Mapping the Self: Double Consciousness in Digital Diaspora

> "I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape.…Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being 'worked' on. I have the sense that certain 'faculties'—not just in me but in every border resident, colored or non-colored—and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened…the 'alien' element has become familiar—never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the hold, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable but home."
>
> – Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, the poet and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa speaks of race in diaspora as a burgeoning consciousness that is awakened by a struggle to straddle a plurality of territories and identities at odds, at once. What happens when one identifies with and *as* the border, or the inbetween, in a world riddled with racial, colonial, and oriental binaries? The result is a particular sense of simultaneous alienation and homecoming. As the humanities digitize, and "border resident[s]" become "participant[s] in the further evolution of humankind," Anzaldúa's words provide a homing touchstone for an outline of how the double consciousness of race is developed in digital diaspora (Anzaldúa Preface).

Geographies, real and imagined, make up the background of Anzaldúa's words: "border," "territory," "place," "features of the landscape," "areas," "home" (Preface). With the metaphor of swimming, it seems as though Anzaldúa is placing herself as moving towards and away from shores, processing the middle passage between colonized and colonial territories. What does it mean to come of age in the ocean between borders? In the world we live in today, borders are no longer drawn with ink to reflect the binary of the Eurocentric known and unknown as in Pliny's time or Joan Blaeu's map of the Old World and the New. Instead, social media and digital tools have created communities for diaspora, homes away from homeland, and spatially complex

identities as border residents. If we take the digital landscape as our text, we can theorize about race as grounded in diaspora and bound by geographies, in the context of digital spaces, through the lens of double consciousness. Following Said's Orientalism, Du Bois's double consciousness and Hegel's dialectic, and with counter-mapping as tool, the purpose of this new approach to race is to explore how geographically racialized existences depend on the positionality of the reader in relation to imagined geographies; how map power can be employed towards rememory of heritage, diaspora, and movement; and how the border resident is at home in inhabiting different racialized spatialities. That said, what does it mean to become racially conscious in digital diaspora?

Imagined geographies are an age-old tradition in the portrayal of the Other and the perpetuation of racism. Pliny's textual world map and John Blaeu's visual world map reveal the ways in which colonialist imagined geographies define racial difference. By analyzing the specific ways in which these imagined geographies operated, their subtextual and visual arguments, we set up the ground on which post-colonial frameworks of counter-mapping and diasporic consciousness come to re-define race in a changed and changing world. Specifically, points of view provide an underlying and interconnecting train of reference: the two textual and visual colonialist word maps exemplify points of view that position the map-maker and reader as a colonizer, whereas the method of counter-mapping focuses on lived experience and rememory. Currently, counter-maps are often created with digital tools to serve a digital diaspora, taking on the form of spatially innovative digital maps or online forums organized around a diasporic identity that shares imagined geographic memories. These lived, inhabited imagined geographies exemplify the juxtapositions of straddling both the West and the East, and of living as both an Orientalized Other and Orientalist. A particular diasporic double consciousness attempts to

resolve these juxtapositions. Following the Hegelian dialectic, imagined geographies become a racially-bound diaspora's attempt to resolve what it means to live as the Orientalist Other disconnected from the Orient by creating an Orient onto which they project themselves and call home. As such, border residents live in this double conscious Orientalized self, in imagined geographies they mapped for themselves for which they call home.

Imagined Geographies and Imagined Others

Both ambitious works that attempt to provide an encyclopedic or at-a-glance view of the world, Pliny's *Natural History* and John Blaeu's *Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis Tabula* demonstrate Western ways of knowing and racializing. Their geographies of the world, which are as speculative as they are scientific, are therefore 'imagined' because they represent non-Europe by European imagination. In that sense, Pliny's written geography and Blaeu's map can be respectively read as a textual and a visual map that define the known and the unknown according to European Orientalist viewpoints. Edward Said defines such viewpoints in *Orientalism* as an European gaze that holds power over territories "out there" as opposed to "our world" (67):

> For the Orient ('out there' towards the East) is corrected, even penalized, for lying outside the boundaries of European society, 'our' world; the Orient is thus *Orientalized,* a process that not only marks the Orient as the province of the Orientalist but also forces the un-initiated Western reader to accept Orientalist codifications…as the *true* Orient. (67)

Hand in hand with Said, Joanne P. Sharp contends in *Geographies of Postcolonialism* that European ways of knowing "influenced not only how 'they' were known by 'us', but also how 'they' were persuaded to know themselves" (110):

> Europeans drew maps of new lands with boundaries inscribed to identify territories claimed by different nations. The names given to places by indigenous people were

> ignored, and instead European words and meanings are written onto the maps. Once these European maps had been created and accepted, they started to influence the nature of the actual space they represented. Places took on their European names, reflecting European ownership. (18)

Pliny and Blaeu's maps, then, reinforce geographic racism and exemplify European colonialist map power by practices of sightseeing, naming, and othering.

Pliny presents a worldview telescoped through Roman-centric eyes. The contrast between his detailed, specific, and scientifically measured view of Europe, such as giving exact miles to the length of seas and straits, and his hearsay of Africa and Asia illuminate the imagined dichotomy of the 'known world' and the 'unknown world.' The juxtaposition between Europe and the rest is a power structure rooted in Orientalism, where lands unknown to Europe are represented as sights for the European gaze, as well as colonialism, in the sense that the power of definition rests with the Eurocentric sightseer. In beginning *Book III* with Spain and Italy, Pliny announces, "We start in the West," using direct address to position the reader in close confidence to Pliny himself, as a sightseer from Rome in relation to the rest of the world (42). Therefore, Pliny's use of the 'we' becomes symbolic. Pliny and his reader never inhabit the lands discussed, never interact with the indigenous people, and always maintain their status as sightseers—the world outside of Europe appears to the reader as though on a stage. Indeed, in Pliny's imagined geography, "the Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe" (Said 63). Not only does the farther away we get from Europe, the more monstrous the people become, but they become more mute in their monstrosity. For instance, Pliny describes "human freaks" in Ethiopia as having "no upper lip" and "no tongue" (70). The indigenous people do not speak, because it is

Europe that speaks for them for it is Europe that maps the Orient. Furthermore, when 'we' arrive in the interiors of Africa and encounters "the Strapfeet," "people with feet like thongs who naturally move by crawling," the reader is meant to know only these people by false European definitions of their characteristics (58). Again, it is Europe that defines them for it is Europe that maps Orient. Through Pliny, it is as though a veil, a curtain falls between the reader and the stage on which they direct the Orient's performance.

In John Blaeu's *Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis Tabula*, created in 1648, we again see cartographic evidence for colonialism and Euro-superiority in an interplay between 'knowns' and 'unknowns.' In effect, to analyze Blaeu is to engage in and problematize the relationship between the reader/viewer and the map, the sightseer and the sight, the colonialist cartographer and the colonized. Djoeke van Netten states, in "The New World Map and the Old: The Moving

Narrative of Joan Blaeu's Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis Tabula (1648)," that through conscious boasting of Holland's prowess, the conflation of mythical creatures and exocitized people in South Asia and Africa, and Dutch ships ruling the waves, Blaeu "provides a Euro-superior, male-dominated, optimistic, and pro-Dutch...worldview" (35). I will go further to say that much can be drawn from Blaeu's emphasis on European voyages and drawings of vessels carrying Dutch flags in relation to the 'knowns' and 'unknowns' of the worlds: the visual relationships place the viewer as an European traveler to unknown lands. There are the ships he would take, the ports he would stop in, the promises of the sights he would behold. In fact, although Blaeu's map was not designed to provide navigational value at sea, he can be seen to "advertise this map as aimed at people who wish to navigate there" (Netten 47). As with Pliny's textual map of the world, Blaeu's visual map allows the viewer—again, a colonizing European man—to wander the worlds at his disposal. The powers of sightseeing, of the colonizing gaze, and of knowing as an entitlement to owning, are subverted in counter-maps which are the structurally opposite.

Counter-mapping Digital Diaspora

Pliny and John Blaeu's maps represent ways of thinking about race and imagined geographies as fundamentally about knowing and owning, which follow Western notions of knowledge and power, rather than being and inhabiting. In "Counter-Mapping as Method," Manuela Boatcă defines counter-mapping as "a critique of maps as self-evident representations," "foreground[ing] spaces resulting from connections and border practices" (245). For the purpose of this theory, counter-mapping is a focus on mapping imagined geographies in a way that is different from Western ways of knowing and looking, centering instead the diasporic and the marginalized. To illustrate, Jim Enote, a traditional Zuni farmer and director of the A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center, describes Zuni artists' counter-mapping as "a different view that expands the human experience of a place": "To assume that people would look at the earth only from a vantage point that is above and looking straight down doesn't consider the humanity of living on the landscape" (Steinauer-Scudder). This reversal of the positionality of the viewer, while keeping with an intentional subversion of the colonial gaze, sets the stage for the construction of double consciousness in digital diaspora.

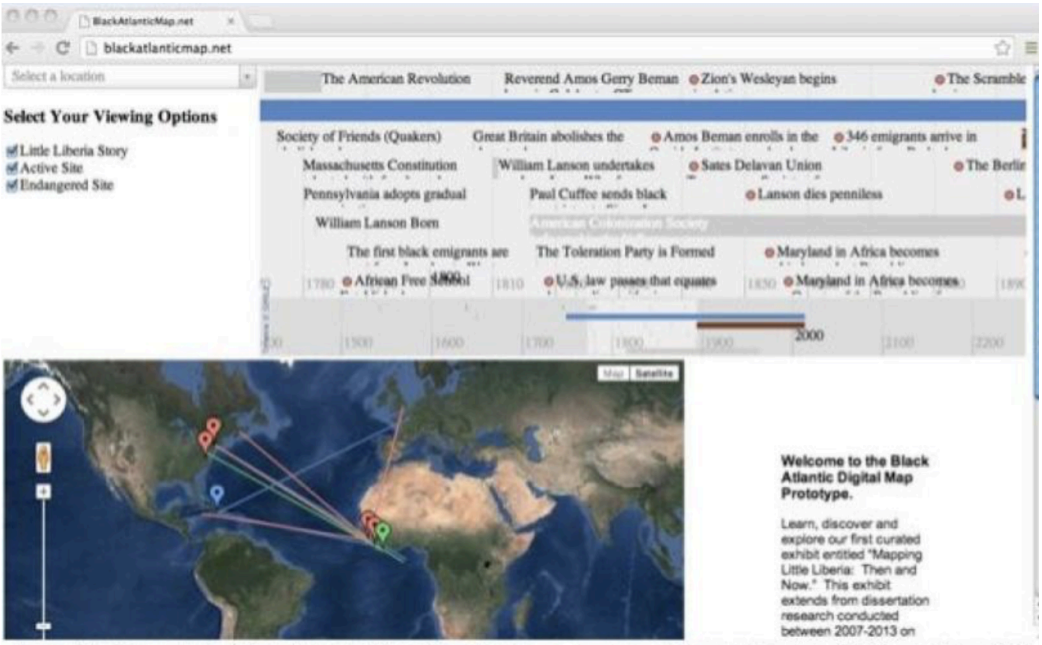


Figure 38. Screen shot of Black Atlantic Digital Map showing connecting polylines and timeline © J. Moore Pewu, 2014

In the sense that mapping allows for construction and deconstruction of imagined geographies and the structure of racializing consciousness, map power easily extends into the digital realm, where processes for racialization become more morpheus with diasporic communities that span borders. With digital tools, collective history, rememory, and lived experiences can be visualized as counter-maps. Dr. Jamila Moore Pewu's work with creating "The Black Atlantic Map," "a prototype created using TimeMap and Google Maps in 2013-2014 that displayed spatial relationships between different African diasporic sites," is Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic visualized (Pewu). Coming from Du Bois, Paul Gilroy directly asserts, in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, that "striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness" (1). Gilroy employs an image focused on movement and passage, symbols of diaspora, as opposed to binaries of the known and unknown:

> I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean…The image of the ship — a living, microcultural,

> micro-political system in motion — …immediately focus[s] attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland. (Gilroy 4)

These juxtapositions, as Roopika Risam and Kelly Baker Josephs describes in *The Digital Black Atlantic*, rests on a double-edged relationship with space and time rooted in "the 'transformative continuity' that exists between the concepts 'slave' and revolutionary'" (77). What Gilroy, Risam, and Josephs illuminate is blackness as spatial relations and African diaspora as a process, not just a condition. Thus, in visualizing both space and time in the Black Atlantic, Pewu's map gives spatial form to such aforementioned double consciousness. Unlike Pliny and Blaeu's maps, Pewu's digital map is a counter-map that allows the user—not merely a viewer, but an inhabiter—to select and enter into diasporic sites, emphasizing a human experience of place. Through mapping geographic timelines, Pewu informs how African diasporic identities hold both history and futuriority in their swim to 'a redemptive return to an African homeland.'

Double Consciousness in Digital Diaspora

Connecting diasporic double consciousness with diasporic experience of the Orient, we arrive at the crux of a theory for race in digital diaspora. First, although W. E. B. Du Bois's double consciousness applies specifically to the experience of black folks, its overarching theoretical structure may be applied to racially marginalized or diasporic communities broadly. Those who grew up being marked racially different and inferior in the West know what it is like to see ourselves as others:

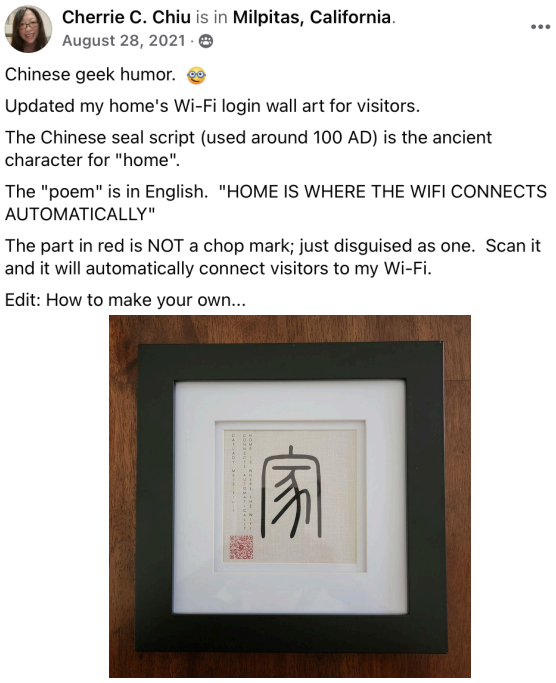
> …born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the

> revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others. (Du Bois 9)

Given that many individuals in diaspora are the children of immigrants and migrants, grew up in the West, underwent Eurocentric schooling, and often lack a native access to the language of their 'homeland,' the homeland they look to is one of imagined geographies.

Digital diasporic communities can form online forums that gather together to share and recreate geographic memories and traditions, a textual form of counter-mapping their homeland in the Orient. For example, the Facebook group Subtle Asian Traits, which hosts over two million individuals who identify within the pan-Asian community, provides space for English-speaking Asians around the Western world to, put simply, discuss and participate in what it means to be Asian. Yet, because the dominant narrative of the group is one of fractured connections to homelands or cultures of their parents, as well as a reclaiming of cultural traditions for themselves, the group members are in effect imagining the Asia—or Orient—that their parents grew up in. As with Pliny's textual map, the use of "we" here problematizes who is speaking for the Orient. The pan-Asian identity itself is a function of Orientalism in meaning because a pan-Asianness can only exist when termed as such from outside of Asia, the residents of which prefer to identify with national, ethnic, or cultural identities relevant to their local geography. In that group members of Subtle Asian Traits often ritualize the mundane habits from their parents that they perceive as tradition, they theatricalize their connection to their homeland and set the Orient upon a stage. For instance, one poster wrote about the plastic bags that his grandmother uses as a string to tie around luggage as an identifier, calling this habit a Taiwanese tradition and wondering if others in the group shared in such a practice. His grandmother's habit is as inherently and intimately tied to her Taiwanese identity and that by posting about this in the

group, the poster was reconnecting and reclaiming his own identity. The post is also notable for its connection to movement with its subject centered around familial identification of luggage, a vessel much like Gilroy's ships, that becomes an interesting vehicle for a discussion about recognizing the tradition of home in symbols of migration itself.



Digital diaspora have unique ways of accessing, constructing, and preserving a connection to 'home.' A potent example is a Subtle Asian Traits creating a wall art for her wifi password using "an ancient Chinese script for 'home,'" but writing in English "Home is where the wifi connects automatically" as in ancient Chinese texts (Chiu). Here, the poster's words are not only a nod to the power of digital diaspora communities to provide a sort of online home, but also problematizes bilingualism and claims to history in connection to an imagined homeland. By hanging this piece of wall art, the poster can be seen to superimpose an imagined Chinese geography and the associated Chinese identity onto her own residence in the United States—only

then can it be considered home. Responding to requests, she provides instructions for creating "your own" wall art of home using a website catered to Western Chinese language learners and selecting characters for aesthetic appreciation as well as translated meaning—her access to homeland is filtered through an Orientalist process.

On the one hand, we have Pliny's theatre, Blaeu's two worlds, DuBois's veil. On the other hand, we have Anzaldúa's swimming, Pewu's middle journey, and Subtle Asian Traits's traditions. Following the Hegelian dialectic, in trying to realize our identity within real and imagined geographies, our self-consciousness "proceeds to supersede its *own* self, for this other is itself" (Hegel 111). Living with a racial double consciousness, residents of diaspora attempt to arrive at a homeland that is also somehow the middle passage. First, we recognize that the homeland and the Orient are distinct, with each being lost or inaccessible to the residents of diaspora in some way. As a result, we use imagined geographies to map a version of our homeland that we can access: the stage is set. Then, we engage in theatricalizing traditions to position ourselves as part of that stage. In this the Hegelian dialectic, in which the individuals engage in a diasporic double consciousness to imagine themselves as impacting something in order to see themselves reflected, the theatricality of performing what it means to come from the Orient, but from a Occidental positionality, becomes a process of staging the Orient such that one might be an actor at home on the stage.

What I have attempted to advance is not a homogenification of the experiences of every diaspora, because the experience of each diaspora is idiosyncratic, but rather provide the framework for considering racial consciousness in the context of how we map ourselves in relation to the world. In an increasingly digitizing world that grants growing access to tools for connecting diasporic communities and visualizing imagined geographies, it becomes

imperatively meaningful to conceptualize racial identities as a process, a becoming, a continued swim. Returning to Alduzas' words, 'there is an exhilaration to being 'worked on.'' And returning to Du Bois's words, a hybridized existence is perhaps a 'gift' of 'second-sight. Indeed, it is at this nexus of the overlap between the Orient and the Occident that frameworks for post-coloniality—especially the digital post-coloniality we so need—arise. This is how we are radicalized in digital geographies. At its core, digital diasporic double consciousness is a theory for the imagination of race, and the mapping and superimposing of ourselves onto race.

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