Majority World Diasporas

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1. INTRODUCTION

Leading British sociologist Stuart Hall states “language is the privileged medium in which we make sense of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged” (1982). It is made up of signs and symbols that come together to create meaning in culture, meanings that have been given to them by culture makers. Words have connotations that people, as participants of a culture, use as a frame of reference in their understanding of the world. To challenge ideological injustices in culture, the language of a society must be challenged as well.

The term “Majority World” is a term coined in the 90s by Bangladeshi photographer and social activist Shahidul Alam (2008). The term is being increasingly used to describe countries in Asia, Africa and South America. It is a more accurate representation of the part of the world that is often referred to as “third world,” “developing world,” or “minority ethnic.” Alam describes the terms as “[challenging] the West's rhetoric of democracy” and represents the region in a more humanitarian and positive way.

2. IDEOLOGICAL CODES

Amongst other ideologically loaded terms used to describe the majority World region is “the Global south.” This term on face-value should refer to the geographical part of the world south of the equator, however it is used to refer to describe what the Western World describes and represents as the socio-economically “less developed” nations, nations that were formally colonised.

As a word, “south” connotes being at the bottom. The fact that Australia and New Zealand, two predominately white countries at the very bottom of the globe, are not included in the global south term suggests that non-whiteness is linked with subordination; “Ethnic minority” connotes cultural insignificance, even though those groups factually make up over 80% of the world’s population; “People of colour” groups and positions non-white identities as the antithesis of whiteness, rather than identities in their own right.

In February 2022 when Russian president Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine, media outlets were quick to describe the conflict as an attack on a “civilised” society as opposed to the wars that happen in countries assumed to be less civilised. Countries like Syria, Palestine, Afghanistan, places in the Majority World where their populations are black and brown people.

Stuart Hall argues that medias and their technologies play a much more active role in the reproduction of ‘reality’ – of ideology – than simply mirroring the culture they exist in. He says,

“Representation is a very different notion from that of reflection. It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping; not merely the transmitting of an already existing meaning, but the more active labour of making things mean.”
This representation can affect how a society views conflict and tragedy in different situations, where one people’s suffering is regarded as more important than another because of the race of a majority of its population.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper is not written to imply that there is some sort of linguistic conspiracy with aims to marginalise groups of people, but rather to highlight the ideological codes imbued within our everyday language and to advocate for a shift in the culture. A lot of the language we use when describing 82.5% of the World’s population is often rooted in outdated colonial and imperialist histories. The world has changed, and it is time the language changes with it and better represent, with more accuracy, the nature of global society. Actions need to be taken to redress unequal structures, language is a powerful tool exposing and rectifying present social practices. Using the term Majority World Diasporas is a way one can promote the humanity of black and brown people, identities historically marginalised, while challenging the colonial and archaic ideologies embedded in our globalised culture.

4. REFERENCES

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