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Dawn Rae Davis

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WITH/IN THE ACADEMY

Unmirroring Pedagogies: Teaching with Intersectional and Transnational Methods in the Women and Gender Studies Classroom

Dawn Rae Davis

As the U.S. academy increasingly markets “the global” and “diversity” for undergraduate student consumption, feminists face new challenges with respect to the decolonizing goals of teaching. Analyzing race, gender, and culture intersections that inform epistemological desires in the Women and Gender Studies classroom, this article examines the potential of a “pedagogy of unmirroring” to engage students in a decolonizing process of learning that facilitates intersectional and transnational feminist methods. The analysis draws from personal teaching experiences to argue that the languages of postcolonial feminist studies can be applied to a politics of knowledge in the classroom by rendering self–other relations of empire visible to the “mirror” of student perceptions in ways that help them confront epistemological desires rooted in imperialist assumptions.

Keywords: diversity / epistemology / feminist teaching / gender / intersectionality / pedagogy / postcolonial / privilege / race / transnational / whiteness

Humanities pedagogy as such attempts an uncoercive rearrangement of desire through the method of its study. When we leave the general field of the Social Sciences and enter into the Humanities as such, we are speaking of a more textured kind of work,

*entering through friendship with the language(s) able to
meditate upon gender and sexuality without the self-conscious
arrogance of the gender-trained do-gooder.*

—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2008, 226)

The decolonizing objectives undertaken in North American Women and Gender Studies contexts entail a pedagogical rearrangement of desire similar to what Spivak (2008) identifies with the humanities.¹ This is especially true when intersectional and transnational methods organize course materials. As these two methods alter the field's primary objects of study and reshape knowledge formations, they displace white, middle-class, and First World-centered subjectivities within the epistemological desires of the classroom, as well as more broadly across feminist-knowledge productions.² In fact, intersectional and transnational feminist methods render these displacements a fundamental goal of the discipline, the accomplishment of which depends in no small measure on disrupting basic imperialist presuppositions through which the identity formations of dominant classes are constructed in terms of class, race, and heterosexual privilege (in the global North generally, although my focus is with respect to U.S. Women and Gender Studies).

Although such displacements are critical to the current knowledge field of the discipline, significant pedagogical challenges can arise when one's teaching disturbs imperialist epistemologies at a rudimentary level, where habits of knowing are enmeshed in identity. Consequently, it is not uncommon for students to resist when coursework asks them to relinquish imperialist desires of learning and to confront epistemological relationships of power in which they are privileged agents. Students may feel uncomfortable as their perceptions shift in response to ways that intersectional and transnational methods move women-of-color identities and perspectives to the center of course materials, challenge what they expect from course topics, and alter understandings of gender justice and oppression.

Student resistance can find a variety of expressions, but I have identified two persistent habits of imperialist knowing that typically organize the epistemic desires that privileged white students may bring with them to the classroom: The "mirroring effect" and the "touristic imaginary." Both habits directly inform student resistance to intersectional and transnational methods and can be understood in relation to the feminist postcolonial problematic of self–other relations, specifically as the power dynamics of self–other relations pertain to the politics of knowledge and the politics of recognition. I will discuss both of these tropes of imperialist knowing in detail during the course of this article's analysis; however, in the spirit of introduction, I would like to share two examples taken from my earliest teaching experiences in the field to illustrate these two epistemological habits and to demonstrate the degree of discomfort

that often results for undergraduates when the epistemic desires of white, First World, heteronormative, and middle-class subjects are displaced by disciplinary methods engaged in the decolonial projects of feminisms.

Each semester during my first years as a teaching assistant in Women's Studies at a Midwestern research institution (where the majority of students are white, heterosexual, and U.S. citizens), my office hours were host to a handful of unhappy students intent on expressing their disapproval of course materials that integrated intersectional and transnational methods. For example, while assisting on a transnational Women's Studies course titled "Women in World Cultures" taught by a Women's Studies faculty member who is South Asian, a number of white students came to my office to tell me they did not think the United States should be "put down" by the professor (with students placing noticeable emphasis on the professor's last name). Their comments implied that students did not think the United States should be criticized specifically by someone they perceived as (and would designate) a "foreigner."³ I was quite surprised when several students dissolved into tears, saying they had always believed "our country was the best in the world," and now they "were not sure what to believe." The emotional register of these doubts expressed the extent to which the methodological displacements effected by transnational feminist studies interrupt imperialist ways of knowing, such that epistemological standpoints of privileged identity formations are disturbed at subjective levels of perception and experience.

Shortly thereafter I assisted on an "Introduction to Women's Studies" course taught by a Chicana member of the Women's Studies faculty who used a rigorously intersectional approach to the course. Again, a rash of white students came to my office to register complaints. These were indignant complaints and went along the lines of "I thought this was 'Intro to *Women's Studies*' and we were going to learn about *women*, but all we ever talk about are lesbians and black women."

Although equally offensive, the precise nature of these two sets of student responses to course materials differed. Comments coming from students in the *Women in World Cultures* course pertained to how the inclusion of feminist critiques of U.S. imperialist power and the political economies of globalization unsettled students' perceptions regarding U.S. national identity and policy. Importantly, these complaints reflected certain expectations students brought to the course, anticipating that they would be taken on an unproblematic, scintillating "world tour" of "different" cultures around the globe and of gender oppressions particular to "exotic" spaces and conditions.⁴ The bases such expectations supply to unexamined First World subjectivity formations within global relations of power were troubled when students did not get to go on this whirlwind culture tour or encounter the oppressions they imagined. When course materials and objectives deeply problematized the touristic imaginary that informed students' desires, it was not merely that students were

disappointed—they were dismayed to discover that their expectations were implicated in the very critiques of First World privilege and global disparities in production and consumption that we were studying. With respect to the introductory Women’s Studies course, student unhappiness about the requirement to consider gender’s intersections with race, ethnicity, and sexuality expressed a desire to see an unmarked hegemonic white, heterosexual female subject at the center of introductory topics and revealed an amount of homophobic perception, as well as what Gloria Yamato (1990) would call a form of “unaware, unintentional” racism (20). Students were demonstrably angry when they were unable to locate their own subject positions reflected or “mirrored” in the center of course materials.

The displeasures and frustrations each course aroused were distinct with respect to specific cultural assumptions challenged by course materials, but both sets of responses illustrated resistance to the uncomfortable experience many students initially undergo when the “woman” they encounter in the mirror of course materials is rendered through the displacements of intersectional and transnational methods and does not conform to their expectations and desires.⁵ To a significant degree, these methodological displacements challenge knowledge-desires in the context of self–Other perceptions: Students are often surprised and uncomfortable when the woman “in the mirror” of course materials does not duplicate their own identity formations (and instead “other women” seem to be in charge), or when the Otherness of a distinctly Other woman is reflected by course materials in such a way as to prohibit the appropriating gestures of colonizing practices (and the power of such practices to reinforce self-perceptions and dominant identity formations).

Similar examples in my several years of teaching have compelled me to develop pedagogical approaches able to uncoercively “rearrange” (as Spivak [2008] says) the desires of the classroom in order to engage students in a decolonizing process of learning. Introducing students to the languages provided by postcolonial feminist studies has proven an integral component of developing what I have begun calling a “pedagogy of unmirroring.” In this article, I outline the details of this pedagogical approach for which a primary learning objective involves students in an active process of *unlearning* familiar frames of reference and rudimentary epistemological assumptions rooted in various histories of privilege. Analyzing broader contexts of race, gender, and culture intersections through which the axiomatics of imperialism circulate to inform epistemological desires in the Women and Gender Studies classroom, I examine the potential of the “mirror” to usefully engage students in a critical politics of recognition attentive to self–other economies that are both established by imperialist formations and available to the rearranging strategies of a decolonizing approach to teaching.

Focusing first on the tendency of white students to collapse “culture” with “racialized” embodiment, I discuss institutional practices and curricular

approaches that fortify the two tropes of imperialist desire animating aspects of the epistemological context of the classroom that were mentioned earlier (the mirroring effect and the touristic imaginary). My objective is also to identify practices in the field of Women and Gender Studies that advance or inhibit decolonizing projects of feminist knowledge, specifically with respect to opportunities the classroom presents. For this purpose, I draw upon my experiences with a course I have been recurrently teaching, “Politics of the Body,” investigating how the languages of feminist postcolonial theory and, specifically, critiques of self–other formations can be pedagogically employed to facilitate the displacements effected by transnational and intersectional methods. My argument is that “unmirroring”⁶ can be used as a pedagogical tactic for deconstructing correspondences among identity, perception, and “the gaze.” The intent of such a deconstruction is to render epistemologies projected through self–other relations of empire visible to the mirror of student perceptions in order to instigate new desires of learning.

Epistemic Habits of Imperialist Desire: Material and Disciplinary Contexts

In dramatically reconfiguring “woman” as an object of study, intersectional and transnational methods have opened the politics of recognition for critical engagement—creating an epistemic affair of uncertainty for many Women and Gender Studies students. More difficult is the disorientation students experience in finding the mirror’s imperialist desire thwarted and the images that they sought to affirm in its reflection unavailable. Straight from the playbook of postcolonial critiques of imperialist knowledge, what makes the mirror’s failure to deliver the familiar so disturbing is the questioning alterity that slips between desire and the impossible image of the Other, who will never conform to the expectations of knowledge. In this regard, student resistance to objects of inquiry that do not conform to imperialist logics of western knowledge is symptomatic of a transformation taking place across the field of Women and Gender Studies.

As the pedagogical demands exerted by intersectional and transnational methods continue to challenge epistemologies of empire, gender-trained reliance on imperialist ways of knowing and the desires of privilege (in relation to both the other woman and the gendered figure who has for so long stood at the center of Women’s Studies knowledges) come under increasing pressure. This is true for students, who are on the frontline of a broader effect rippling through practices currently redefining the field, and it is also true for many faculty. To a degree, a significant number of seasoned practitioners are acclimating to shifts brought about not so much by the “postmodern turn,” as is often lamented, but by pressures that coalitions across the field assert in a decolonizing feminist politics. The task at the fore of the field is that of unlearning epistemologies of empire mediated through raced, classed, and First World, heteronormative

gendered perceptions regarding which subject formations ought to be at the center of Women's Studies knowledges, and also exactly whom Women's Studies knowledges are primarily intended to benefit and which subjects are entitled to represent critiques of that knowledge (as well as which subjects are not).

Within these politics of knowledge, my experiences with student resistance to the decolonizing project of Women and Gender Studies have alerted me to just how significantly intersectional and transnational methods critically unsettle perceptions and assumptions inherited through cultural legacies of the "imperialist centuries" (Spivak 1999), embedded in both old and new institutional logics via multiple circuits of production. With the contemporary U.S. academy's increased marketing of "the global" and "diversity" under the sign of "culture" a mainstay of today's liberal arts education and is uncritically packaged by an increasingly corporatized academy for undergraduate student consumption, it is somewhat inevitable that these logics should filter down into the classroom, hence organizing dynamics and desires. Consequently, it perhaps goes without saying that the two methods most responsible for currently reorganizing epistemologies in the field of Women and Gender Studies—intersectionality and the transnational—render the politics of recognition key to the pedagogical details entailed by the "uncoercive rearrangement of desires" (Spivak 2008, 226), necessary to the decolonial projects of feminist teaching. These two methods are linked, not only by the methodological goal of dislocating white, First World subjectivities from the center of the knowledge field, but also by the interdependent capacity they demonstrate in transforming terrains of knowledge production. Indeed, despite the regularity with which the link between them is subordinate to an historical demarcation of the two in terms of developments in Women and Gender Studies, intersectionality, as performed by women-of-color feminist analyses, has in very important respects always represented a transnational critique of the material histories of imperialism and the political economies of nation linking race, class, culture, sexuality, and ethnicity.⁷ Therefore, in confronting the colonial history of western knowledge from a feminist perspective that places the postcolonial condition of self–other relations at the fore of considerations, intersectional and transnational methods allow us to enter (as Spivak says of the humanities) "through friendship with the language(s), able to meditate upon gender and sexuality" (ibid.) in the pedagogical context of strategically meeting the demographic group overrepresented in many of our classrooms at the intersection that the reflection in the mirror supplies—namely, where the imaginary figures of both a global and racialized Other and the desires of white, First World gender identities meet.

Thus through discovering how the language(s) of postcolonial feminist studies can be deployed within intersectional and transnational methods to stipulate the terms of a pedagogy intent on rearranging gender desire, I have grown increasingly aware of the pedagogical value to be extracted from a persistent and painstaking effort to summon the imaginary figure of the Other

woman within the classroom, while navigating the uncoercive circumstances that allow students to critically engage cultural legacies of imperialist power and knowledge.

“Culture” as the Misplaced Signifier of Race and the Transnational: Linking Intersectional and Transnational Methods

Those with experience teaching in demographic regional contexts similar to those of the Midwestern United States will be familiar with the frequently stated disavowal of cultural identity expressed by many white students from small towns and rural communities, who perceive “culture” as intrinsically raced in connection with nonwhite identity formations and non-U.S. nations of origin. These students also tend to see urban dwellers (“city people”) as intrinsically more cultured than themselves based on perceptions that identify urban locales as racially, ethnically, and nationally diverse, in contrast to an exclusive homogeneity presumed to define nonurban communities.⁸ Due to the frequency with which I encounter such statements as “I’m from a small town and so I don’t really have culture” or “I’m not ‘cultured,’ being from a small town,” the pedagogical project of meeting students where they are at has entailed seeking to engage them at the point where they imagine a racialized and/or national Other perceived to embody culture, in contrast to perceptions of their own embodiment as cultureless.

Emptying the mirror of the assumption of cultural absence involves rendering the gender subjectivity of whiteness as an historically dynamic cultural narrative of embodiment in order to dispel the notion that culture attaches solely to racialized and transnational (or Third World) subjects and the embodiments these subjects represent. I have found a comparative framework helpful in allowing students to grasp a gender analytic defined by intersectionality, stressing at each juncture of courses I teach how gendered subject formations are intersected by *multiple* histories of race, capital, and nation within transglobal circuits.⁹ Enabling white students to understand their own subject-positions as included by the rubric of diversity such that they learn to identify whiteness, heterosexuality, middle-class status, U.S. nationalism, and so on as specific cultural productions of gender, identity, and power in the context of race-nation constructions is an important initial step of an unmirroring pedagogy. Its preliminary task is to reorient the perceptual apparatus that sees culture as residing “over there,” in exotic, racialized spaces, and to locate the presumed “racelessness” of whiteness within specific cultural formations. A comparative framework helps break down perceptions trained by the othering technologies of imperialist desire, allowing difference to emerge as an effect of relational dynamics of power. In grasping difference as a relational effect, *all* students learn to see themselves *within* relations of difference (rather than outside of, or at a distance from, difference) and to locate their identities with respect to specific cultural productions—discovering,

in the process, that culture productions are as materially consequential as they are both discursively and materially produced.

Intersectionality is an extraordinarily useful methodological tool for retraining gendered perceptions of an essentialized relationship between race and culture. However, while identity is often the privileged explanatory model practitioners use for teaching the concept of intersectionality (and unquestionably, it is extremely useful for introducing students to the concept), intersectionality is most productive when moved beyond an identity model. Both the stasis of social location the identity model suggests and the tendency to collapse intersectionality with racialized embodiment constrain its utility. More effective is an approach that accentuates the mobilities of intersecting differentials, not only in terms of social categories of power, but also with regard to political economies that reveal the combined effects of structural, institutional, and ideological axes intersecting along various trajectories of history, culture, materiality, and practice. Integrating nation as an intrinsic axis of gender is critical to identifying how these effects circulate through identity categories, requiring students to consider various political economies connected to nation. However, in this regard also, an identity model is limiting in appealing too strongly to an experiential frame of reference conditioned by the dominating effects of U.S. national belonging, and it constrains the explanatory scope and capacity of intersectionality to function as a method for interrogating differential mobilities of power across historical, cultural, and social contexts. A domestic nationalism tends to dominate the extent to which many U.S. students are able to engage intersections between gender and nation, providing little in the way of altering the imperialist impulse to encounter “global diversity” as the cultural embodiment of a racialized Other, who then “appears” in their coursework as a commodity for educational consumption.

Therefore the effort I am promoting is one that intrinsically re-links intersectionality to transnational feminist methods. Emphasizing both the distinct and mutually reinforcing aspects of the two methods, my suggestion is that we more strongly stress the interdependent linkages between intersectionality and the transnational and move away from an identity model, which supports the perception that each represents either a discrete topical site or a distinct subject formation and embodiment. Doing so highlights the capacity of intersectionality to function as a method for analyzing an array of transnational relations linking gender to a network of disciplinary regimes, normativities, sexual ethics, class apartheid, and racialized effects, and locates transnational gender contexts as already mobile within and across intersecting circuits of race, class, and sexuality moving in multiple and simultaneous political economies, histories, and culture formations.

This approach used persistently throughout the teaching of any given course introduces students to intersectionality as a core method of feminist analysis that is explicitly integrated by the transnational in a manner that both

resists the additive formula often represented by multicultural emphases and averts the tendency of multicultural rubrics to collapse both intersectionality and the transnational with subject embodiment, and to particularize the explicit markings of culture and race in ways that reproduce the privileges of an unmarked center within knowledge productions of the field. I have arrived at this recommendation despite what I take to be a general willingness on the part of Women and Gender Studies practitioners to acknowledge the importance of de-universalizing and diversifying the gender analytic. While recent years have demonstrated efforts to expand and diversify the knowledge objects of the field, course titles and the design of program curricula still significantly tend to illustrate a distinction between the unmarked “fundamentals” perceived to define the center of knowledge and practice and those analytics and topics specifically marked by race and global diversity, which (although accorded value) give the appearance of representing peripheral “add on” components complementary to the “main menu” of the field’s knowledge domain.¹⁰

The add-on formula rendered at the curricular level informs student perceptions at the level of the classroom; whether students are conscious of them or not, cues of imperialist logic are displayed in the distinction between courses marked by racial or global emphases and those that are not. These distinctions communicate particularities about the knowledge field, not only informing student expectations and epistemological outlooks regarding “core” versus “marginal” knowledge content, but training the desires of learning for compatibility with imperialist tropes of self–other formations. For example, being enrolled in a course the title of which is not marked by race or the global and not anticipating that the course will foreground intersectional and transnational methods (gender/race/nation), white students are often frustrated to find racialized subjects at the center of course topics where they had expected to see themselves (as an unmarked identity category). This is the trope of imperialist knowing I call the mirroring effect, and you will recall the earlier example I gave of student complaints in the context of a Women’s Studies introductory course as representative of this trope. On the flip side of the mirroring effect is the touristic imaginary, a frequent consequence of the additive curricular approach that often leads students to elect courses explicitly marked by race/diversity or the global-based on an implicit desire to encounter the cultural Other whom they perceive to reside in exotic and specifically racialized distant spaces. This trope is evident in the other example of responses I encountered early in my career while assisting on the Women in World Cultures course.

Needless to say, the curricular structure and design of individual programs often set the stage for approaches to course materials that do not discernibly disturb pedagogies of empire, leaving the degree to which the implications of gender/race/colonial–neocolonial intersections are critically engaged to the prerogative of individual instructors. The organizing structure of imperialist epistemologies is further reinforced when practitioners in the field regard these

intersections as domains of particular expertise situated at the outskirts of the field's knowledge requirements and ancillary rather than intrinsic to core foundations and the general expertise of the field. For undergraduates—and this ought to especially concern us with respect to Women and Gender Studies majors—these program practices enable a stable center–margin paradigm both in terms of how race and imperialism are located as critical knowledges in relation to the field and with respect to how self–other formulations function within the politics of knowledge.

Because the disciplinary power of self–other perceptions is a primary mechanism through which imperialist economies of desire circulate not only broadly, but specifically with regard to knowledge formations and practice, the efforts of a decolonizing pedagogy require attentive critical engagement with self–other economies. Both the mirroring effect and the touristic imaginary can be understood as effects of the self–other economy of imperialist productions of power—or, put another way, as symptomatic of the subjectivity produced by technologies of empire. Strenuously engaging the implications of gender/race/colonial intersections, a pedagogy of displacement seeks to confront the self–other economy of imperialist desire and to rearrange the gender training it has historically performed. A primary objective of the pedagogical tactic of unmirroring, then, is to confront this economy specifically at the link between perception and subjectivity—a link that mediates the epistemological encounter of the classroom.

Unmirroring Desires: Transforming the Mirroring Effect and the Touristic Imaginary

As I am discussing them, both the mirroring effect and the touristic imaginary are symptomatic of un-interrogated privilege accruing to white, U.S. national, and heterosexual subject formations. Within these, class status is also a significant though variable factor. The mirroring effect describes the unacknowledged expectation that course materials will centrally illuminate the experiences of a dominant subject identity represented demographically by the majority of students in the classroom, and that students readily recognize as such. The touristic imaginary describes the desire of this student group to encounter a racial and/or global Other in ways that do not disturb or critically engage their privilege.¹¹ The mirroring effect and the touristic imaginary represent flip sides of an epistemology organized by the primacy of the “self” to identity and, in the relation of self-identity, to difference within the orthodoxies of imperialism and its western traditions.

How both sides of this epistemology are expressed by student expectations is partly attributable as well to the relationship between the institutional history of Women's Studies and the tradition of identitarian politics inherited from North American contexts of second-wave feminism in which both racialized

exclusions and ethnocentrism were prevalent. With a view to the contribution that this historical relation makes to student perceptions of the current field as formulated around female subject identity and experience, it is understandable that female students expect to see their experiences and identities *as women* reflected by course materials. This type of acknowledgment, however, does not mitigate the imperialist perspectives and white privilege that are often underlying expectations. So, for example, when enrolled in courses that students did not anticipate would foreground the intersections of gender/race/nation, the mirroring effect creates confusion and frustration for white students who expected to see white-female subjectivity and experience represented as the “universal woman” unproblematically at the center of course topics. Perhaps particularly as consumers of education, many middle-class white students tend to feel “short-changed” when this universalism is implicitly disqualified and the center displaced—without warning, so to speak. In this context, white students tend to feel misled when courses are not marked by race in the usual, readily recognizable ways (by course titles, for example). Similarly, if the entire architecture of course design and the presentation of topics integrate racialized embodiment and women-of-color identities and experiences instead of presenting racialized identities and topics as discreetly marked and segregated course components, my sense is that white students suspect the course description of misrepresentation.

The experience for many female students of color is very much the opposite. Students of color generally anticipate an amount of disappointment with regard to how courses (the titles of which are) not explicitly marked by race will engage their identities; for these students, it is not an exceptional occurrence to encounter a mirror that renders them absent, or only minimally allows them to see their experiences as women unobscured and reflected by course materials. For women students of color in the United States, gender already represents a context of displacement with respect to academic knowledge and the marginalizing power of whiteness within even broader contexts of representation and social and institutional power. When these erasures and marginalizations are duplicated in Women and Gender Studies, it is a particularly strong point of failure for the field, and the contrasting experiences that students of color and white students call upon to epistemologically negotiate the politics of displacement respective to gendered identity formations illustrate the importance of strategic pedagogical practices that directly confront racialized knowledge regimes.

Because race, knowledge, and power intersections reveal gendered desires trained by center–margin contexts and the subject–object relations of colonial desire, I have found the mirror a useful device for thinking about a pedagogy of displacement that starts by considering the relationship between seeing and knowing. In this regard, and especially in terms of a decolonizing politics (for which deconstructing power relations rendered through the ubiquitous subject–object formation is a primary goal), the mirror serves as a figurative space

for investigating the subject who looks and the desires that animate looking, specifically with regard to privilege and the self–other relations that structure imperialist ways of knowing. To this end, feminist critiques of seer/seen and knower/known subject–object relations and the politics of looking have been invaluable to my efforts to consider a pedagogy that actively deconstructs self–other constructions.

Using feminist critiques of the gaze and of the power of looking to supply a frame of reference for considering the gendered-trained desires produced in colonial subject–object relations and epistemologies, one can pedagogically imagine any particular course as a collection of objects assembled for the “gaze” of student inquiry (Doane 1982; Haraway 1988; hooks 1992; Mohanty 1988; Mulvey 1975). From this perspective, attention can then be devoted to involving students in an investigation of how privilege participates in constructions of the gaze, its objects, and perception in the context of the course and learning expectations. Exploring the relationship between the gaze and social privilege creates awareness of the constructed nature of perception and how the epistemic desires of the knowing self structure objects of knowledge; introducing the mirror into this context allows students to interrogate the epistemological desires of subjectivity and their own expectations with regard to exactly whom it is they wish to see “reflected” in course objects of inquiry: Did they desire the course to mirror a subject self familiar to them? Did they expect the course to reflect a distinct Other about whom they know little but desire to know? The idea behind mirroring as a teaching tool is to facilitate displacements of privilege by directly engaging students in questions of self–other relations as they pertain to epistemological desires of the classroom and expectations of learning to which they contribute.

It is in this context of using the mirror and the gaze to investigate the embeddedness of privilege in the link between subjectivity and perception that I have found the language(s) of postcolonial feminist criticism usefully inserted to intervene upon the imperialist-trained desires of knowledge. In effect, the goal is to render a self that cannot be recognized as such from an epistemological perspective *without directly appealing* to difference and the effects of its circulation (in other words, a “self” given in the relation of alterity). The initial goal is twofold: To disengage epistemologies of the classroom from colonial self–other constructions operating through privilege, and to interrupt the process by which self-identification is understood as the locus or origination point of the knowledge project. Both aspects of the goal are accomplished by entertaining a particular construction of the self yielded by an anti-foundationalist theory of the subject and the theoretical premise made available in the intersection of postcolonial discourse and poststructuralist accounts of the subject, specifically with respect to alterity and the ethical relation it supplies.

Alterity names an ethical relation that forms the basis for a distinctly decolonizing epistemology (Davis 2002). In part, because the alterity of the

Other depends upon and prevents her/his being known or appropriated by the subject-self and its field of knowledge, for the alterity of the Other to exist as such the Other cannot be known, and neither the Other nor the relation of self to the Other can be regarded as providing an epistemological foundation for the self (Levinas 1969, 1998). In this particular framework of ethics, knowledge does not coincide with the self, but rather is ordered by the unknowable alterity of the Other and the command of the ethical relation. Applied in the classroom as a practical politics, alterity requires students to grasp (and experience) the self as a nontotalized and profoundly provisional structure. In this experience, students find their epistemological desires “rearranged” (as it were) to respond to the repeated sense of “coming up short,” as alterity engages desire as that which inevitably disappoints; this disappointment results from the seductive misapprehension that the mirror (focus of their gaze) is able to stage a non-oblique self and ready-made reflection. Invoking alterity for use in the classroom delivers this misapprehension—which so often typifies privilege in contexts of knowing and perception—as a site of critical engagement useful to the success of intersectional and transnational methods and the displacements they entail within the objectives of pedagogy.

The kind of postcolonial feminist language I have in mind draws upon the notion of alterity to express the constitutive power of absence, to insist upon the deconstruction of binary structures, and to articulate third-space conceptual terrains accentuated by the demands of the decolonial imaginary (Pérez 1999). Trinh Minh-ha’s (1989, 1997) articulation of the “I” and the “Not-I” provides perhaps the most explicit example of this language. Gayatri Spivak’s (1988, 1993, 2000) work is exemplary for its emphatic attention to the ethical–political necessity of alterity; philosopher Ofelia Schutte’s (2000) recognition of a space of “incommensurability” within North–South cross-cultural communications and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) conception of *nepantla* are also explicit examples. The work of Chela Sandoval (2000), specifically her analyses of *mestizaje* and differential consciousness, Emma Pérez (1999), and many other postcolonial feminist theorists all provide a language of third-space ambiguities with which to introduce students to the project of rethinking the (epistemological) structure and priority of the self within western political and intellectual traditions and the power dynamics inscribed in self–other relationships.

Displacing foundationalist accounts of the self and self-sovereignty in deference to the radical relationality defined by the constitutive power of the Other helps enable the link between perception and subjectivity to engender a differently inaugurated knowledge project in the classroom. For students belonging to dominant social groups, this project often begins in an experience of dis-identification. Creating the conditions for such an experience to occur is one aspect of a pedagogy of displacement, the process of which begins when the unknowable alterity of the other is that which places the “I” fundamentally in question; as a result, the starting point of inquiry is the self that

cannot be known solely on its own terms. Put differently, one places students' unexamined assumptions regarding the primacy of the self to knowledge under interrogation by:

- 1.) Actively engaging (as a site of critical pedagogical practice) the privileged expectation on the part of students that course materials will *mirror* their identities;
- 2.) Facilitating the experience of dis-identification (and sense of the provisional self) within which students no longer understand precisely how to identify in relation to course materials;
- 3.) Connecting this experience to the figure of the Other woman (the Not-I) who crowds (so to speak) the self-image that students are no longer able to discern in the mirror of course materials; and
- 4.) Helping students negotiate the unsettling feelings that result when what they presume about themselves as knowers is placed in question, and a familiar self–other paradigm fails to serve their initial knowledge goals.

When the epistemological space in which the self—placed in question—seeks reflection is occupied by the figure of the Other, the perceptual task of dis-identification is a practical one for students who find their usual habits of looking to be impaired as they endeavor to discern a self given in the image of the Not-I (as Minh-ha [1997] would say). In this process, students begin to experience the desire to see *themselves* as already entangled with both the Other and a reflection that emits the interrogative presence of difference. This sense of entanglement is not, of course, incidental; the purpose of the pedagogical move that actively places the self in question is to draw attention to the constructed character of the self in its traditional designation as the exclusive purveyor of knowledge, and to render the self (as well as the desire for knowledge) as an object of investigation subject to a gaze that is no longer unified in terms of being coherently sovereign.

In sum, tacitly rendering the mirror as a space for interrogating links among imperialist desire, perception, and constructions of knowledge focuses awareness on the postcolonial condition of self–other relations and discloses epistemic habits located by privilege, inviting students to critically engage self–other relations that are often unconsciously projected onto the epistemological projects of the classroom. In the process, most students learn to detect how self–other constructions are embedded in their epistemological desires, and, by extension, begin to unlearn epistemologies of empire produced through self–other configurations that inform raced and classed intersections of heteronormative gender within transnational and other circuits of difference.

But let me move from a general theoretical analysis of the objectives of a decolonizing pedagogy to one that better outlines more concrete classroom dynamics entailed by confronting the mirroring effect and the touristic imaginary in the context of intersectional and transnational teaching methods.

Teaching the course Politics of the Body in successive semesters, I have had the opportunity to examine pedagogical issues produced by a hegemonic whiteness pressuring students' expectations and epistemological practices. The majority of students arrive in the course sharing a primary desire to study body image with respect to the sexualized objectification of female bodies, diet cultures, the tyranny of thinness, and the role of media in these contexts. They also anticipate we will look at violence (specifically household or partner violence and sexual violence) and at reproductive freedom (specifically, abortion rights).¹²

The course covers these topics, but because my emphasis is on intersectional and transnational methods, we investigate these topic areas with significant attention to gender's intersections with race, labor, sexuality, nation, colonial legacies, and the financialization of the globe. All topic areas foreground these aspects of gendered relations of power. So, for example, with respect to the topic of sexual violence, the course syllabus does not include a section of readings organized by the specific subheading of sexual violence or that is exclusively focused on sexual violence; instead, we study sexual violence at three different points in the semester in the context of texts positioned by different subheadings of our syllabus. One text, included under the subheading "Body and Self: Private and Public Constitutions," is an article by two British feminist sociologists investigating connections between perceptions of independence, corporeal autonomy, and constructions of the self among young teenage women in East London (with an emphasis on how young women both resist and are vulnerable to social discourses that construct their autonomy directly in relation to the threat of sexual violence, sexually transmitted disease, and pregnancy [Woollett and Marshall 1997]). The second, falling under the syllabus subheading "Laboring Bodies and Domestic Others," is in a monograph by Grace Chang (2000), *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy*, focusing on migrant women working in domestic and homecare service industries in the United States (with attention given to the vulnerability of these workers to sexual exploitation and violence in the homes of employers). The third is under the subheading "Imperialist Matters" and focuses on sexual violence as a tool of genocide with respect to Native Americans in the context of an excerpt from Andrea Smith's *Conquest* (2005). Similarly, our readings on reproductive freedom are scheduled at several points on the syllabus and are organized to cut across contexts, connecting our investigation of domestic abortion laws and policies to issues of economic and geographical access to reproductive health, global population-control-policy efforts, the criminalization of black women's bodies and "illegal immigrant" discourses in the United States, and the forced sterilization of Native, Black, and Latina women.

Because intersectional and transnational methods represent gender issues very differently than a white-privilege-model approach, what many white students experience is a breakdown of the mirror, as the clarity of the white image they expected to see illuminated fails to materialize. When subjectivities of the

Other overwhelm the mirror onto which a realm of self-identifying desires are projected, direct correspondences among self, identity, and the gaze are dislodged—the subjective experience of which inaugurates the dis-identification process I described earlier. It is not that the mirror appears empty; rather, dis-identification renders its contents uncertain. A jumble of fragments compete for intelligibility, and, for many white students, inability to locate their own identities displayed in the coherent image to which they are accustomed marks a radical break with habits of knowing, signaling a first stage of the displacement enabled by an unmirroring pedagogy. It is important to note here that unlike many students of color who are well trained by academic (as well as by broader social) experience to extract or construct relevant meaning from a mirror that regularly does not represent them clearly, white students are somewhat slower to recognize the implications of not finding themselves visible and thus are less prepared to respond productively.

In the effort to discern their own image in the (dis)assembled visage that confronts them, a further displacement occurs specifically with respect to whiteness: The mirror (suddenly) emits a gaze of otherness, looking back (so to speak) in ways that alter schemes of recognition and challenge self-perceptions situated by privileges of whiteness. This is often a very new experience for white students, and frequently they are not equipped to respond with a level of confidence to being looked upon specifically as racialized (white) identities in a manner that challenges self-perception and identity. In contrast, most students of color are familiar with the power dynamics of the gaze and are prepared to resist white practices of looking, having often encountered their reflection in a gaze that others them and having been taught the tactics for resisting a range of othering technologies as a matter of identity formation connected to community and empowerment.

In order to set up the framework for interrogating the mirror, examining the gaze, and considering self–other relations—all of which receive explicit attention later in the semester—early sections of the course syllabus foreground questions of identity and constructions of the self with respect to the body. With these early readings, my aim is to render both self and identity as specific objects of critical inquiry, and to draw attention to the constructed character of these fundamental concepts. In the midst of these questions I also include a documentary on contemporary feminist art, which, by focusing on the female body in terms of both its representation as a passive object in classical and male-dominated traditions and the ways that feminist art reclaims the female body as a site of active subjectivity and agency, introduces students to the politics of looking and the power dynamics of the gaze. Immediately following these course materials interrogating identity and the self, assigned readings focus on representational bodies organized by racializing discourses and economies; representations and experiences of women of color are exclusively at the center of analyses. It is in this section of readings (as women-of-color identities

dominate our study of the body) that white students begin to self-consciously feel the displacing effects of intersectional and transnational methods (significantly also, they are feeling these effects in association with earlier coursework de-naturalizing the transparency of the self and identity).

As links among readings draw upon relational dynamics between self-identity and difference and begin to implicitly interrogate the mirror and constructions of the gaze it emits, for many white students, unlearning imperialist desires comes with a somewhat disorienting sense of loss, as they are required to confront privileges through which their identities are produced and that often strongly inform the self–other relations in which they participate.¹³ As an other increasingly appears at the center of course materials and specific topics where they had initially expected to find themselves, white students often experience the gap between their expectations and the mirror’s reflection as one of obfuscation and feel personally affronted when the gaze they project against the mirror is re-directed by other images to come back at them, creating an often unfamiliar self-consciousness. The failure to represent whiteness as the center of gender experience is a direct outcome of using intersectional and transnational teaching methods, but an important lesson for me in feminist teaching has been grasping the need to strategically anticipate the frustrations of white students and to tread a fine line between generously allowing them to struggle with uncertainty (not endeavoring to “rescue” them or divert their sense of alienation) *and* making an interspersed array of stepping stones available so that students are able to gain enough of a foothold to glimpse the source of their uncertainty and regain sufficient confidence in the learning process.

When teaching *Politics of the Body*, I discovered that there is one point toward the end of the semester when my staging of the course produces a collision between the mirroring effect and the touristic imaginary in a way that discloses the importance of the link between intersectional and transnational methods. The moment arrives when we turn our attention to the topic of the objectification of women’s bodies in the context of media and popular culture—the topic area students most strongly anticipate at the outset of the semester and about which they are always very excited. I stage the topic in relation to axes of power intersecting race and colonizing processes, using black feminist scholar Janell Hobson’s *Venus in the Dark: Black Beauty and Popular Culture* (2005). Hobson employs a transnational feminist framework to analyze perceptions of black female beauty and the sexual objectification of black women’s bodies in media and popular culture, and she positions the colonial relationship to Sara Baartman’s embodiment as the frame of reference foregrounding her analysis. It does not take long for the disappointment of white students to register in finding the objectification of women’s bodies investigated in a context that explicitly foregrounds the effects of objectification on black women. While my presentation of Hobson’s text includes a comparative framework, encouraging white students to consider how the objectification of white female bodies, while

unquestionably oppressive, also becomes an instrument of oppression in the context of rendering white standards of beauty in correlation to the denigration and/or exoticization of black women's bodies, the inability on the part of white students to locate their own bodies and identities at the center of this course topic engenders a perception that the course had failed to "truly cover" the objectification of female bodies—a clear example of the mirroring effect and how student expectations organize epistemological desires (in anticipation of finding their own subject positions at the center of course topics).

Better prepared on my second excursion with the course to directly engage students' disappointment with Hobson's text as a teaching moment, I confronted the unusually awkward and preponderant silence characterizing the classroom dynamic and initiated a conversation to talk about their apparent reluctance to engage Hobson's analysis, asking: "Is there something about this text that makes it difficult to engage?" My question was met with cautious silence, until one white student admitted it was "very challenging to access" Hobson's analysis because "it had so little to do with" her. Other students nodded their heads in agreement, and after some discussion revealing the extent to which white students perceived the text's focus on black female embodiment as distinctly unrelated to their own embodied experiences of objectification, I asked them to compare their experiences with Hobson's text to Chang's text studied earlier in the semester (which, you will recall, is an analysis of the political economies pertinent to Third World migrant workers in domestic and homecare service industries in the United States, presented from a transnational feminist-studies perspective).

Several white students quickly offered that accessing Chang's text had posed no difficulties. I then noted how interesting their responses were, given that Chang's text focused as exclusively as Hobson's on representations of women of color, and asked why they thought Chang's text was so much easier to engage. One white student said she "could relate to those women because of the work they do." I asked if others felt that way also and a number of heads began nodding in agreement. So I asked about the basis for this connection in terms of relating to these women through the work they do, putting it rather bluntly (but in the decidedly nonjudgmental tone of one who is simply curious): "Have many of you worked as domestics or homecare workers?" Instantly, there was lots of rigorous head shaking no, they had not done this type of work. So what was it about these women's work that allowed students to feel "related" to the women in Chang's text in ways they did not feel related to the women in Hobson's text? At that point, I made clear what I was asking them to consider with respect to why they thought they had less access to the subjects of analysis in Hobson's text than in Chang's, pointing out that both texts used a transnational framework of analysis and critiqued similar imperialist productions of gender/race intersections of power with which they had become familiar over the course of the semester: So why was a text about Third World migrant workers so much

more accessible than a text about black female embodiment and popular culture (primarily focusing on popular culture produced in U.S. contexts)?

The most general observation I extracted from this exchange was that white, U.S. students have little difficulty “imagining the other woman” via First–Third world trafficking relations, whereas (in agreement with one student’s statement) perceiving themselves as “having nothing in common” with representations of black women’s bodies in popular culture, their ability to imagine the other woman had come up against an obstruction of some kind. What this suggested to me was that Chang’s text allowed students to engage the touristic imaginary, whereas Hobson’s did not, and I interpreted the distinction to reflect a difference in the context of students’ perceptions regarding the accessibility of the “transnational subject” to a First World gaze, in contrast to the accessibility of black women’s bodies to a white gaze. Because Hobson explicitly critiqued the white gaze, her analysis rendered this avenue of accessibility deeply problematic for white students, who found themselves frustrated (by the text) not only in terms of the mirroring effect—not finding white female bodies at the center of analysis—but also with respect to the touristic imaginary—unable to imagine the other woman as an effect of distance, encountered “far from home” and racialized as a distant other within the collapse of race *into* culture (the culture of a global other).

Hobson’s text thoroughly intervened against the othering techniques of imperialist self–other formations on both sides of the epistemological coin—the mirroring effect and the touristic imaginary—while Chang’s had provided students a somewhat familiar position of “distance” from which to engage a transnationally privileged commodity relationship via identifying with First World purchasing power in relation to the labor performed by Third World women’s bodies—at least, I believe this is what students were implicitly referencing in agreeing that the women in Chang’s text were accessible “due to their labor.” From this perspective, students might feel somewhat troubled by their own privilege (similar to the way a First World traveler to Third World spaces might be troubled by finding herself in the midst of extreme poverty), but the link that privilege sustains between perception and subjectivity was not impaired by considering the women analyzed by Chang. Nor were students’ epistemological desires rearranged with respect to the desire to learn something about the circumstances of the other woman. They were able to deplore, sympathize with, or critically consider conditions faced by migrant women workers in the United States without having to relinquish any of their own privilege with respect to the links among privilege, knowledge, and perception.

In contrast, Hobson required students to confront the sexual objectification of the black female body at the same time that it explicitly implicated the gaze that white students used for this confrontation in a critique of colonial history. Consequently, as students engaged Hobson’s critique of a sequence of dominating gazes (white, ethnographic, imperialist, scientific, imperialist), they

very uncomfortably recognized themselves (as an unfamiliar colonial self in the mirror) in this historical positioning: Gazing as class-privileged, white women at the exotic, dangerous, and “strange” black female body. That is, for many white students, the link between perception and subjectivity was disrupted by Hobson’s analysis in ways both palpable and uncomfortable.

White students’ perceptions of these two course texts allowed me to think further about the touristic imaginary in terms of the wish to disavow First–Third world transnational intersections of gendered subjectivity (and transnational transactions of power enabled by them) with respect to whiteness and its others in the context of epistemological desire and a tendency to engage the global through commodity relationships that mask the desires of whiteness. It seems rather apparent that the touristic imaginary is such that when students look away from the mirror in which they had hoped to discover a clarifying image of (the white) self, what they want to look at and see is a distinctly othered embodiment situated by a distance that neither interrupts First World privilege nor calls the whiteness of the self into question. This desired way of looking does not implicate the knowing self in a racializing gaze or challenge students to see a gendered subjectivity that is actively looking from a perspective that racializes whiteness; to gaze upon a distinctly othered embodiment is to locate the other, global, or Third World subject as always passively available to a First World gaze fundamentally defined by a First–Third worlds commodity relationship in which race is merely an attribute of cultural difference. Perceived as an attribute of culture, race can be consumed as an object of pleasure, along with the entire field of the other’s difference. From this perspective, the racial other is merely cultural difference experienced as enhancing to the self and the stability of First World, white subject formations (Mohanty 1988). The other woman is not engaged in terms of her inappropriable alterity; rather, the mirroring effect operates within the touristic imaginary, and the mirror is held at a different angle such that the other woman is not outside the mirror of the self, but is an attenuated extension of self-desire, her appearance welcomed as a form of novelty orchestrated by a sovereign (sense of) self, an image admitted to the mirror for the constrained purpose of enhancing the reflection of the one who looks.

Thinking further about implications revealed by students’ comments, a number of critical issues emerged. The consistent focus of Hobson’s analysis is the production of culture and how black women’s bodies are constructed through cultural representation. Her explicit attention to the racializing aspects of cultural production foreclosed white students’ ability to naturalize race as cultural embodiment, and to rely on this naturalization to mediate the contact zone of difference. As a result, the specific point of entry provided by the distancing mechanism (intrinsic to the commodity relationship as well as to the ethnographic traveler), which allows white First World subjects to imagine race as an excursion into the distant space of a cultural Other, was not available. Instead, this mechanism was at the center of Hobson’s critique of imperialist legacies;

rather than enabling the touristic imaginary, her text distinctly obstructed this point of entry for imagining race.

In direct contrast, students' comments suggested that the accessibility of Chang's *Disposable Domestic*s was due to their ability to engage the transnational subject exclusively through the commodity relationship of the touristic imaginary. Student agreement that it was specifically *through relating to the work* that migrant women do by which they felt connected to the subjects of Chang's analysis suggests that imaginary and material circuits privileging white, First World consumer power and leisure formed the basis of students' identification with Third World migrant women, specifically as connected to their labor. *Race* was, in effect, subsumed by *culture* (evidence of the collapse I discussed earlier between culture and racialized embodiment), understood as "over there" (the origin of its difference) even as the labor migrated "here" and is performed in the United States specifically as a racialized labor force. In other words, the fact that students (according to their statements) identified *with* these migrant women on the basis of the work they did indicates an identification that actively ignores how white privilege constructs migrant labor as a raced commodity within transnational circuits of capital and human resources. From my view, dropping race from their retrospective view of how they accessed Chang's text demonstrates the unfortunate extent to which white students are able to critically engage transnational methods, while simultaneously preserving privileges of whiteness intrinsic to the mirroring effect and excuse their own subject formations from implication in the colonization-by-race aspect of global imperialism.

Although Chang's text critiques circuits of First World privilege and consumption (and it must be noted that students discernibly found her critiques compelling), the distance mechanism of the touristic imaginary is so thoroughly ingrained by racialized ways of white, First World seeing and cultural imagining that transnational subject identity is rendered intelligible (merely) as Third World "cultural difference," with racial difference absorbed into a consumerist ethic associated with First World travel (and consequently divested of its power to threaten the unidirectional gaze of white privilege). In this way, migrant women could appear within the self-identifying desires of the mirror held at the angle supplied by the touristic imaginary without encountering the gaze of otherness, and the alteration that such a gaze presents to schemes of recognition.

Directly challenging these desires, Hobson's *Venus in the Dark* is intrinsically constructed to invoke an oppositional gaze and its power to disrupt imperialist schemes of recognition, and she explicitly conceives the black feminist politics of her project as that of deconstructing the mirror and gendered images of race-by-colonization captured within it (using the colonialist capture of Baartman's body as an historical template to explicate the epistemological project of decolonization she calls unmirroring). Attributing the term to artist and theorist Lorraine O'Grady, Hobson characterizes black women's representational history as one of distorted images: "So long unmirrored" she writes, quoting O'Grady,

“we may have forgotten how we look” (qtd. in Hobson 2005, 14). Hobson argues that exploring “the creation of a black feminist aesthetic” requires the creative “process of ‘unmirroring,’ in which struggles for black female subjectivity constantly grate against the distorted images of the dominant culture”—a process for which an oppositional stance deconstructs the structure of vision and mediates the consciousness of a black feminist optics (15). Creating a new way of seeing, the black female body can be envisioned in “a mirror that reveals a different image divorced from [the] iconographic history” produced in the stereotypes and “controlling images” of dominant culture (15).

In class meetings just prior to the specific exchange with students I have been describing, I had focused extensively on Hobson’s notion of unmirroring, as well as on her analyses of various forms of the dominating gaze. And the particular exchange we had about text accessibility truly became an exciting transnational teaching moment, in that it allowed me to retrospectively piece the journey of the course onto an explicit postcolonial mapping of self–other knowledge productions, engaging the concept of unmirroring to explain the epistemological uncertainties the students had been required to negotiate throughout the semester’s course materials in terms of those intersections where self-conceptions of gender identity are implicated in imperialist projects of power and knowledge. Retrospectively framing students’ coursework in terms of how the epistemology they had been engaging required them to disassemble the images they expected or sought to find mirrored in course materials resulted in a powerful reimagining of the politics of recognition in terms of seeing students moved to a more complexly situated comprehension of relations between the imagined other woman and self-perception.

This could not have been accomplished without continually situating the transnational in relation to intersectionality throughout the semester, as well as by persistently foregrounding the intersectionality of gender throughout our engagements with course readings. Both methods supplied students a foundation for grasping the complicated mobilities of gender identity and experience and for negotiating the subjectively experienced displacing effects of a pedagogy of unmirroring, in which the instability of gender as a signifier is produced in the back-and-forth struggle between identification and dis-identification. By requiring students to engage an intersectional gender analytic conditioned by a postcolonial framework (and self–other economies of knowledge), thus troubling the desire to locate a gender fully represented in the register of recognition, the particular teaching moment reached near the end of the semester marked a shift in the gears of perception for most white students, who were newly aware of a series of displacements having rearranged some basic epistemic presuppositions regarding self-perception and knowledge.

This one particular teaching moment has reinforced for me the potential of Women and Gender Studies to resist pedagogies of empire in the unlearning of imperialist desires by integrating intersectional and transnational methods.

Such moments repeated throughout the discipline have the capacity to advance the emancipatory politics of the field in its current mobilizations against imperialist/race/class formations, although they remain somewhat limited until programs on the whole adopt a commitment to curricular and pedagogical strategies for comprehensively implementing intersectional and transnational methods in ways that transform self–other economies of the knowledge–power nexus.

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Dawn Rae Davis is an assistant professor in Women and Gender Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Her PhD is in Feminist Studies from the University of Minnesota. Her current research explores the decolonial imaginary in relation to an epistemology of love and the demands of transnational feminism, and she is working on a monograph that investigates gendered intersections of whiteness in a postcolonial feminist framework. She can be reached at dawn.davis@mnsu.edu.

Notes

1. In referring to either the combined or single-field formation that Women and Gender Studies appears to represent, I have dropped the possessive from the title that more traditionally names the field of “Women’s Studies.”

2. As the formulaic nexus of gender/race/class wended its way into the mainstream of the field throughout the 1990s, an intersectional understanding of gender helped reshape the primary object of the field, moving from the study of women to the study of gendered relations of power. Increased and more recent consideration of transnational contexts in gender research and analysis has further modified the object of study in the field, expanding the nexus of intersecting relations of power under investigation.

3. This inference regarding the faculty member’s “foreignness” must be understood with respect to ways that Asian Americans are racialized via dominant white-nationalist cultural discourses marking “Asian-ness” as perpetually “outside” the perimeters of U.S. national belonging. See Erika Lee (2002) for an historical analysis of this particular process of racialization.

4. See M. Jacqui Alexander’s (2005) *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* for an excellent discussion of distance and the exotic in the feminist classroom (186–96).

5. Clearly, my examples make racial politics of authority in the classroom exceedingly apparent; both courses were instructed by faculty of color, and as a white, U.S.-born teaching assistant (TA) on these courses, in all likelihood I appeared to white students as an ally that was available to their discomfort and concerns. I suspect it unlikely that students would have felt entitled to so candidly express their displeasure with the courses if their TA had not been perceived as a white racial ally. As feminists of color have thoroughly analyzed elsewhere, racialized embodiment frequently challenges expectations of authority that subjects engendered by white privilege may bring to the classroom. There is no question that as a white, U.S.-born pedagogue, the forms of white student resistance to unlearning epistemologies of empire that I encounter while teaching intersectional and transnational methods are very differently charged than those encountered by faculty of color and those with multinational or non-U.S. identities. In offering these two examples as an introduction to my analysis, interactions between racial embodiment and national identity are far from being beside the point I want to press home; rather, I want to stress that conceptions of racial embodiment are a fundamentally problematic component of how intersectionality and the transnational are connected. As I argue in this article, student perceptions identifying racialized embodiment with culture are intrinsic to the interrelatedness of the ethnocentric and racialized hegemonic biases they bring to the classroom.

On a different note, it is important to point out that my thinking about the self–other economy of decolonial knowledge was informed long ago by Donna Haraway’s (1988) understanding of partial perspective in “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.”

6. I take the term “unmirroring” directly from Janell Hobson’s book *Venus in the Dark: Black Beauty and Popular Culture* (2005), a required text for my Politics of the Body course, and I will say much more about Hobson’s formulation further on. For me, her term (and the ways I find myself putting it to work pedagogically) is a superb example of how the language(s) of postcolonial feminist studies can be productively implemented to advance the decolonizing strategies of feminist politics in the context of intersectional and transnational methods. However, I have also been using the imagery of the “mirror” for some time in my work on whiteness, specifically in the essay “Romancing Brownness: Confronting Sonia Braga in the Mirror” (Davis, unpublished monograph titled *Learning Whiteness: The Personal Politics of Fear, Romance, and Reproduction*). In the latter context, the imagery of the mirror is indebted to Nikki Giovanni’s poem “Mirrors” (qtd. in Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano 1998) and to Emma Perez’s (1999) analysis of the decolonial imaginary.

7. Studying the conference program for the NWSA 2009 annual conference “Difficult Dialogues” offers ways to think about how the field represents these two methods as distinct (and to consider the merits or problematic aspects of such a distinction). Noting how conference themes and many individual panel and paper titles appeared to represent intersectionality and the transnational as distinct sites of critical inquiry, it seems to me that probing the politics and methodological implications of this apparent distinction could be an important place to expand the conversation in the future.

8. This perception persists despite ever-increasing demographic changes in rural Midwestern communities with migrants from Mexico, Central American countries, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Somalia, and Liberia (to name only a few global regions

represented in Midwestern towns and rural communities), and with displaced urban communities from such places as Chicago, for example, obtaining employment and making their homes in rural Midwestern townships.

9. See AnaLouise Keating's (2004) "Making New Connections: Transformational Multiculturalism in the Classroom" for an excellent example demonstrating the value of a comparative framework to the goals of multicultural education.

10. Considering current practices, it appears that both intersectional and transnational methods are broadly perceived to represent particular areas of expertise at the outskirts of what are taken to be the fundamentals of the gender analytic. Faculty who take this view tend to see the need for these methods in program curriculum as best met by a specific hire or faculty member whose research is focused on women of color, transnational or Third World subjects, Third World area studies, or by postcolonial studies. And it is frequently these scholars who are specifically assigned to teach the transnational, global, or racially marked courses in the curriculum. Or programs seek faculty jointly appointed or affiliated with other disciplines to fill these course needs with the same general research foci assumed to represent the scholars' expertise in intersectional and transnational methods. A further comment regarding reliance on an identity model in consideration of intersectionality and transnationality: The fact that women of color and/or non-U.S. nationals are those most often relied upon to teach courses specifically marked by race, intersectionality, and the global or transnational further indicates the tendency to collapse intersectionality and the transnational with subject embodiment and racialization.

11. The specific identity formations I refer to are not, of course, exclusive with respect to various forms of privilege, but they typify ranks of privilege particular to student groups I have been teaching. The touristic imaginary also functions within the desires of white students in relation to U.S. racial identities, and, although students of color are significantly more critically engaged with the problematic of a touristic perception of racialized otherness, U.S. students of color may also, of course, engage the touristic imaginary in the epistemological encounter with a global Other.

12. As most Gender and Women's Studies practitioners are aware, students are always very excited to analyze media images of women's bodies.

13. I draw on Spivak (2000) here with regard to unlearning privilege as loss, but see her "Claiming Transformation: Travel Notes with Pictures" for a critique of the narcissism entailed by such an unlearning and the recommendation she offers in its place, that of "learning to learn from below" as a practical politics of alterity (121).

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