Body-based Therapy

Zara Zimbardo

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"The word massage is a really slippery word. It can mean really unskilled labor or very skilled. It's synonymous with prostitution in the eyes of the state. It's seen as non-intelligent work, which I think is very much related to mind/body split and also to the ways sexism works. If someone is a psychotherapist, that's seen as 'smart,' whereas it's tough for me to explain in words the type of intelligence I was trained in and that I've practiced for thousands of hours.... There are all these types of skill and value and care that are unseen."

"Why is everything I do alternative? Isn't it actually its own thing? Something as basic as touching areas that are hurting? That predates western medicine. It's the feeling of a lot of the teaching community that I'm in—folks that have a pretty radical analysis. Radical, not meaning extreme, just meaning root: root causes, looking at history... at intersections of power. To me, that seems like common sense: actually looking at structures and systems.... It's interesting to think about how that relates to bodywork because a lot of people are hurting because a lot of these same forces that I am otherwise analyzing in class are what shape lives.... A lot of the teaching I do is looking at really deep sickness and wounds and colonization that keep reproducing themselves. So what does actually healing mean with the same perspective you would have in Chinese medicine? What does a more holistic approach look like instead of isolating and attacking pathology in a western body-as-machine kind of way?"

"Solidarity, and what decolonizing solidarity means, is an ongoing question. Answers will look different in different contexts. Part of that is being aware of the power and privilege that we have and using it strategically… Without continual questioning and reflection, a lot of the patterns coming from so many hundreds of years of colonization—that some people are worth more/less, that ways of living are worth more/less—if we're not engaging them, there are ways that what is considered dominant or more fully human always keeps replaying itself.… This is going to keep happening, creating new norms, so how can we keep moving to de-center it.… So that's some of what solidarity means: that ongoing struggle to make things visible.… There are whole histories of the white savior industrial complex: 'I'm going to come and save and why aren't people appreciating it.' I don't want to reproduce that. At the same time pushing myself to be in solidarity. Because it's easy to be like, 'I'm thinking about an issue and therefore I care about it.' But what does it mean to actually show up with my body in certain places and show that its important for people who are not targeted by a certain issue, why you care, and why your collective liberation is bound up together? Its not that I'm being a nice person, its that this effects me in a different way because it is a sick system."

"All of my teachers are Aikido black belts. Aikido is a nonviolent marshal art. It's a way of **dissolving conflict by dissolving duality**… The philosophy is really amazing and the movements that embody it are about shifting the dynamic of conflicts."

The quotations in this book are excerpts from a conversation with Zara Zimbardo on April 23, 2013 at her home in Emeryville. The transcript is archived as an entry in An Encyclopedia of Embodied Politics. This intimately personal and politically expansive encyclopedia takes the form of written texts, textiles, and public programming. If you would like to receive information about future events, please email tali.weinberg@gmail.com

Zara is a founder of the anti-racist White Noise Collective, a body-based therapist, and faculty at the California Institute of Integral Studies. With an MA in Cultural Anthropology and Social Transformation, her research interests include the politics of representation, Islamophobia, collective memory, and nonviolent social movements. We spoke about gendered labor, knowledge, skill, and care; about her work in solidarity with activists in Colombia; founding the White Noise Collective; and the relationship between her scholarship, her body-based therapy practice, and her activism.