequalities by individual advancement rather than by the collective action of racial groups. Indeed, mobilization of the latter to pursue racial civil rights is viewed as racist – a threat of balkanization of modern society. The HRT logic presents us with a paradox. The reality is that agitation by people of color has made the US a freer and, in a strict sense, more liberal country.[17] The universalist HRT claim, however, is the following: continued organizing around race retards the liberal development of society and, thus, should be stopped because it has lost its liberationist thrust.[18]

2) *The HRT stance assumes that modern nation-states are not deeply racialized (some admit, though, to their gender and class bias). If nation-states are also racial states, as David T. Goldberg argues, why would they provide for and guarantee full citizenship to non-whites?*[19]

There is a deep connection between democracy and human rights because, as Beetham states, "the guarantee of basic freedoms is a necessary condition for the people's voice to be effective in public affairs and for

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[14] Guinier and Torres 2002, p. 38.
[15] Guinier and Torres 2002.
[16] see Morrison 1998 or Walters 2005.
[17] Guinier and Torres 2002, p. 52
[18] Guinier and Torres 2002, p. 52.
[19] Goldberg 2001.

popular control over government to be secured."[20] Although the laws of today's democratic nation-states appear to provide universal political access, minorities in these nation-states suffer *de facto* exclusion from the democratic process. As Castles and Davidson point out, "They [minorities] have the right to vote, but social, economic and cultural exclusion denies them the chance of gaining political representation or having any real say in the decisions that affect their lives."[21] The HRT stance attempts to mollify minorities in the United States and Canada by claiming that "blacks and women in North America do not all suffer dishonor at the same rate or intensity" as people elsewhere.[22] But the reality is that, in the Western nation-states, citizenship has been, and continues to be, a white-conceived political category. As Dallmayr argues in his critique of Rorty's *Achieving Our Country*, the anti-identity politics, pro-melting pot stance of America was "basically a sham, disguising the hegemonic predominance of one culture – white, male, Anglo-Saxon – over women and all sorts of minorities."[23]

We agree with Beetham in that there is also a deeper reason for democracy: commonality of humanity and needs.[24] Full democratic citizenship thus implies economic and other social inclusion, not just political inclusion. As Fraga and Leal argue, "…having more rights to vote, own a home, or get an education means very little when people are provided insufficient resources to realize those rights."[25] The fact is that ascriptive racial status remains an organizing principle of Western social institutions. Social arrangements by race, such as labor market segmentation and residential segregation, produce "real-life differences that cannot be understood purely in representational terms."[26] These arrangements produce and are reproduced by differential access to social capital. As Portes and Landolt suggest, social capital works through closure.[27] The outcomes of social capital "… will vary depending on what economic resources are obtained, who is excluded from them, and what is demanded in exchange."[28] Therefore,

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[20] Beetham 1999, p. 93.
[21] Castles and Davidson 2001, p. 11.
[22] Howard 1995, p. 159.
[23] Dallmayr 2001, p. 101.
[24] Beetham 1999.
[25] Fraga and Leal 2004, p. 298.
[26] Glenn 2002, pp. 14–15.
[27] Portes and Landolt 1996.
[28] Portes and Landolt 1996, p. 21.

social capital can perpetuate "exclusivity and a society in which identity, to a great extent, determines whether or not one is allowed to join."[29]

As HRT proponents like Howard claim, "In a society based on human rights, human dignity consists not of acquiescence to hierarchical order but of equality and assertion of one's claims to respect."[30] The problem is that the ideology of individual choice in Western societies undermines concerns with ascriptive restrictions related to status, as status remains a private matter outside the purview of the state.[31]

3) *The HRT stance subscribes to the notion of ethical individualism – "the intrinsic value of all humans," but it seems unwilling to temper this view by the fact that there are vast differences of power among individuals as individuals and as members of social groups or nation-states.*[32]

The idea of citizenship typically designates the two related notions of membership and equality: people who are *members* are *equal* with respect to the rights and duties associated with membership.[33] Individual autonomy is the status of being enabled to participate in the governing of the state, or in an ongoing democratic dialogue, or both.[34] But such participation is contingent upon social and economic equality. Body-Gendrot and Gittel argue that the rise of competitive national states has yielded an erosion of citizenship – that "…universal policies of redistribution have masked unequal power relations and been beneficial to dominant groups… and less helpful to stigmatized groups, who have then demanded special treatment and affirmative action policies to combat racism and discrimination."[35] The fact is the poor and minorities cannot participate fully in modern nation-states. Genuine democratic citizenship and human rights can only happen when differences are no longer the basis of subordination.[36]

4) *The HRT betrays an ahistorical understanding of the discourse of human rights and, thus, ignores the fact that the West would not have been anything without the Rest. The West reached its place, its 'civilization,' through 'the development of underdevelopment,' as authors such as Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein, authors in the Dependency tradition,*

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[29] Portes and Landolt 1996, p. 21.
[30] Howard 1995, p. 27.
[31] Howard 1995.
[32] Howard 1995, p. 46.
[33] Gaffaney 2000.
[34] Gaffaney 2000.
[35] Body-Gendrot and Gittel 2003, p. xi.
[36] Pateman 1992.

and most writers on globalization acknowledge. Rights, citizenship, and democracy for the West exist at the expense of the Rest!

Institutional definitions of democracy fail to say that the starting point for a democracy is popular rule and control over decision-making.[37] What the liberal discourse has sorely missed is the fact that exclusion of some groups from democratic citizenship has been, as Barbara Marshall states, "from the start integral to the entitlement of other groups."[38]

No one can deny that American 'democracy' was built on the backs of its internally colonized racial and ethnic minorities, especially those of color. Besides black slavery, American Indians and their children were subject to indentured and other highly inequitable restrictive contracts; thousands of Chinese indentured laborers worked America's railroads and mines; and Mexican Americans were dispossessed of their lands and, in New Mexico, forced into legalized peonage.[39] Black Americans were denied rights to their own labor for almost 100 years on the grounds that they were, according to the Constitution, three-fifths of a man and, to quote Chief Justice Taney in the Dred Scott decision of 1857, "so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."[40] Although black Americans were supposedly granted citizenship after the Civil War, they were subsequently robbed of the privileges of being full citizens by multiple laws and Supreme Court decisions. Have we forgotten the decision in Plessy *vs.* Ferguson that constitutionally validated Jim Crow: "… if one race is inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane."[41] Blacks struggled valiantly to dismantle Jim Crow but they only gained second-class citizenship, as black power activists tried in vain to tell America in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[42]

As for Europe, their 'democratic' societies can attribute their economic success to the resources they stripped from their defenseless colonies. As Cairns states, the subjects of colonial empires consequently "entered world politics not as full-fledged participants, but as people ruled by alien others on their own territories."[43] The colonial empires were hierarchical systems

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[37) Beetham 1999.
[38) Marshall 1994, p. 133.
[39) Glenn 2002.
[40) Glenn 2002, p. 36.
[41) Cecil 1990, p. 64.
[42) Bonilla-Silva 2001.
[43) Cairns 1999, p. 25.

based on power imbalances and on a ranking of cultures and civilizations – often equated with race – that gave a surplus of positive recognition to the ruling European peoples, counterbalanced by the non-recognition, misrecognition, or negative recognition of the people they ruled.[44]

Even the European anthropologists and missionaries who 'spoke for' the subject peoples as intermediaries judged these peoples as backward.[45] Imperialism thereby defined hundreds of millions of non-Western people as politically incapable and unworthy of self-rule.[46] As a consequence, even after their release from imperial bondage, vast numbers of these conquered people have been too poor to ever become 'citizens' in the sense of full participation.[47]

Today, imperial dominance worldwide takes the form of multinational corporations who operate outside governmental constraints. The result has been the structuring of the global system into developed and underdeveloped economies, zones of security and insecurity, hegemonic and subordinate cultures, as well as the reproduction of these inequalities within states.[48] As Chandra Muzzafar states:

> By equating human rights with civil and political rights, the rich and powerful in the North hope to avoid coming to grips with those economic, social and cultural challenges which could threaten their privileged position in the existing world order. What the rich and powerful do not want is a struggle for economic transformation presented as a human rights struggle, a struggle for human dignity.[49]

5) *Despite their claims to universalism, the democracy, citizenship, and human rights discourses are often paternalistic towards minorities. Many in these traditions still talk down to the 'minorities' in the world order and still seem burdened by the urge to civilize us. This stand, as Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson argue, "can only be lived as majority oppression and provoke resistance."*[50]

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[44] Cairns 1999, p. 25.
[45] Cairns 1999.
[46] Cairns 1999, p. 27.
[47] Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 50.
[48] Beetham 1999.
[49] Muzzafar 1993, p. 39, quoted in Dallymayr 2001.
[50] Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 215.

The HRT stance correctly maintains that political dominance of one ethno-religious group in a state precludes the protection of human rights. But the tradition subscribes to the illusion that modern Western societies are now realizing homogeneity of secular citizenship, which prescribes tolerance of race, ethnic, and religious differences.[51] Ethnic identity has become, in their opinion, a voluntary and private celebration.[52] We argue that this may be the case for dominant identities, but not for subordinated ones. Minority status is enforced in Western societies as much as differential citizenships.

As Castles and Davidson argue, "in the civics of a nation-state, even reason is a national patrimony and only the host society is believed to have its key. Any attempt to debate it shows a quality that requires re-education."[53] 'Bona fide' members of the society must meet the necessary racial qualifications, and even citizenship is not a guarantee of inclusion.[54]

6) *HRT proponents object to political and military tactics that violate the human rights of actors, thus creating a stance that is of limited use to any revolutionary movement. Instead, they advocate 'tolerance,' listening to others, democratic politics, and a 'Kumbaya, my Lord' political practice.*

The HRT agenda is moral intervention. They envision several means: cosmopolitanism based on the ideals of Habermas, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) devoted to human rights, international citizenship, and morally motivated, international governmental bodies.

Habermasian cosmopolitanism has perhaps the most obvious limits. How can democracies negotiate in good faith with non-democracies even on matters that ought to concern everybody, such as environmental degradation? After all, democracies have destroyed the planet, too.[55]

The motivations of humanely motivated NGOs seem more laudable. However, as Hardt and Negri state, "precisely because they are not run directly by governments, [NGOs] are assumed to act on the basis of ethical or moral imperatives... [they] strive to identify universal needs and defend human rights."[56] These NGOs thereby "conduct 'just wars' without arms, without violence, without borders."[57] Nevertheless, as Steven Friedman warns, watch

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[51] Howard 1995, p. 37.
[52] Howard 1995.
[53] Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 215.
[54] Aranda 2006, p. 116.
[55] Dauenhauer 1998.
[56] Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 36.
[57] Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 36.

out for "civil society" interventions, as "nonstate actors may thus hand control of resources to individuals and oligarchies who may limit democracy's reach and ensure that 'development' becomes a source of patronage rather than equity."[58] Moreover, the efforts of these NGOs are never sufficient. This fact, in turn, is used to justify 'legitimate' interferences by external states or the international agencies they sponsor.[59] "In this way," as Hardt and Negri state, "moral intervention has become a frontline force of imperial intervention."[60]

The idealistic notion of a global democratic citizenship is also intrinsically flawed. It ignores the fact that citizenship is still state bound and thus cannot produce internationalism.[61] As Michael Walzer points out, philosophical knowing can be "universalist and singular," but political knowing is always "particular and plural."[62] International citizenship, consequently, would have to be predicated on an international governing body, paving the way for another kind of imperialism.

Ironically, HRT proponents, such as Ishay, document how 'human rights' have ultimately been at the mercy of powerful actors, yet they maintain a faith in powerful actors as a way out.[63] They support international governing bodies, even though history demonstrates these international actors work to maintain the exploitation of poor, less developed nations by the more powerful states of the world system. Do they need to be reminded that the League of Nations was dominated by the imperial nations and that it egregiously ignored the rights of the colonized nation-states? The global relationship among nations and the role of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in serving the interests of the dominant countries and their international corporations is not so different today. And, to quote Lummis, "it is a perversion of the idea of liberation to transform it into a means for establishing the authority of a small elite of trained specialists."[64]

The fact is that liberalizing changes in the world have rarely occurred except through major social crises. In the US, for example, revolution,

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[58] Friedman 2002, p. 32.
[59] Hardt and Negri 2000.
[60] Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 36.
[61] Dauenhauer 1998.
[62] Waltzer 1981 paraphrased by Dauenhauer 1998, p. 38.
[63] Ishay 2004.
[64] Lummis 1996, p. 20.

Civil War-Reconstruction, and WWII were, as Glenn states, "times of expanding egalitarianism typically... followed by periods of regression during which hard-won gains were rolled back and new exclusions put in place – the current post-civil rights period being an obvious instance."[65]

What is to be Done? Challenges to the HRT and a Few Ideas on How to Get Beyond

How can an HRT approach deal with the Katrina ordeal? What can it do to address the fundamental racial inequities in New Orleans, Detroit, Los Angeles, Durham, and everywhere-America that structure disasters such as this one? What will HRT folks do when chocolate New Orleans is reorganized into a vanilla city?[66]

What is the HRT political approach to the racist anti-immigration mood of American citizens? What will HRT scholars do when white citizens vote in a democratic way to enforce a *herrenvolk* democracy and cut programs, benefits, and resources for immigrants?

What is the HRT political strategy to deal with US-led interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the many more to come (and we know many in the HRT supported these interventions against 'terrorism')? How do they deal with torture, rapes, massacres of civilians, and the 'collateral damage' produced by 'smart' bombs?

What is the HRT approach to deal with the plight of the Palestinians? As characterized by Roy, "The transformations in land, labor, demography, and society have been stunning, and the place of Palestinians in the country [occupied Palestinian lands] is being taken away in a manner not seen since the beginning of Israeli occupation in 1967."[67] And lastly, of particular interest to the authors, what is the HRT stance on the 100 plus years of American colonial domination of the island of Puerto Rico and its people? (It is no longer a 'sexy' cause, so it is all but off the radar of folks in the HRT!)[68]

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[65] Glenn 2002, p. 24.

[66] 'Chocolate city' is a reference to the song and album of the same title by the band Parliament.

[67] Roy 2004, p. 366.

[68] For a while, the colonial case of Puerto Rico has been all but ignored by the left in the world and, more depressing, in the USA. In the 2008 election, even 'progressive' black candidate Barack Obama did not mention this matter during his visit to Puerto Rico. For an important exception in academia, see Smith 2007.

And, more controversially, how do we feel when a 9/11 happens and many Third World people rejoice? Do we understand and empathize with their feelings? For those who still ponder the silly, 'Why do they hate us?' question, the answer is because 'we' have done a lot of harm to 'them,' and 'the chickens coming home to roost' is part of the equality game![69] If the West inflicts terror on the Rest, why do you not appreciate the beauty of reciprocity? Why do you not recognize the inalienable right of oppressed people to fight back?

How do you feel when Iraqis rejoice after an American is killed in Iraq or elsewhere? Do you understand why they feel like that? Do you even comprehend the brutal but real logic that leaves Palestinians no recourse but to fight the Israeli occupation through suicide bombings? For every Israeli killed in this second *Intifada*, over three Palestinians are killed.[70] Do you appreciate the sacrifice in this horrendous yet effective weapon of the weak? As Leon Trotsky argued, although terrorism is not necessary to the revolution,

> the revolution does require of the revolutionary class that it should attain its end by all methods at its disposal – if necessary, by an armed rising: if required, by terrorism. A revolutionary class which has conquered power with arms in its hands is bound to, and will, suppress, rifle in hand, all attempts to tear the power out of its hands. Where it has against it a hostile army, it will oppose to it its own army. Where it is confronted with armed conspiracy, attempt at murder, or rising, it will hurl at the heads of its enemies an unsparing penalty.[71]

Given that the world is fundamentally organized around collectivities with differential access to power and resources, there is no way we can place the resistance struggles and the tactics used by subalterns on the same plane as the offensive, imperial actions of those of the top of the world-system! Taking this liberal stance ultimately helps maintain the current power arrangements in the world, as Pieterse claims about 'neutrality' within humanitarian interventions:

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[69] Churchill 2003.

[70] In the first *Intifada* (1987–1992), and according to statistics from Irish and British newspapers, for every one Israeli killed by a Palestinian, 11 Palestinians were killed by Israelis. In the second *Intifada* (2000–to date), the statistics are more 'egalitarian' as the ratio has improved for Palestinians. According to *B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*, for every Israeli who has died, three and a half Palestinians have died.

[71] Trotsky 1920.

> Neutrality implies a parti pris for the status quo and as such involves conceptual and political problems. Statism and hard sovereignty are part of the conceptual bias of HI [humanitarian interventions] under Security Council authorization. Thus in Rwanda, "An obsession with 'neutrality' actively impeded any attempts to address the crisis. Diplomatic 'neutrality' meant surrendering the weapons of moral and diplomatic condemnation of the interim government, foregoing such sanctions as diplomatically isolating it by expelling ambassadors, calling for sanctions, etc" (African Rights, 1994b: 682). The ultimate absurdity was that the same government that was perpetrating the genocide of the Tutsis was shaping UN policy as a member of the Security Council throughout the period of crisis.[72]

Thus, liberation movements – then and now – have used the language, ideas, and spirit of the HRT, but have always been ready to force the issue. Resistance, as Fanon and Malcolm X told us, can be both a 'cleansing force' and central in the struggle to assist others in recognizing our humanity.[73]

So, what can be done to rearticulate the HRT as part of the struggle for racial equality and freedom?

1) Acknowledge the power differential among actors in the world system. Nation-states and subjects in those states are in different stations and, thus, proclamations of rights will not be enough to overcome these differences.

2) Recognize that collectivities exist and that members of those collectivities share a similar position and set of conditions in the system. This means that if 'whites' or 'men' or 'capitalists' have an advantageous position in society, advocating for individual-level rights for women, people of color, and workers will not do the trick.[74] The way out is to work toward group-level solutions for the 'problems' faced by the oppressed people of the world.

3) Maintain a relentless critique of Empire and neo-empire. Human rights advocates must always keep in mind when empire is talking and why they must be cautious of taking its talk at face value.[75]

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[72] Pieterse 1997, p. 89.
[73] see Oliver 2004.
[74] Tienda 2008.
[75] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva gave this talk in the summer of 2006 when the state of Israel was bombing Lebanon. At the time, too many Human Rights advocates, including members of *Sociologists without Borders*, an organization to which we belong, condemned both sides for their 'atrocities.' This stance, we suggest, forgets the imperial role of Israel and its allies in

4) Support those at the bottom of the well in social orders all over the world. Human rights advocates cannot continue their 'all-people-are–the-same' nonsense. Since some people have more power than others and are either active or passive beneficiaries of unequal social relations, human rights advocates ought to support the oppressed, period.

5) Understand that resistance struggles are nasty. This means that in liberation struggles of any kind, excesses, brutality, and terror may happen. But we must always remember that in the tragic mathematics of death between oppressors and the oppressed, the oppressed always lose more people than the oppressors and, most often, by margins of ten to one.[76]

6) Recognize that multicultural and international citizenship and the international vigilance for the human rights of *all* will be the end product of many particular struggles. The universal and cosmopolitan dream of the HRT will come out of the particular and not the other way around.[77]

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the Middle East and does not help advance progressive politics in the area. And our beloved organization did not learn from that experience. The recent debate in the group's listserve about the Israeli attack on the Gaza strip (December 2008–January 2009) shows many members still cling to a classic HRT stance. While according to the UN, Israel, the imperial aggressor, lost 13 people and had an estimated 182 wounded during this military venture, Palestinians lost 1382 people and had thousands of people injured. If the organization wishes to remain vital and help shape sociological discussions on inequality, it will have to review its policies and politics and become an anti-imperialist organization without exceptions! We cannot in good conscience be anti-imperialist and exempt states such as Israel from the game.

[76] Those concerned about the 'brutality' and 'inhumanity' of resistance wars should always remember that Empire is always more brutal and more inhumane. For example, the inequities in the moral calculations of humanity can be estimated from how much financial compensation is given when the US admits a 'mistake' in a bombing. Marc Herold, a professor of economics at The University of New Hampshire, has done the math and, for the Italians accidentally killed or injured when a US Marine jet hit aerial tramway cables in Italy not too long ago, the US gave close to $2 million to each Italian victim; for the Chinese victims of the accidental bombing in Budapest a while ago, $150,000; and for the victims of an accidental bombing of an Afghani wedding party, after initially offering tents and blankets as compensation, the US ended up paying $100 per victim. The relative value of life according to Empire comes to this: at the top, an American (white) expects 6 million, an Italian a third of that, a Chinese one fortieth of that, and an Afghani expects 1/6000th. According to Professor Herold, even if one controls for purchasing power, the relative value of life for people in the West vis-a-vis the Rest is staggering! See his webpage at http://www.cursor.org/stories/afghandead.htm.

[77] The proposition that "all citizens should assume the same impartial, general point of

7) Lastly, *real* international human rights will emerge slowly when we begin a massive redistribution of resources, recognize the historical atrocities the West has committed (and is still committing) to the Rest, and amend them. Without redistribution of resources; without an end to wasteful and uncontrolled 'development;' without an end to first, second, third, and fourth worlds we will not be able to see each other as members of one community (humankind) with equal rights.

We end our discussion with the words of Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> From the moment that you and your like are liquidated like so many dogs, you have no other resources but to use all and every means to regain your importance as a man (sic). You must therefore weigh as heavily as you can upon the body of your torturer in order that his soul, lost in some byway, may finally find once more its universal dimension.[78]

So please know that we, men and women of color, will weigh heavily on our torturers to make sure *their* souls become truly universal. Then 'human rights' will become totally irrelevant as we will all be equal partners in the world community of humankind.

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view transcending all particular interests, perspectives and experiences" in dealing with their citizenship is nonsense, as Iris Marion Young argues (Young 1989, p. 257). According to Smith, Young claims that "so long as there are disadvantaged and oppressed groups, measures should be taken to provide mechanisms for the effective recognition of their distinct voices and perspectives" through "differentiated citizenship" (Smith 1999, p. 142).

[78] Fanon 1968, p. 295.

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