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Editorial Leadership

Editorial Board

About the Journal: Peitho seeks to encourage, advance, and publish original feminist research in the history of rhetoric and composition and thereby support scholars and students within our profession. For submission guidelines and requirements, please see http://peitho.cwshrc.org/submit/.Peitho (ISSN 2169-0774) is published twice a year, in the Spring and Fall. Access to back issues of Peitho are part of the Coalition membership package. Coalition membership is $10 for graduate students and $25 for faculty; more information is available at cwshrc.org.

Cover Art: a photo taken by Associate Editor Jennifer Nish showing a metal post with a flyer pasted to it on a street in a city, with a bright blue sky with clouds. The flyer is black and white and says "SOS Iran," "Femme vie liberté," and the hashtags #sosiran, #jinamahsaamini, and #betheirvoice. It also has a drawing of a bird in a heart with drops of blood dripping from the bottom tip of the heart. The purpose of the flyer is to support women protesting compulsory wearing of the hijab. Under the flyer, also on the post, are the words "Peitho 27.3 Spring 2025" in an orange graffiti-inspired font.

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Foreword

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Syracuse University

At a time in history when we are faced with an authoritarian, misogynist, racist, imperial regime that has actively dismantled higher education in the USA, what does it mean to stand as an academic witness against the consolidation of white supremacy, of imperial regimes, of the normalization of gender, race, caste and class violence, of religious fundamentalisms and climate disasters, economic dispossession and the carceral state within and beyond the walls of the academy? In this special issue devoted to *Transnational Feminist Rhetorical Studies*, contributors mobilize critical race theory and transnational feminism to bear witness to the deeply violent, neoliberal, eurocentric narratives of the US academy that objectify, erase, and colonize minoritized international communities from the Global South. Using feminist autoethnography and counter-storytelling, these courageous authors develop complex, theoretically provocative analyses of a variety of rhetorical landscapes in the academy mapping the academic journey of a queer South Asian educator (Saurabh Anand); speculative linking and corporeal rhetorics--the body as the site, producer and consumer of labor in transnational feminist rhetorics (Florianne Jimenez); transnational counterstories and autoethnographies of Bangladeshi women (Abantika Dhar and Ridita Mizan); challenging female fragility and objectification of hegemonic narratives of refugees using counter-storytelling by Syrian Muslim women refugees to develop genealogies of agency and resistance (Nabila Hijazi); and finally, Sarah Cathryn Majed Dweik and Bernadita Yunis Varas' compelling autoethnographic, theoretically and historically grounded analysis of Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics bearing witness to the profound impact of the occupation, colonization and genocide of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. In speaking back to racist, colonial, objectified hegemonic knowledges normalized by the US academy these young scholars illustrate the profound significance of bearing witness to injustice, just as James Baldwin and many others stood witness to racism and white supremacy.

Editor's Introduction: Passing the Baton in Precarious Times and The Available Means of Transnational Feminist Rhetorical Studies

Rebecca Dingo and Clancy Ratliff

Doi: doi.org/10.37514/PEI-J.2025.27.3.01

Clancy and I took on the position of co-editors of *Peitho* amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2021. At the time, *Peitho*, like many journals, was struggling with fewer submissions and a scant number of reviewers who had the capacity to spend the extra uncompensated time reading and commenting on their colleagues' work. I think it is safe to say that *everyone* was tired and anxious. I am grateful for the vast team that made *Peitho* much like the cover of our first issue in Fall 2021, rise and become brighter despite dark times. Since Clancy and I have stewarded the *Peitho* ship, we have been grateful to work with and learn from several stellar editors and web coordinators: Temptaous Mckoy, Stacy Earp, Kelli Lycke, Ashley Canter Meredith, Stacie Klinowski, Jennifer Nish, Hannah Taylor, Jade Onn, and Rachel Smith Olson. We are both grateful also for the guidance of our editorial board who did the groundwork to index the journal and include it in the EBSCO database as well as to move the journal under WAC Clearinghouse. Michael Palmquist made the process go easy and smoothly! Tarez Graban, the Chair of the Editorial Board, was the most responsive and proactive Chair we could have asked for. We have confidence that the new editorial team will make sure *Peitho* continues to thrive and grow.

Although Clancy and I didn't apply as a team to be co-editors of *Peitho* (we had never even met!), we are grateful that the search committee brought us together. Collaboration enabled us to stay on schedule with publishing issues and deal with the challenges presented by the pandemic. We are proud to have helped with infrastructural changes, like indexing *Peitho* in the WAC Clearinghouse databases and getting an ISSN

Rebecca Dingo is Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Rebecca's research has addressed transnational rhetorical and composition studies and in doing so she forwards a transnational feministlens attuned to global political economy. She is the author of *Networking Arguments: Rhetoric, Transnational Feminism, and Public Policy Writing*, which received the W. Ross Winterowd Award in 2012. She has published widely in both the field of Women's Studies and Rhetorical Studies. Rebecca has also offered workshops and trainings across the globe on her research, writing pedagogies, and writing development. Her pedagogy seeks to connect theory with practice and all of her classes tend to offer on-the-ground case studies paired with theoretical lenses. Rebecca earned her Ph.D. in English with an emphasis on Rhetoric and Composition from The Ohio State University.

Clancy Ratliff is Friends of the Humanities/Regents Professor in the English department and Associate Dean ofthe College of Liberal Arts at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Her research and teaching interests are infeminist rhetorics, environmental rhetorics, writing program administration, and copyright and authorship. Shehas published research in *Women's Studies Quarterly, Kairos, Pedagogy*, and other journals and edited collections. She is involved with several community advocacy organizations, including Sierra Club Delta Chapter, Move the Mindset, Citizens Climate Lobby, Acadiana Regional Coalition on Homelessness and Housing, and LouisianaAssociation of Sports, Outdoor Adventure, and Recreation (LASOAR).

assigned to the journal as well as DOIs assigned to each article. We're pleased to have made some progressive changes to submission guidelines, like including image descriptions in the captions under images (including cover images of issues), which is preferable to alt-text from an accessibility standpoint. Also, we adopted a Creative Commons license for *Peitho*, which copyright and open access scholars nickname "CC-BY," or attribution only. That means the authors retain the copyright to their work, but they grant *Peitho* the right to publish it (and it cannot be de-published). Other people are free to make copies of articles, distribute them, and to create derivative works such as audio recordings, as long as they give credit to the author. We have sometimes received inquiries about republishing a *Peitho* article in an edited collection, and our Creative Commons license grants this permission in advance. And we're happy to now participate in the Best of the Journals in Rhetoric & Composition Series from Parlor Press, allowing us and future editorial teams to nominate two articles per volume year to be considered for selection in a future *Best of the Journals* collection.

I took on the co-editorship at *Peitho* because I believed that *Peitho* was poised to address the deep cultural tensions that exist within the US and the complex transglobal relations that make feminist work necessary. At the time, in the US, we were (and still are) experiencing blatant and deadly racism at the hands of those in power, which had fueled activist commitments and social justice movements like Black Lives Matter and MeToo. Yet, in broadening outside of the US, we were emerging from a global pandemic that had laid bare the deep racial, gendered, and geopolitical inequalities that were more hidden/not at the public forefront before March of 2020. Beyond the pandemic, we were seeing the continued punishment and inhuman treatment of migrants as they sought to escape prosecution—Muslims in China, children at the US-Mexico border, Yemini and Syrians scattered throughout the Middle East and Europe (and other places), to name a few. Likewise, scholars and activist were actively naming the structures of white supremacy and imperialism that imbue all aspects of US and global culture. Following scholars such a Darrel Wanzer- Serrano, Lisa Flores, Lisa B. Y. Calvente, Bernadette Marie Calafell, and Karma R. Chávez, as an editor I sought to poise the journal so that it could begin to examine critically the field of feminist rhetorical studies' theoretical underpinnings, commitments, methods, and practices to account for its own raced, gendered, and ethnocentric focus. As an editor, in addition to displaying new work in already established areas, I wanted to draw the *Peitho* readership's attention to new approaches in the field that address these sorts of structures of power. Thus, one of the main goals I had was to expand the journal away from its US-centric focus and methods. Part of doing this, I knew meant developing editorial practices that were obviously inclusive, anti-racist, and open to publishing perspectives and scholarship from outside of the US. In fact, having the journal indexed, I knew, would help authors from outside of the US to be able to point to the necessary metrics needed in their countries so that our journal would count toward promotions. But it also meant seeking out and publishing essays that offered new methods, perspectives, and writing styles than our field may have come to expect.

I curated this issue, my final issue as an editor of *Peitho,* to tangibly demonstrate the culmination of these goals through drawing the readerships' attention to the co-workings of critical race and transnational feminist theory--two areas of scholarship that are poised to address our recent and current political moment.

Several of the essays in this issue were proposed to Peitho by Aja Martinez. As she edited her own special issue on Critical Race Theory, she noted a cluster of essays with a transnational feminist bent. Martinez added that germinal transnational feminist scholar, Chandra Mohanty, was willing to contribute a forward to the essays. I excitedly suggested that the authors submit their manuscripts for review and decided to build my final issue around these essays, adding a few more essays that were also addressing race and transnational feminism. A special thanks is due to Aja Martinez, who worked with these authors in the earlier stages of their projects.

That was almost two years ago. The COVID pandemic was waning, people had energy and things to say. To say the least, the political climate was different from what it is today. Most of these essays were written well in advance of or on the heels of the October 7, 2023 reinvigoration of the violence between Palestinians and Israelis. Pro-Palestinian students had not yet been arrested; Donald Trump had not been re-elected; freedom of speech still had protections; the US government wasn't actively attaching its own citizens.

Peitho is an open access journal. As a scholar, especially one who has sought to share scholarship with and learn from and alongside my international colleagues, I am dedicated to open access scholarship. Yet, in the past six months, the political climate has shifted so much so that scholars fear retaliation for their speech acts, especially international scholars who write and reside in the US. In the last few months, there have been several high-profile arrests of international scholars. The abduction of the Tufts student, Rümeysa Ozturk, by ICE agents is an especially chilling example. Videos show her walking in broad daylight home to her apartment in an urban area of Boston when a swarm of black clad people with faces covered by masks, swooped in, grabbed her, and forced her into an unmarked car. Ozturk was sent out of the region to Louisiana where she was held in an ICE detention facility for over six weeks. Although Ozturk was accused of supporting Hamas, which the federal government has deemed a terrorist group there is no evidence that Ozturk has supported Hamas. Ozturk co-wrote on opt-ed in the Tuft's student newspaper in support of Palestinians but in that in that article did not claim support for Hamas. While the thin reasons for her arrest are alarming enough, the fact that a woman of color just walking down the street can be taken… kidnapped… and put into a car is terrifying. That people can be removed from their community without due process is a sign of fascism.

It is because of cases like this and the unfolding political climate that is threating democracy, freedom of speech and movement, and that is actively encouraging violence against immigrants, that scholars have become afraid of speaking out—even US citizens. At my own institution, my administration suggested that *all* faculty "assess their risks and tolerances for being detained" when crossing back into the US after international travel for work. Another dear friend and colleague was terribly doxxed recently due to her political views spoken at her university's graduation. In fact, this issue was supposed to be bigger, to include more voices, but some scholars pulled out of the issue for fear of retaliation.

What we are seeing is an expansion of organized and systematic nation-state violence against non-cit-

izen populations in an attempt to consolidate the authority of the nation-state by displaying its ability to incarcerate, deport, or otherwise dispose of so called non-desired, non-citizens. Feminist and critical race scholar, Grace Hong has used the term "existentially surplus," to describe groups of people who have become rhetorically coded as criminal through narratives, tropes, and metaphors. Such narratives that code surplus populations aid in brewing disdain for and disregard of the humanity of entire groups (Hong 72-73). Several feminist rhetorical scholars have been tracing the slow rhetorical moves to create "existentially surplus" populations (see Ore, Wingard, and Flores, to name just a few) and now we are seeing the extreme material effects of such long-standing narratives in the form of abducting immigrants off the street and even in courts at asylum and immigration hearings.

As Mohanty's statement that frames this issue asks,

> "At a time in history when we are faced with an authoritarian, misogynist, racist, imperial regime that has actively dismantled higher education in the USA, what does it mean to stand as an academic witness against the consolidation of white supremacy, of imperial regimes, of the normalization of gender, race, caste and class violence, of religious fundamentalisms and climate disasters, economic dispossession and the carceral state within and beyond the walls of the academy?"

Mohanty's questions is extremely important for feminist rhetorical scholars because not only do we have the tools to witness and practice rhetorical listening, but we also have the ability to rhetorically analyze and connect rhetorical acts to materials realities. What transnational feminist rhetorical scholars can add is an attention to how what is happening in the US is in no way isolated from the histories of fascism globally or disconnected to other unfolding forms of violence in other parts of the world including Gaza.

Much like in Mohanty's earlier work, the essay in this issue demonstrate how we can be attentive to local, situated, and embodied rhetorics of everyday life at the same time as scholars and teachers "consider the local in/of the global and vice versa" ("Under Western Eyes Revisited") .Mohanty's call for an analysis of local and transnational power as it intersects with gender, race, class, caste, and other social categories was taken up by a first generation of transnational feminists rhetorical scholars almost two decades ago (see Schell, Hesford, Dingo, Reidner, Wingard, Richards, Queen, among others). An analysis of scaled, multifaceted power, these early transnational feminist rhetorical scholars argue, is central to how rhetoric circulates and is persuasive, for understanding argument, audience, and situations, for analyzing how narratives, tropes, and metaphors circulate and are persuasive, and how rhetorics are lived and embodied in everyday life (see Dingo, Hesford, Nish, Riedner, Wingard, Schell, and Wang).

Essays in this issue of *Peitho*, which represent a new generation of transnational feminist rhetorical scholars, are grounded in analysis of networked power where rhetorical acts take place within a complex interaction between race, gender, political economic, national, and geopolitical power and contexts that intersect with what rhetors say, how audiences hear messages, and whose rhetorical acts circulate (Dingo, Dingo and Riedner). Accordingly essays in this issue track, unpack, and make visible local and lived experiences, embodied lives, speech acts, and rhetorical practices that are impacted and integrated in networked systems

of power and intersect with gender, race, and other social categories. The scholars in this issue extend this geminal work to argue for discussions of how power works rhetorically that, importantly, includes complex analysis of different scales of power. While earlier transnational feminist work tended to take more of a birds-eye view of these scales, the authors in this issue, settle deeply into the lived and embodied everyday life with an eye to the global. As their work makes so clear, looking at the local and the global, regional, national together requires analytical breadth *and* depth in order to capture specificity of local contexts in which "multiple forces—among them economic agendas, social practices, historical legacies…reinforce each other in complex situations" (Riedner 649). Beyond analysis of power itself, as this group of scholars points out, is an effort to make visible lived and embodied experiences within networked power. As a whole the authors investigate how people experience and live in local situations that are imbricated in networked power that intersects with formations of gender and race. The purpose is to make these experiences visible as a means of activism and intervention, a practice that feminist rhetorical scholars, Sweta Baniya urges. Readers see the network from a particular time and place (Jimenez), reading from the local outwards and taking into account the specificity of lives and powerful contexts in which particular people live.

For example, in Florianne Bo Jimenez essay "Speculative Linking in the Network: Rethinking Comparison in Transnational Feminist Rhetoric" makes the keen observation that "Methodologically, this makes the intellectual and ethical task of the transnational rhetorical scholar complex: to be a transnational rhetorical scholar is to know multiple places, spaces, and people *well enough* to describe links between them. The responsibility of the transnational rhetorical scholar, then, is conceptual breadth." Jimenez goes on to consider what transnational feminist scholars might be losing when their conceptual breadth is dependent upon one's own specific context. To combat this potential for a myopic point of view, she proposes a method of "speculative linking: a transnational method for analyzing multiple texts via a generous and ethical mode of comparison." She tests this new method by placing two different, yet networked texts in conversation with each other—a popular press how to book about balancing domestic labor and the Zine WORK IS WORK which is written by domestic workers in Hong Kong. Through this essay, she demonstrates new methods and theoretical frames that speak across difference but still recognize vectors of difference within transnational economies.

Nabila Hijazi's essay "Syrian Refugee Women Producing Counter-stories: Countering Female Fragility," also seeks to work across difference. She investigates stereotypes of Syrian women in media representations and other cultural texts contrasting the richness and complexity of their lives and offers a pedagogical approach for students to think and act across difference. In her classroom, she asks students to consider what narratives do. In doing so Hijazi moves her students through analyzes of discursive power, showing them how systemic inequalities, as she says, require an intersectional analysis where gender, race are situated in geopolitical contexts. This analysis is important for students, as she argues, because they learn to "...challenge the paternalistic frameworks that frame these women solely as victims in need of rescue by Western institutions." Hijazi's essay revolves around the experiences of Syrian refugee women "facing particular forms of discrimination and marginalization" in order to interrogate the ways in which "intersecting forms of oppres-

sion impact their lives." Through an innovative pedagogical practice whereby students interview and work with Syrian refugees, they learn to situate these women's lives "within the broader framework of global power dynamics, migration, and cultural politics," deploying a critical and intersectional approach "that recognizes the agency of Muslim refugee women, challenges reductive stereotypes, and addresses the structural inequalities that shape their lives."

In the poem "My Queer (Writing) Heart," Saurabh Anad moves from microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem that all inform each other - makes the relationship between the self and powerful systems visible in poem and narrative. The poetry and prologue invite readers to rethink access and support for queer writers in the context of institutional structures, showing how to "access to LGBT resources should not necessarily always be embedded in institutional through institutional structures (confusing repetition of "institutional") so that they are always at the whim of the institution. Such resources need to be decentralized, if required, to continue serving queer individuals in the community and not centralized within the institution to avoid defunding/underfunding the existence of such resources." Just as Anad considers the relationship between identities and systems, Abantika Dhar and Ridita Mizan's essay "Transnational Counterstories: Autoethnographies of Bangladeshi Women in USHigher Education" presents their own lived experiences as a standpoint from which they raise questions about existing power relations and inequality that turn on ethnic, national, and class differences. Reflecting on the anxiety of being NNES and teaching English to undergraduates in the Midwest, their accounts bear witness to experiences that result from different accents in the classroom. They reframe those experiences through transnational rhetorical feminist theory, as a "reflection of the inauthenticity imposed by these internalized norms."

Majed Dweik and Yunis Vara's essay "To Gather Amongst the Olive Trees: Counterstorytelling through Palestinian Feminist Survivance Rhetorics" weave between their grounded experiences of being part of the Palestinian diaspora living within the US while their extended family and friends live within occupied Gaza and the West Bank and the "infinitive temporalities" that can disrupt Western understanding Palestinian narratives. Beautifully written and emotionally charged, the essay looks at narrative's role in an ongoing genocide. They ask, "How do rhetorical studies offer particularly crucial tools to address the immediacy of ongoing, accelerated violence and genocide?" To answer this question, they offer and embody Palestinian feminist survivance tactics as a rhetorical tool to recognize how survival and resistance go hand in hand under settler colonialism. This essay challenges feminist scholars to sit simultaneously with theory and emotion coming not to conclusion but to experience the pain of genocide through the eyes and words of those who are surviving it.

Ultimately, the objective of these essays is an investment in solidarity practices. In different ways, these scholars ask: how can we build new solidarities through pedagogies, listening, reflecting, storytelling, and analyses? One means of building solidarities across boundaries is through classroom teaching that takes into consideration lived experiences by teaching rhetorical listening, storytelling, and writing counter stories that account for networked power. Along these lines, Hijazi uses a transnational feminist framework to make

visible how refugees are portrayed, but also how these hegemonic portrayals can be written. In her focus on counter-stories, that "opposes language of hegemony and oppression" Hijazi finds ways to unpack experiences and amplify voices that provide an alternative portrait. She brings this work to the classroom, working carefully with students to conduct interviews that encourage open dialogue, that encourages rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe), and that engages deeply with cultural, political, and historical contexts that shape women's experiences and voices. Similarly, Dhar and Mizan advocate for a resistant transnational feminist rhetorical practice through "transnational counterstories," wherein these counterstories serve a "rhetorical method to share our narratives based on our academic and language experiences of struggle and non-linear trajectories of knowledge-making from the perspective of transnational female graduate students in UShigher education." This focus on the complex precarity of international gendered graduate students sheds light on their often hidden and neglected experiences, and well expands dialogue on pedagogy.

Lastly, the essays are framed by transnational feminist rhetorical scholars, Belinda Walzer, Tareza Samra Graban, Jennifer Nish, and Sweta Baniya who offer forwarding thinking and expansive response to these essays. This collaboratively written response raises questions about transnational feminist rhetorical studies critical frameworks while highlighting how as a method and practice it can create solidarities and justice despite colonial, imperial, and neoliberal legacies. Ultimately, essays in this issue reinforce the necessity of recognizing and analyzing power for exploring how social actors speak and act, and for looking deeply at how identities are formed and developed. Power - in all its forms and in intersecting scales - must be contended with as the context for recognizing and building voice and agency. This analysis holds together intersectional analysis of race, class, caste, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and other axes of social differentiation. The essays demonstrate a deep investment in bringing to the surface situated voices as they highlight how and where speakers act, speak, and write from deeply particular contexts. They gesture to the rhetorical strategies such as counter-storytelling that can be employed to deeply understand local lived gendered and racialized experiences and by tracking how rhetoric is activated by actors and collectivities. Thus, the essays respond to Mohanty's call for attention to embodied rhetorics of everyday life within the context of deep and complex analysis of power.

In close, I leave this co-editorship with a slight sense of hope that scholars such as those included in this issue will help us navigate the precarious terrain of our current turbulent times. I also present this issue as an opening and call for us as feminist to grow our methods and to maintain our solidarities even as we will most certainly be challenged.

In solidarity,

Rebecca

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Articles and Poems

My Queer (Writing) Heart

Saurabh Anand

Abstract: "My Queer (Writing) Heart" is a poetic autoethnographic expression that maps the journeys of a queer South Asian educator navigating US academia, especially in the writing programs, where queerness in teaching and administrative staff is both a possibility but also seen as a burden by its various stakeholders. Using a bus as a metaphor for higher education, this piece depicts bare the emotional labor, rhetorical erasure, and pedagogical resilience that transnational queer English composition teachers and writing center tutors often endure as queer rhetorics within US Education remain under siege.

Tags: writing center, writing program, transnational feminism, queerness, LGBTIQ+, anglophone queer poem, creative writing

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Some crossed,

some crossed by to catch others.

Many stood on the curb, too close,

In, out. In, out. –

Most rode until their destinations.

A few couldn't be careless enough.

In Out, in Out. –

Each time, an overheated pain engulfs.

A sense of breakdown – Tss! Tss!

Repair status: more Ins, less Outs.

Yet, on constant crash protector duty,

dodging danger zones of others, for others, until kaput,

not wondering how to secure own loose belts and not get hurt,

especially when unloading is unorderly. Out, out, out. Tss! Tss! Tss –

Saurabh Anand is a Ph.D. candidate in Rhetoric and Composition Studies housed in the English Department and serves as the assistant director of the University of Georgia's writing center. His research in the writing center focuses on his sexuality and multilingualism as a global anglophone writer from India. His research interests include transnational writing center studies, non-Western rhetoric, (counter)storytelling, creative writing, and autoethnography.

They did them. Mine will do him.
Smile, protecting them selflessly,
ready to bet itself without a pledge
or dime. Like a free ride, no promises.

Adopting their past cycles and blades as my own.
Survive the known pain of being left every single time. Would there
be a day it will not get robbed? Not mishandled, misused, and missed to be yearned?

Prologue

While growing up in India as a South Asian queer person, I used to follow American politics and academia from a distance. Watching the public electing queer teachers such as Mark Allan Takano to the US Senate, the declaration of June as pride month, or appointing Randy Berry as the US first LGBT representative for the Human Rights of LGBTI+ Persons at United Nations, I used to think: *I want to go to America and live my life as me.* It appeared relatively easier to be a queer person in America as the US society seemed sensitive, and education appeared liberal. However, my bubble burst soon after I moved to the US as an academic. I say burst bubble because the possibility of being a Queer[1] and the trajectories of Queer imagination in my work and field of Rhetoric and Composition Studies, and others, were not always just there, nor they did not mushroom sporadically; it took years and decades of blood, sweat, and queerism. It took me a while to understand educational politics and how queer writing teachers like me understand and navigate US academia, and make sense of what Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes mean by how to "juxtapose and improvise to enact and embody both the possibility of speaking queerly to composition and the impossibility of composing queerness." (177). My poem is the autoethnographic roving of my queer experiences as an early-career rhetorician, writing teacher, and assistant writing center director. My poem invites readers to peek into my so-far queer teacher/tutor journey and interactions in the US academia at the micro, meso, and macro levels. I use the metaphor of the bus as a container for the US higher education system, where a Queer and/or Queer teacher/tutors travel alone or with passengers (colleagues and students) like them.

Microsystem: The first two stanzas provide readers recollections of interactions in my micro circle: teaching first-year composition and tutoring/administrating at the Writing Center. In my writing classrooms and writing center tutoring sessions, my student-writers/tutees, often lacked a certain level of attention and labor to analyze what is going on in a rhetorical situation queerly due to heterosexist influences through educational policies and laws. Hence, they inadvertently become complicit in the problem and rhetoric of the disordered and normative educational US contexts. The interaction above was one of the first few indications of my bubble-bursting experiences that I mentioned at the beginning of this prologue. Such interactions began managing my expectations of the academic circles I have been operating within. The current hypervigilance of queer lives and perspectives in broader education (Kosciw et al.) and significantly higher education (Denny et al.; Greenfield) are some of recent examples. In my poem, I have attempted to show such attention by quantifying things that are done to the queer selves of our students and us as teachers, such as being "*crossed*" or being totally "careless enough," AKA being callus of queer needs in education. Unfortunately, ongoing anti-homosexual/trans-imagination-oriented educational practices have **contributed** to the hostile educational practices that are slowly becoming expectations and future parameters, which should not be so.

Mesosystem: The third and fourth stanzas lead to implicit and explicit impacts on my Queer teaching and tutoring identities, based on my interactions with my field's various stakeholders, the field itself, and the

1 I use Queer as an inclusive terms that acknowledge also those don't identify as L, G, B, T, Q, I, or A, such as two spirit, pansexual, or others including LGBTIQ+.

questions and problems I often grapple with when I see queer rhetoric in danger across situations. A day-to-day example would be the constant pitching in of my queer teacher labor for my students' intellectual development, in my precarious and contingent student-teacher position which James Daniel defines as "overwork and burnout" (9). I have attempted to indicate the labor and stress of employing such labor by using phrases in my poem to reflect the feelings of being robbed, holding everything for everyone, or being used up. Such labor is a product of the pedagogical situations I have encountered during my teaching/tutoring, where some of my student writers feel clueless when I employ queer texts or artifacts. Their cluelessness terrifies me, but they should not be blamed. The real cause is US education's hegemonical and historical discourses that constantly review access to queer knowledge or literacies. Shutting down the University of Houston's LGBT resource center (Welsch) is one example of silencing spaces where pedagogical and rhetorical agency thrives, hence one's marginalized perspective within education experiences

Macrosystem: The last two stanzas are about my discontentment with my field which, according to research, is still largely anti-trans/queer, White supremacist, and racist (Banks et al.; Wallace; Webster). However, I still hope for an intellectual or broader rhetoric of queer inclusion intersecting with diversity and multiculturalism through activism. For example, "Smile, protecting them selflessly" is one of my recollections of when my queer teachers took care of my needs at the cost of theirs. I see this as activism, especially for untenured faculty members who supported my queer needs and literacies. In this despotic world where homophobia, queerphobia, transphobia, and racism exist, my queer teachers made it less dystopian for me, especially in academia and beyond, through their more involved mentorship and commitment to my success. I operate in my teaching/tutoring identities with such a background and the conscious need for more of such ongoing investments. The words/phrases in my poem such as "mishandled," "misused," and "missed to be yearned" signify my urge/hope that access to LGBT resources should not necessarily always be embedded in institutional structures, such that they are always at the whim of the institution. Such resources need to be decentralized to continue serving queer individuals in the community, rather than being centralized within institutions, to avoid the dangers of defunding or underfunding their existence. Some of these instances are currently being faced in the US educational rhetoric as one example.

I hope my experiences and thoughts will connect with readers, and give them the specifics of my teacher/tutor-being through my foregrounded experiences and experiences of others maneuvering my imaginations.

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Speculative Linking in the Network: Rethinking Comparison in Transnational Feminist Rhetoric

Florianne Jimenez

Abstract: The transnational is about a multi-sited and dynamic view of power: rather than viewing power as merely transferred between fixed places, spaces, and people, power itself is always contingent. Methodologically, this makes the intellectual and ethical task of the transnational rhetorical scholar complex. In response to this complex task, this article proposes a method of speculative linking: a transnational method for analyzing multiple texts via a generous and ethical mode of comparison. In this article, I test the method of speculative linking by placing two texts and two discursive fields in conversation with one another: Eve Rodsky's Fair Play, a book about rebalancing domestic labor in heterosexual households, and WORK IS WORK, a zine written by migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong to protest the Mandatory Live-in Policies. Informed by approaches in transnational rhetoric and comparative rhetoric, I argue that engaging with networks via speculative linking invites transnational feminist rhetoricians to create new theoretical frames that speak across, but still recognize, vectors of difference.

Tags: method, rhetorical analysis, transnational, transnational feminism, Philippines, migration, labor

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The sub/inter-discipline of transnational feminist rhetoric emerged at a moment of increasing ethnonationalism, concerns about uncritical cosmopolitanism, and a desire to push back against a white feminist co-opting of transnational figures. In their 2008 article, "Configurations of Transnationality: Locating Feminist Rhetorics," Hesford and Schell took the field of composition and rhetoric to task for "the risk of institutionalizing certain forms of resistance, romanticizing mobility and hybrid identities, and tokenizing individual writers over and above a contextual and geopolitical analysis of alternative rhetorical practices" (462). Hesford and Schell were speaking to a cultural and intellectual moment in the field that viewed global diversity as an additive stance — expanding our reading lists and canons to include non-US and non-white voices, but not disrupting the epistemologies and geographies of the discipline. Their special issue on feminist rhetorics and transnationalism drew attention to "the disciplinary defining of rhetoric and composition around U.S.-centric narratives of nation, nationalism, and citizenship, including its focus on feminist and women's rhetorics only within the borders of the United States or Western Europe, and explores its potential complicity in reproducing institutional hierarchies" (463). Since Hesford and Schell's special issue, transnational rhetoric and transnational feminist rhetoric have become dynamic and active sites of intellectual exchange with their own methods and terminologies.

Since then, the field of transnational rhetorical studies has moved beyond transnational as qualifying a *place* (i.e. scholarly and popular interest in people and places beyond North America), and towards a way

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of seeing — a lens and method that illuminates matrices of power, asymmetries, and inequalities because "we must see how sites across the globe are influenced by both the exchange of local and global all at once" (Dingo, Riedner, and Wingard 518). Fixed and bordered notions of the national and nation-state no longer suit contemporary conditions of increased global mobility and connection. Our analyses must come from an orientation that blurs distinctions between and among nations and national practices (Dingo 8), and instead account for "how various scales of power link diverse nations, regions, and people and shape them in similar and different ways" (Dingo, Riedner, and Wingard 518). If we were to proffer an object or method of analysis, transnational studies "traces how individuals build social fields across real or perceived borders to accommodate and resist difficult circumstances" and "examines how cross-border connections—kinwork, affective ties, or long-distance nationalism—occur among spaces, inclusive of the US" (Lorimer Leonard, Vieira, and Young vi-vii). The transnational is about a multi-sited and dynamic view of power: rather than viewing power as merely transferred between fixed places, spaces, and people, power itself is always contingent. Methodologically, this makes the intellectual and ethical task of the transnational rhetorical scholar complex: to be a transnational rhetorical scholar is to know multiple places, spaces, and people *well enough* to describe links between them. The responsibility of the transnational rhetorical scholar, then, is conceptual breadth.

The intellectual move away from the nation-state as a unit of analysis, and towards conceptual breadth, is not just an ethical mode — it is also a response to the contemporary neoliberal moment. Ideologically, we are surrounded by "neoliberal ideas of private property, free markets, and free trade; the idea that the state's role is to preserve a national economy; and the ideology that valuable subjects are those who are part of a normative political economic system" (Dingo, Riedner, and Wingard 519). In an era of increasingly interconnected people, combined with the strong economic and corporatist logics of everyday life, our methodological assumptions about rhetoric, such as audiences, publics, and persuasion must be rethought (Hesford and Schell 466). More crucially, the neoliberal moment calls for transnational rhetoric and transnational feminist rhetoric to account for "how transnational power relationships themselves work" and describe how "transnational relationships tie people and places together across borders" (521).

I recognize the fear and risks of conceptual and geographical breadth in our analyses, particularly from a feminist stance. In "Under Western Eyes", many years before the emergence of transnational feminist rhetorical studies, Chandra Mohanty criticized feminist writing on Third World women for "assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality. . .and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship" (19). In other words, (some) Western feminists attempting to write about subject-positions that they did not occupy displayed a lack of knowledge and self-reflexivity required to go beyond "the production of the 'Third World woman' as a singular, monolithic subject" (17). And in rhetorical studies, scholars have critiqued approaches that attempted to go beyond cultural boundaries but merely demonstrated a deficit orientation to non-Western cultures, and/or imposed Western terms and frames on non-Western speakers and situations. For instance, Scott Lyons, in "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What do American Indians Want From Writing?", points out that George Kennedy's *Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction* traces the history of rhetoric on a developmental scheme that relies on Western notions of the Other, an

oral/literate binary, and a move from animal rhetorics, to "oral" indigenous rhetorics, and concludes in Greek and Roman civilization (459). In going overly broad in our analyses, do we risk misrepresenting spaces, places, and subject-positions that are epistemologically, geographically, and culturally distant and different from us? Moreover, do we, as rhetoricians located in and supported by institutions in the Global North, risk speaking over certain perspectives? But on the underside of this question: if we go too narrow because we're afraid to speak over other, different perspectives, do we also lose, as a discipline, the opportunity for theorizing?

This article explores previous approaches to comparison in rhetorical analysis in transnational feminist rhetoric by proposing a method of speculative linking: a transnational method for analyzing multiple texts via a generous and ethical mode of comparison. In this article, I test the method of speculative linking by placing two texts and two discursive fields in conversation with one another: Eve Rodsky's *Fair Play*, a book about rebalancing domestic labor in heterosexual households, and WORK IS WORK, a zine written by migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong to protest the Mandatory Live-in Policies. Informed by approaches in transnational rhetoric and comparative rhetoric, I argue that engaging with networks via speculative linking invites transnational feminist rhetoricians to create new theoretical frames that speak across, but still recognize, vectors of difference.

Comparison as epistemology in rhetorical studies

"Comparison" as an epistemological and intellectual stance has a long history in English studies and rhetorical studies. Scholars have held comparison as method with simultaneous wariness and hope. Susan Stanford Friedman argues, "If the danger of comparing is the potential erasure of the particular and non normative, the danger of not comparing involves the suppression of the general and the theoretical" (756). In other words, the act of placing two or more somewhat similar and dissimilar objects next to or in conversation with each other creates new levels of abstract knowledge. Comparison, particularly of incommensurable things, can cross multiple, diverse identity categories while also generating information about shared ones.

In rhetorical studies, the comparative approach has also introduced new rhetorical traditions, particularly those outside of the rhetorical canon. Early instantiations of "comparative rhetoric", as a sub-discipline of rhetoric, were primarily concerned with introducing rhetorical scholars to histories of rhetoric in non-US spaces and non-English languages. These rhetorical traditions, however, were still described through and tested by Western rhetorical concepts. As exemplified by George Kennedy's *Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Comparison*, this imposing of Western rhetoric upon non-Western contexts often saw these contexts and their rhetors as developmentally backward or less "rhetorical". In later decades, comparative rhetoric would maintain its interest in histories and locales beyond the West, but would instead define national/local rhetorics on their own terms. Comparative rhetoric would also recognize globalization and interconnectedness as an exigence for reassessing our rhetorical methods. As LuMing Mao noted in 2013, "[Global discursive practices] call on us not to take at face value what is the most authentic of authentic detail or what is the most native of native knowledge" (211). In other words, similar to Hesford and Schell's

warning about our methodological assumptions, comparative rhetoric invites scholars to constantly question their cultural epistemologies: how does one *know* a cultural fact? Transnational feminist rhetorician Bo Wang thus calls on rhetoricians to exercise self-reflexivity and recognize the contingency of rhetorical meaning: to "recognize that our interpretations of […] texts are always conditioned by our own time and space" (387). In sum: the narrative of comparative rhetoric in our field is characterized by an increasing self-reflexivity and a willingness to dispense with the notion of "universal" rhetorical terms.

To "compare," in comparative rhetoric, is an intentional and purposeful action. "Comparison" is not about adjudication among multiples of which one is "better" or "truer", nor is it about placing rhetors, traditions, and contexts in agonistic relations. Mao, Wang, Wu, Lyon, and other key figures in comparative rhetoric insist that "the trope of comparison aims to cultivate a mode of thinking that moves away from divides and binaries abstracted from context and promotes nuanced analysis and discursive open-endedness" (240). In this vein, *ethical* comparison is about placing texts and rhetors in productive and generous conversation, with the hope of generating knowledge beyond what Friedman calls "the infinite regress of things" (756). As a method, "speculative linking" in the analytic of the network is informed by comparative epistemology. In revisiting the notion of the network via speculative linking, I strive for a *both/and* approach in transnational feminist rhetoric: to have *both* conceptual breadth *and* maintain distinctions between identities, while still being open to the possibility of contextual enmeshment and entanglement.

Speculative linking and the network as method

Rebecca Dingo, in *Networking Arguments*, develops an analytic that captures the conceptual breadth that was the ambition of transnational rhetorical studies. Enter the analytic of the *network*, which "not only examines rhetorical acts as they relate to identity categories or historical moments but also engages how complex networks of relationships affect rhetorical meaning" (14). In other words, it is no longer sufficient to think of rhetoric as occasion-bound, nation-bound, or even bound to the individual rhetor — transnational feminist rhetoricians must consider "how arguments are transnationally networked and how neoliberal economics and neocolonial power relationships are often exigencies for particular arguments and representations of women, their needs, and their place in the global economy" (15-16). The natural implication of a *networked* stance toward rhetoric is the ability to study *circulation*: how texts are affected by motion, and also affect the people, ideas, and capital implicated in their motion. It also implies the ability to study power: its concentration along some nodes and limitation along others, and how it structures relations on various scales. In Dingo's specific analytical case — policy arguments — networking as a method "expose[s] how domestic and international policies are transnationally and rhetorically linked through complex neoliberal and gendered ideologies and how the commonplace terms that circulate within these policies are dependent upon each other" (19). The network's breadth, or should I say spread, is thus meant to demonstrate, in concrete terms, unexpected or unarticulated relations between women.

The analytic of the network and its connotation of multiple nodes makes a generous assumption of the transnational feminist rhetorician using it: that the transnational feminist rhetorician knows *enough* about multiple sites in order to describe and articulate historical, ideological, and political links between them. Another implication of the network is that its notion of "links" and "nodes" that it conveys may be too literal and material, and thus limiting the scope of arguments that our subfield can make. When talking about the rhetorical bed from which the network emerged — analyses of World Bank and IMF policies — the need to demonstrate historical and material relations makes sense. But since the range of rhetorical texts our subfield pursues is wide, perhaps the *network* and *links* must be refigured in some way. In other words: when we limit our network thinking to demonstrating pre-given, traditional, supranational institutional linkages (e.g. historical encounters, trade relations, aid relations, colonization), do we lose opportunities for "decolonization, anticapitalist critique, and solidarity" (Mohanty 3)?

I also wonder about the epistemological underpinnings of the network as gaze/analytic, and whether or not it represents a white, Western, Eurocentric epistemology. Unfortunately, pursuit of that question, which requires tracing transnational feminist rhetoric's epistemological assumptions and comparing them to white-identified epistemologies, is outside the scope of this article (and would far exceed its word limits). However, I return to the visuality of the network as a metaphor: if the transnational as networked is a gaze, whose eye is doing the gazing? And whose eyes *can* have a gaze that commands such breadth? The orientations that have always been seen as "neutral", "generalizable" in the field of rhetorical studies are also the same orientations that transnational feminist rhetoric aims to disrupt. Perhaps there is value in articulating the networked, as well as our other analytical methods, as arguing *from* specific, embodied places and times.

"Speculative linking", then, is not about placing random texts in conversation with one another and then finding order in the randomness. Rather, it is about an intellectual orientation that links texts with aporia, absence, and potential affinity. To put it in plainer terms: speculative linking acknowledges that, in an interconnected and heterogeneous communicative landscape, we all could be talking across difference, space, and time and finding more similarity than not. In the networked readings I explore in the next section, I place two texts about labor in comparison with one another to see if a productive transnational conversation about labor politics is possible, even as these texts speak from completely different times, spaces, and subject-positions.

A networked, speculatively linked reading of *Fair Play* and *WORK IS WORK*

A vast gulf divides *Fair Play* and *WORK IS WORK*: the two texts could not be more different in terms of circulation, audience, exigence, purpose, and material composition. *Fair Play*, a New York Times bestselling book, emerged from former attorney Eve Rodsky's frustrations with the imbalance of domestic labor in her marriage. She writes, "…I was still shouldering two-thirds of the work required to run a home and raise a family, a statistic I wasn't aware of at the time but was undeniably living. I was still the she-fault parent charged with doing it all…" (12-13). Rodsky acknowledges that this is not just her problem, nor is it a new

one: "Since women began writing about this in the 1940s, we haven't made enough progress in sharing the burden with our partners or finding an answer to this problem that men could buy into. Same sh*t, different decade" (12). As Rodsky polls her friends on their marriages, fumes at her husband, and continues working both in and out of the home, she realizes that she needs a structured, concrete solution. Enter her *Fair Play* deck: "a figurative game played with your partner, with four easy-to-follow rules to be applied sequentially, along with 100 playing "cards" to represent all of the invisible tasks that go into running a home" (21). The game, she says, was inspired by the corporate strategies and management solutions that she witnessed and used in her work as a lawyer and manager to inspire organizational change. The book and the game have spawned a documentary (backed by Reese Witherspoon's *Hello Sunshine* production company), a social media movement, a podcast, and a "policy institute" that aims to "raise public awareness of the need for 'care justice', which includes but is not limited to raising awareness of the undervaluation of care work, the lack of affordable care, and the importance of care for the health and well-being of the general public" (Fair Play Policy Institute). The momentum (and profitability) of *Fair Play* is also sustained by the "CareForce", a collective of advocates, funders, policymakers, researchers, and storytellers engaged in care advocacy, and "Fair Play facilitators", professionals who are certified in using Rodsky's game in coaching, therapy, and/or counseling. Clearly, *Fair Play* has demonstrated circulation and impact across media: though its approach to household inequity seems suspect, its principles and suggested approach seem to resonate with a wide audience.

In contrast to the mythical rise of Rodsky and her *Fair Play* text, *WORK IS WORK*, a zine produced by migrant domestic workers and advocates, has more modest beginnings. Produced by the Mission for Migrant Workers of St. John's Cathedral in Hong Kong in 2015, the zine is written entirely by women migrant domestic workers (MDWs) from the Philippines and Indonesia who participated in seminars and workshops on zine-making and advocacy sponsored by the Mission. The exigence for the zine-making workshops was Hong Kong's Mandatory Live-in Policy. Enacted in 2003, the Mandatory Live-in Policy forbids foreign domestic workers from living outside their employer's residence, and requires this to be stated clearly in any employment contract. The law was ostensibly put in place to discourage foreign domestic workers from taking part-time jobs and undocumented work, thus protecting the local Hong Kong labor market. The unfortunate result of the Mandatory Live-in Policy, particularly in Hong Kong where families live in small residences, is that domestic workers who live in employers' homes are subjected to overwork and limited time off, deplorable and unsuitable living conditions, and verbal, physical, and sexual abuse (Yam 104-107).

As an organization, the Mission for Migrant Workers recognizes that intervention in Hong Kong's Mandatory Live-in Policy requires work on multiple fronts. As a result, the Mission provides different levels of assistance and advocacy for migrant domestic workers, ranging from legal clinics and open fora via their Facebook page, to conducting ethnographic and qualitative research on the experiences of migrant domestic workers. The zine, according to the Introduction by Cynthia Abdon-Tellez, was a positive experience for the women who participated in its creation. Abdon-Tellez writes, "As the project progressed, the participants were able to find their interest in simply expressing their thoughts as a person. […] As they were provided a space to express emotions, insights, and vulnerabilities in their own creative form or style, they discovered

how these would serve to empower them along the way" (4).

The pieces in *WORK IS WORK* cover a range of topics, genres, and media. Some women write first-person narratives about their paths to domestic work in Hong Kong. Others write third person profiles of other women MDWs. Other women have contributed sketches, drawings and photographs, and sometimes they combine text and visual media. The narratives express a variety of affects toward domestic work — all of the women believe in the work that they perform, but some express anger and dismay at the unjust conditions they encounter. The women describe, in detail, strict and overbearing employers, withheld wages, overwork/limited time off, and reneged contracts. Another constant theme in the women's writing is the challenge of distance from their home country and their families, coupled with the pressures and rewards of providing financially from afar.

The limited circulation of *WORK IS WORK* belies the rhetorical and literate goals that the zine has accomplished. As a material, physical production, the zine's old school, print-based nature entextualizes these women's experiences, making it more concrete and embodied than an ephemeral digital form. The zine also provided an avenue for MDWs to participate in and potentially shape the dialogue on Hong Kong's Mandatory Live-in Policy, while also offering protection to participants from retribution or backlash. The end of the zine lists names of all writing workshop participants and contributors, but most individual pieces are attributed to a pseudonym. This provides anonymous cover for women sharing specific and potentially revealing experiences, especially those that detail exploitation and abuse at the hands of employers, while also naming the women as participants in an advocacy effort.

The writer of *Fair Play* and the writers of *WORK IS WORK* could not be more different, especially in terms of racial, class, ethnic, and national identity. They have different relationships and orientations to reproductive labor: the writers of *WORK IS WORK* are paid for their reproductive labor (albeit unfairly), while Rodsky and, ostensibly, the woman served by the *Fair Play* system, participates in unpaid domestic work. In addition, the writers of *WORK IS WORK* labor in vulnerable conditions: not only do they live and work in employers' homes 24/7, they are also excluded from the Hong Kong nation-state by not having access to citizenship or permanent residency. While the female audience of *Fair Play* in the Global North are not immune from poverty, overwork, or physical or emotional abuse in the home, the working and living conditions that surround them are not stated by Rodsky to be a problem — nor are they part of the conversation at all. The rhetorical stakes in these two texts could not be more dissimilar, and it seems almost unproductive to allow them equal space in the same conversation. The complete failure of Fair Play to acknowledge any kind of racial, class, or ethnic differences in among women, in contrast with the transparency of *WORK IS WORK's* writers' subject-positions is particularly problematic: I feel ethically complicated about even mentioning or amplifying *Fair Play*. The danger of a movement like *Fair Play* is that there is zero recognition of how, historically, white women's attempts to free themselves of reproductive labor have occurred on the backs of working-class and women of color. Simply put: in making calls for, say, "more affordable care" — who would actually perform the work of care affordably? History would tell us: very likely, the women of color. The

history of care work and reproductive labor in the United States, which Rodsky claims to have researched herself, *is* intersectional. In 1985, Evelyn Nakano Glenn took Marxist-feminist analyses of women's subordination to task for overlooking the experiences of women of color. Several years later, she would expand her analysis to argue for the necessity of viewing labor stratification as simultaneously raced and gendered: to understand it as only raced, or only gendered, only continues to reify white patriarchal dominance (33-34). Over two decades later, sociologist Rhacel Salazar Parreñas extended Glenn's argument beyond the borders of the United States to argue for an "international division of reproductive labor" where "In both [migrant-] sending and receiving countries, most women have not achieved a gender-egalitarian division of household work; instead, they have used their race and/or class privilege to transfer their reproductive labor with responsibilities to less privileged women." And in rhetorical studies, Rebecca Dingo's network model argues that "feminists must consider not only a woman's local circumstance but how her circumstances *relate to* and are *informed by* supranational policies, colonial history, and even our practices here in the West (11). Approaches like Glenn's, Parreñas', Dingo's, show that if we are to continue aiming for feminist solidarity in our politics, women across national, race, and class lines must recognize their enmeshment and complicity in each other's situations.

To deploy speculative linking, I'm choosing to begin with these two texts' point of overlap. To network with speculative linking requires a willingness to place two seemingly dissimilar texts next to one another, and begin from a point of overlap. The shared core of both conversations is materiality: *How are women's material experiences affected by inequities in the distribution of reproductive labor?* To say that both of these conversations have a shared core is not to argue for their moral or ethical commensurability, especially given the specific and vulnerable context of Filipina migrant workers in Hong Kong. Despite the incommensurability of these experiences, the shared core of these conversations reminds us that labor politics under neoliberal capitalism is and should remain a central concern of transnational feminist rhetoric. A method such as speculative linking, I argue, can build conceptual bridges between the uneven distribution of reproductive labor in the home, and the long-standing acknowledgement in transnational feminism of the gendered and racialized division of labor (Glenn) and the international division of labor (Parreñas).

Reading *Fair Play*

Neoliberal ideology celebrates the enterprising, self-sufficient individual: the human who turns to (or creates) private, normative solutions, rather than to state-supported care. Foucault describes this figure as homo economicus: "homo economicus as the partner of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (226). Put another way, there is a particular set of values that an individual should hold to succeed under neoliberalism: "entrepreneurship, competition, individual choice, self-interest, and self-empowerment" (Dingo 10). Culturally, we might see these values playing out in mainstream/social media feminist movements and figures from the last two decades: examples are the exhortation to women to "lean in" at work from Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg, the celebration of the "girlboss", and the veneration of "side hustles" or "hustle culture" for women to make more

money.

The celebration of neoliberal values runs through the ethos that Rodsky crafts around the origin of Fair Play. She constantly uses corporatist vocabulary to describe the home and her place in it: in her words, she was "CEO, task manager, *and* worker bee of [her] family's never-ending to-do list" (9). The point of tension in her story that yields the Fair Play system is Rodsky's inability to reconcile her success as a corporate woman (a boss at work, who leans in) with her frustrations as a wife and mother at home. Rodsky continues building her ethos when she realizes that her identity as a corporate success outside the home is the solution: "For more than a decade, I'd consulted with hundreds of families in my professional life by providing my expertise in organizational-management strategy. […] By treating the home as our most important organization, wouldn't my household run more smoothly? *Heck, wouldn't this work for every family?*" (20). In applying corporate solutions to the domestic sphere, Rodsky further reifies neoliberalism's approach to reproductive labor: treat it as a private, individual matter — but it's up to *you* to choose and execute the most optimal solution.

Other corporatist strategies infuse the rhetoric of *Fair Play,* such as the use/adaptation of corporate-speak. Rodsky's book introduces various acronyms, which are a fetish in corporate communication, and encourages couples to discuss these terms and introduce them into their communication.

- CPE: Stands for "Conceive, Plan, and Execute", which is one cornerstone of the Fair Play system. The principle of CPE dictates that each partner must be completely in charge of all aspects of a domestic task — realizing that it has to be done, figuring out the steps required to do it, and then seeing the task through to the end. CPE, according to Rodsky, is inspired by the project manager role in many organizations, and is recognized as the most efficient approach to work (115-116).
- MSC: Stands for "Minimum Standard of Care", or the standard that a partnership holds for a functional, well-maintained household. The MSC, according to Rodsky, should be designed collaboratively by the family, and used to hold partners accountable. According to Rodsky, the MSC was inspired by a principle she learned in law school: "Any action taken by a citizen should reflect the shared values and traditions of that specific community" (148).
- RAT: Stands for "Random Assignment of a Task", or a task whose CPE or MSC is highly undefined and causes tension in the home. Rodsky claims that RATs are "one of the top reasons men resent their wives, admit to affairs, and express a desire to divorce" (236), and encourages women to stop participating in this habit of "emasculating finger-pointing" (237) by referring back to the CPE.

These acronyms and their usage in a partnership are fundamental to the Fair Play system, further reinforcing Rodsky's endorsement of corporatist strategies to a systemic problem. The seemingly small changes in communication style she encourages are a synecdoche for the Fair Play system and its corporatist ideology itself: If women would just fall in line with this approach, they can truly get ahead.

Reading *WORK IS WORK*

The question that Rodsky's text begs feminist rhetoricians to ask is: *Can neoliberal problems be addressed by neoliberal solutions?* Is Rodsky working within the system in order to disrupt it, or is she merely pushing women and their partners to make themselves more "fit" for the system? Rhetorically, Rodsky does acknowledge that she is endorsing a private solution to a public, systemic problem. On the way to creating the Fair Play system, Rodsky left a job that didn't provide her an adequate lactation space nor flexibility in her working arrangements (even when she offered to take a pay cut): thus she had no choice but to leave her dream job to become an independent consultant (8-9). While this moment does offer the opportunity for systemic critique, Rodsky is quick to almost *excuse* the toll that *any* paid work outside the home exacts on women. Rodsky claims, via her female friends, that "when you free up time spent in an office, you quickly fill it by doing more at home, including more that isn't necessarily kid-related" (9). In other words, the issue is not that capitalism has structured work to be hostile to family life: the problem is how women choose to structure their time at home.

While Rodsky's rhetoric and response to the inequities of reproductive labor is corporatist, the rhetorical response offered by the writers of *WORK IS WORK* is based in arguments on racial and class equity, the power of community, and human rights. I'm calling the rhetorical strategies that the writers of *WORK IS WORK* employ *corporeal* rhetorics: strategies of writing that place material bodies at the center. Through analysis of selections in *WORK IS WORK*, I argue that by employing corporeal rhetorics, the migrant domestic workers of *WORK IS WORK* offer viable solutions to the injustices of reproductive labor, not only in the immediate context of Hong Kong's Mandatory Live-in Policy, but under neoliberal capitalism writ large.

The body has always been a productive discursive site for feminist rhetoric and transnational feminist rhetoric. Abby Knoblauch, in 2012, defined three major categories of embodiment in the field of composition and rhetoric: *embodied language, embodied knowledge,* and *embodied rhetoric*. *Embodied rhetoric,* as defined by Knoblauch, is "a purposeful decision to include embodied knowledge and social positionalities as forms of meaning-making within a text itself" (52). Knoblauch argues that *embodied rhetoric* offers a strategy for resisting the flattening and homogenizing impulse of the academy and its writing genres: "…writers utilizing an embodied rhetoric work against what might be seen as the potential hegemony of (some) academic discourse, thereby beginning to enact [Adrienne] Rich's politics of location" (59). Following Knoblauch's lead, Ashley Canter proposes a theory of *affective rhetorical resistance* for transnational feminist rhetoric. Canter proposes that affective rhetorical resistance, or resistance performed across media in words as well as in physical bodies, is an analytic that offers rhetorical scholars "a new way of reading seeming silence, of reading bodily movement along with words, in order to see rhetorical activism" (n.p.). As rhetorical frameworks, Knoblauch's and Canter's ideas allow rhetorical scholars to account for the role of the body, both physical and textual, in rhetorical studies.

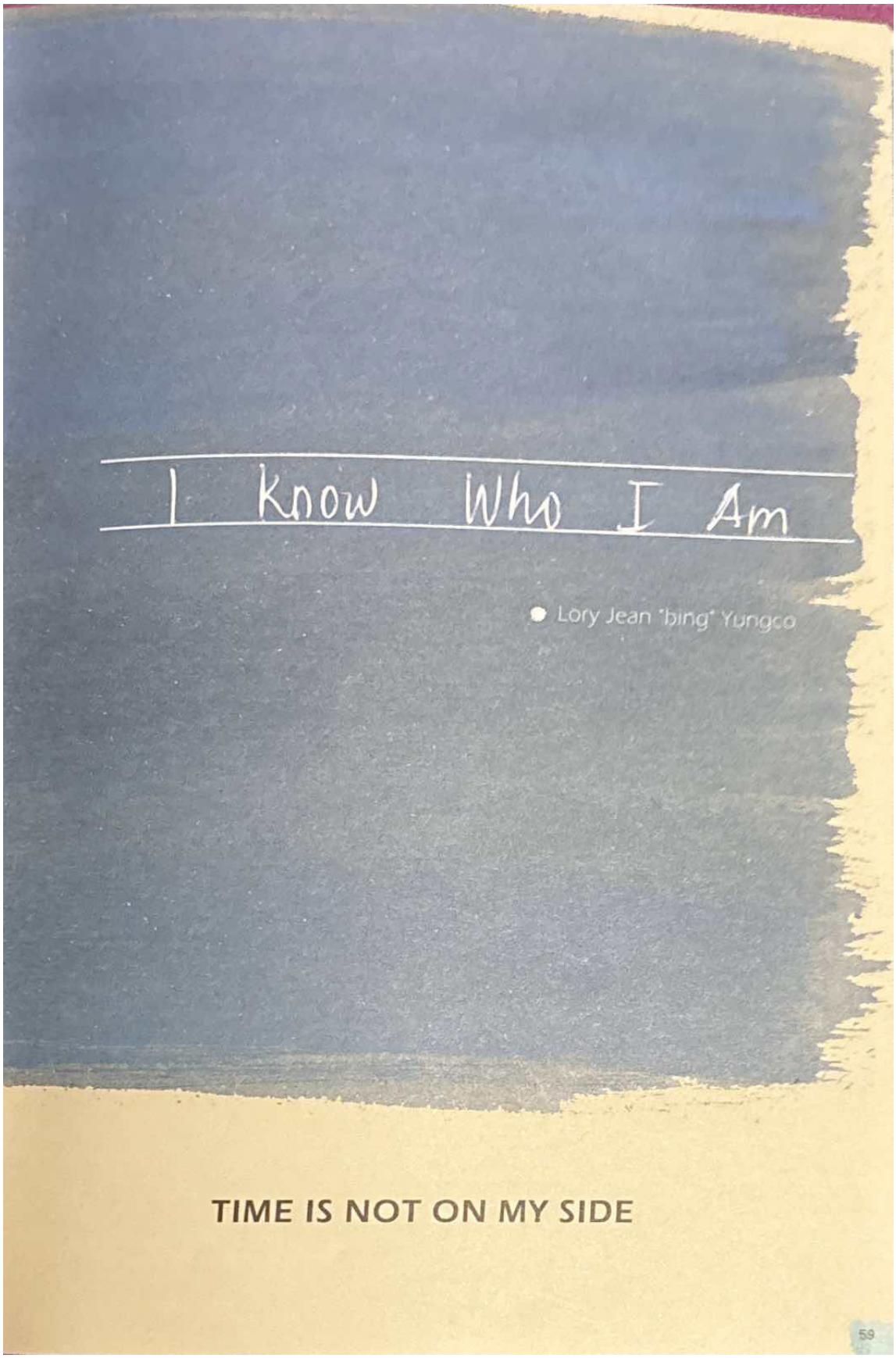
Following Knoblauch, Canter, and other rhetoricians interested in the body, I propose a theory of *corporeal rhetorics*: the strategic use of discourse across multiple modes that calls attention to the body as a site, producer, and consumer of labor. Where Knoblauch and other feminist rhetoricians emphasize the politics of location, and where Canter emphasizes the physical body's use as rhetoric in resistance, I emphasize how the body is incorporated into circuits of labor and exchange under neoliberalism. In talking about corporeality, or about the body, I'm gesturing to how neoliberalism rests upon "the formation of human capital" (Foucault 229). Simply put: neoliberalism, in encouraging entrepreneurship of the self, also creates a market for the *care* of the population. Enter industries of *reproductive labor*: what Karl Marx described as the work required to sustain human life for future generations.

Corporeal rhetorics is thus informed by how reproductive labor and the body are inextricable from one another: Performing reproductive labor, to care for the bodies of others, requires another body being taxed, expended, and (perhaps) re-sustained. On a global scale, for migrant women such as the writers of *WORK IS WORK,* this happens on two levels: these women work in foreign countries and perform reproductive labor for their employers' families, in order to earn enough to ensure the care and sustenance of their own families in the home country. Migrant domestic workers, under neoliberalism, use their bodies to work so that the bodies of others are sustained. This notion is captured through Neferti Tadiar's theory of *life-times:* "a concept for foregrounding the texture and qualities of experience and times of living otherwise absorbed within value and waste" (71). The concept is directly informed by the conditions of migrant domestic work, where "the appropriation of 'feminized' labor is inextricable from the appropriation of the worker's whole bodily being,[. . .] in the specific (gendered, racialized) context of live-in migrant domestic servants at the beck and call, or the unlimited disposal, of their employers (whose disposition over servants is not restricted in time)" (96). I find theorizing such as Tadiar's, which is directly informed by a specific experience shaped by gendered, racial, ethnic, and class marginalization, a double-edged sword. On one hand, *life-times* brings to light the totalizing power of neoliberalism over laboring bodies. On the other hand, we should also be aware that *life-times* requires careful deployment: otherwise, its radical edge, specifically its emphasis on what is at stake for women's bodies under neoliberalism, can be erased. Nonetheless, I believe that theories like Tadiar's, when applied in transnational rhetoric, can serve as conceptual bridges between compared texts and rhetors. Specifically, *life-times* offers *corporeal rhetorics* an explanatory logic for how rhetors narrate the value and waste of the body.

In *WORK IS WORK*, corporeal rhetorics emerge in participants' multimedia (written, hand-drawn, photographed) representations of their bodies at work under the Mandatory Live-in Policy. As many scholars and advocates for migrant domestic work have noted, the Mandatory Live-in Policy creates conditions that leave MDWs vulnerable to abuse and overwork. Many domestic workers live in cramped quarters, and/or sleep and rest in makeshift spaces like the feet of children's beds, a rolled-out mat in a corner in a living room, or even in bathrooms, with little assurance of privacy or quiet. In addition, despite Hong Kong laws that entitle migrant domestic workers to 24 hours' rest every week, many employers defy this rule and severely limit MDWs' time off — one writer noted that she only received Christmas, Easter, Lunar New Year,

and her birthday off. These policies confine MDWs to employers' homes and schedules, and thus immobilize them not just on a national scale, but also on an intensely local level.

A multimodal piece, "I Know Who I Am / Time is Not On My Side", represents these binds viscerally. The piece is two texts that are laid out for the reader to take in simultaneously: a poem, credited to a writer named "Bing", "I Know Who I Am", on an upper visual plane, and a question/response text, "Time is Not On My Side" on a lower visual plane. Spanning 8 pages, the two texts are an inventive dialogue on freedom and confinement.

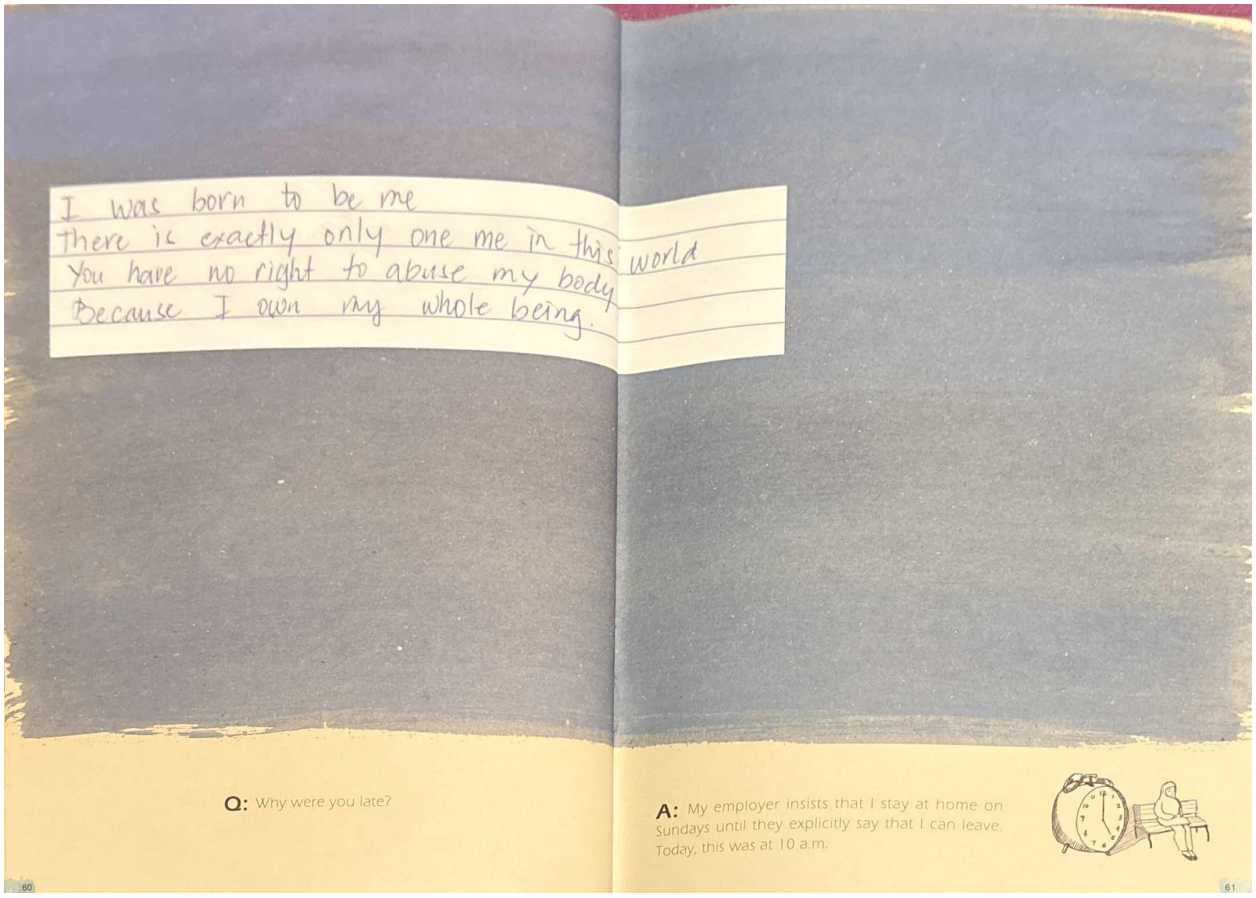


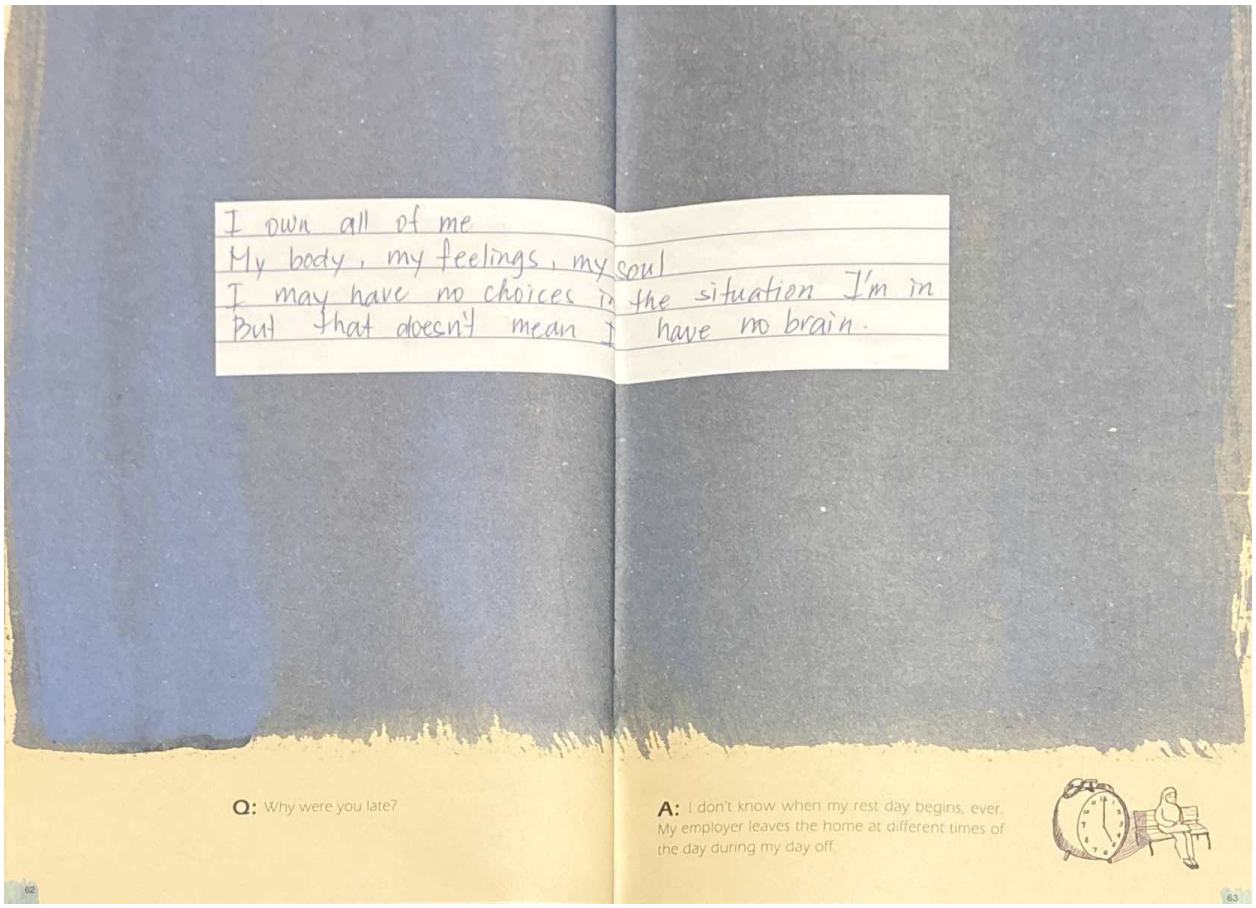
I Know Who I Am

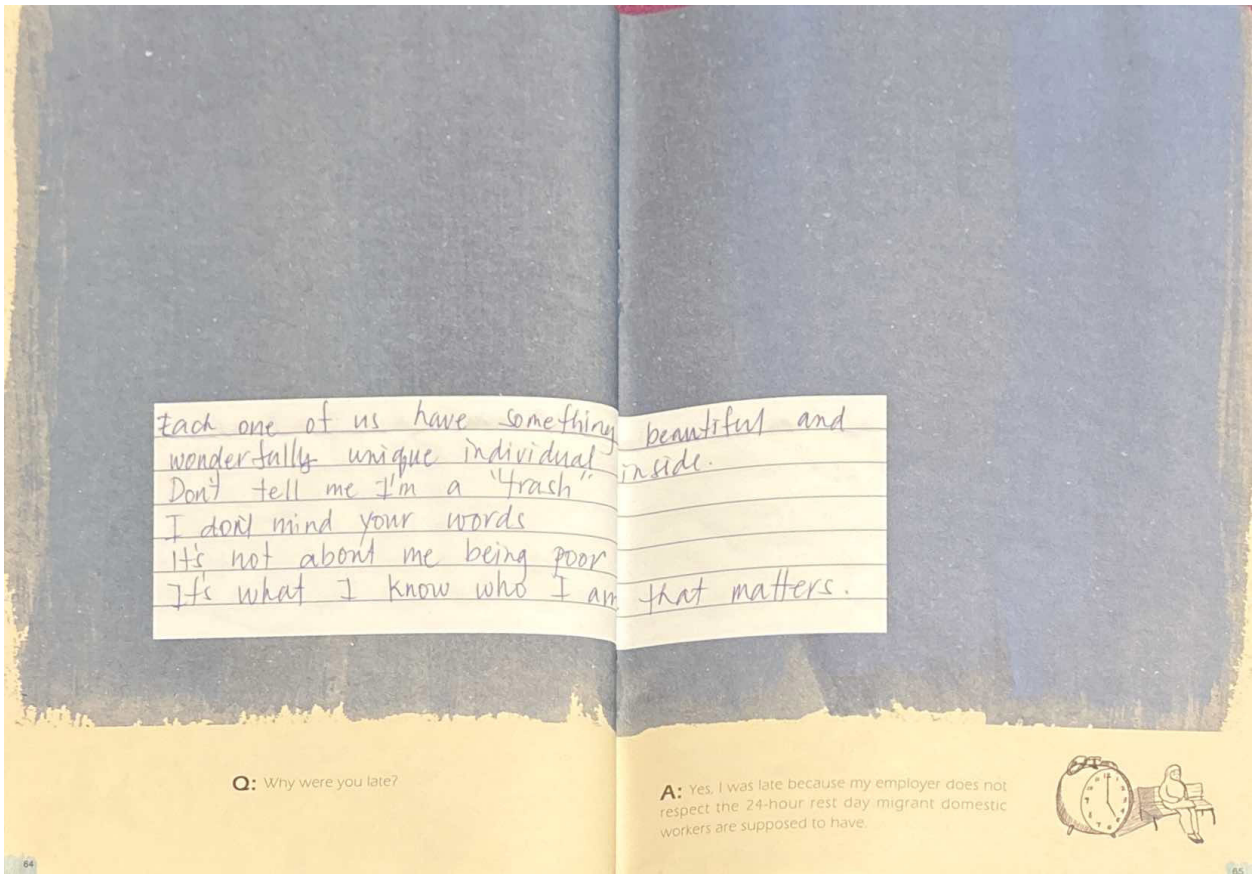
Lory Jean "bing" Yungco

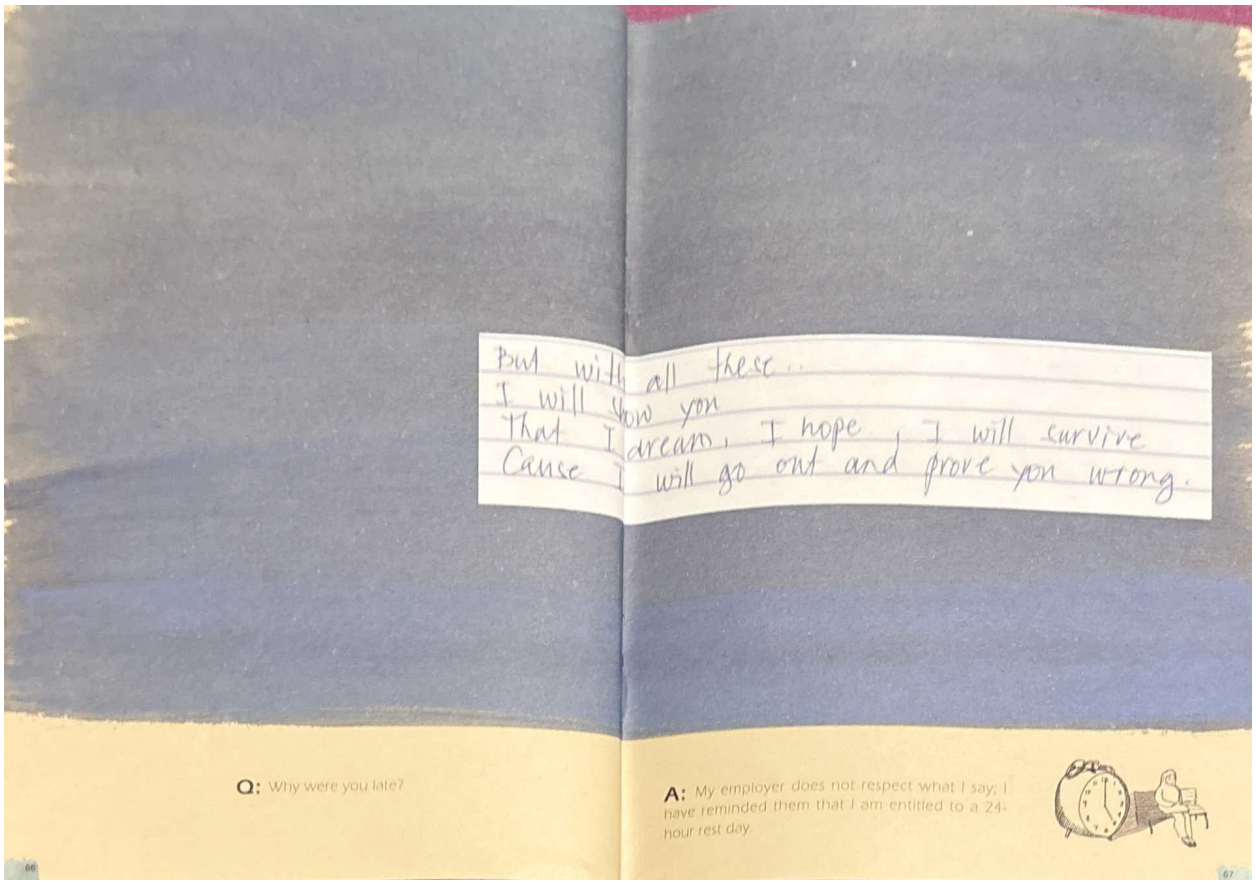
TIME IS NOT ON MY SIDE

59


I was born to be me
There is exactly only one me in this world
You have no right to abuse my body
Because I own my whole being.
Q: Why were you late?
A: My employer insists that I stay at home on Sundays until they explicitly say that I can leave. Today, this was at 10 a.m.
60
61


I own all of me
My body, my feelings, my soul
I may have no choices in the situation I'm in
But that doesn't mean I have no brain.
Q: Why were you late?
A: I don't know when my rest day begins, ever. My employer leaves the home at different times of the day during my day off.
62
63


Each one of us have something beautiful and wonderfully unique individual inside.
Don't tell me I'm a "trash"
I don't mind your words
It's not about me being poor
It's what I know who I am that matters.
Q: Why were you late?
A: Yes, I was late because my employer does not respect the 24-hour rest day migrant domestic workers are supposed to have.
64
65

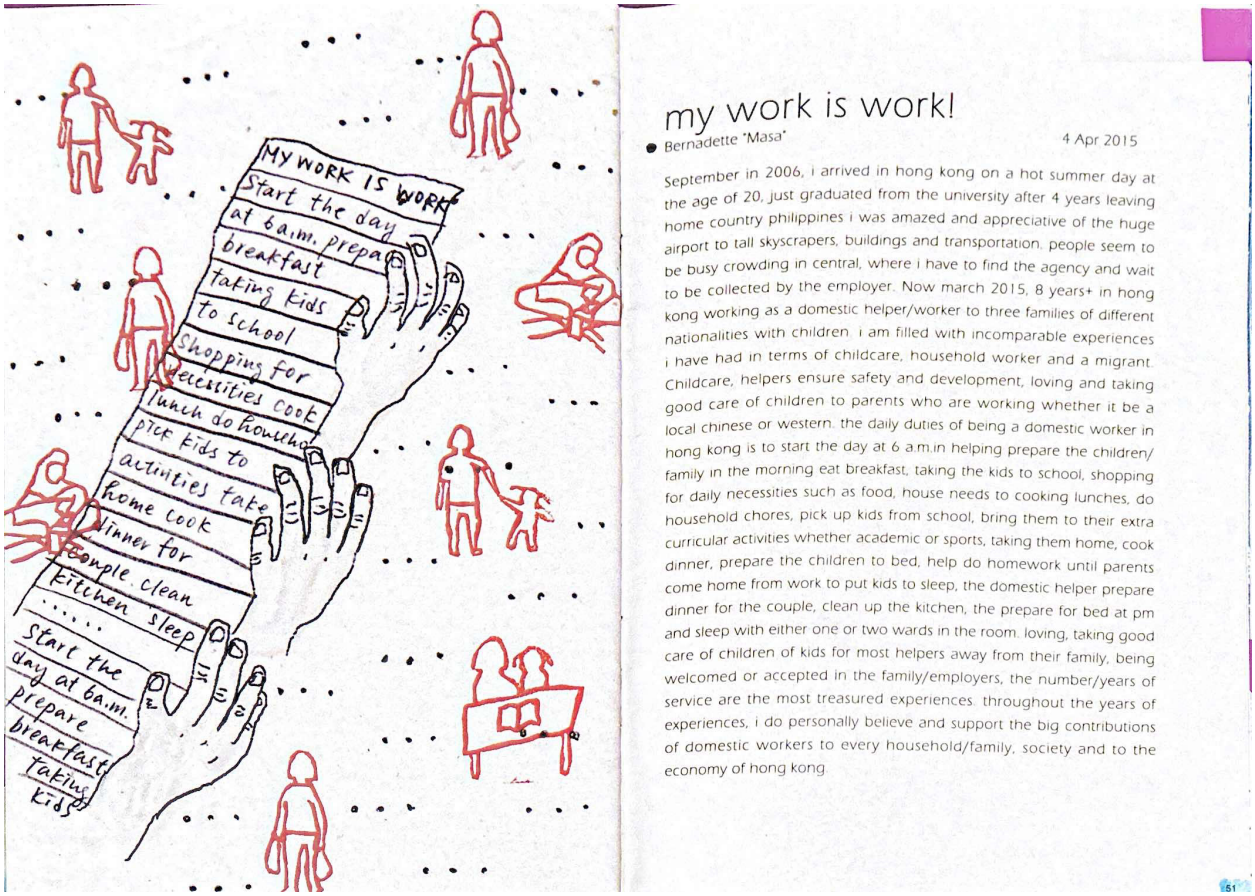

But with all these..
I will show you
That I dream, I hope, I will survive
Cause I will go out and prove you wrong.
Q: Why were you late?
A: My employer does not respect what I say; I have reminded them that I am entitled to a 24-hour rest day.
66
67

"I Know Who I Am" is a declaration of defiance. The writer speaks directly to someone who is physically and verbally abusing her by claiming agency and ownership over her whole self. Even as she hears messages that demean her, the writer refuses to submit to these messages that reduce her intelligence on account of social class. At the end of the poem, Bing claims that through knowing herself, Bing will claim a better future that her abuser cannot even apprehend or imagine. In contrast, "Time is Not on My Side" describes feeling restricted in space and time: decisions such as whether a migrant domestic worker can leave their employer's home, and when, are entirely ruled by someone else's schedule and affect. Despite national laws and international agreements that claim to safeguard domestic workers against overwork and exploitation, the employer(s) invoked in these responses still hold sway over a domestic worker's body and time.

The two texts' themes and voices are in tension with one another: "I Know Who I Am" operates as a strong declaration of human wholeness, and the writer stands with ideas of self-worth. On the other hand, "Time is Not on My Side" is firmly grounded, almost quotidian, in its capturing of the migrant domestic worker's habitus: small details such as being able to leave the home must be negotiated. By describing how the body is restricted in space and time, "I Know Who I Am / Time is Not on My Side" depicts how the body is constantly negotiating power: the migrant domestic worker is constantly navigating employers, national laws, and the employer's home, while also engaging with complicated notions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and belonging. In fact, both "concrete" material conditions and discursive identities mesh and blur to create the binds upon women: such are the conditions that reduce women to *life-times*. The visual rhetorical choices, however, impose the body of the migrant domestic worker upon the text: the reader cannot help but know that this text is *from* the body. By using photographs of handwritten text rather than typesetting the poem, and using a hand-drawn illustration as a watermark for each page, the multimodal text makes clear to readers not only the expenditure of the body involved in *writing* the poem, but also the expenditure of the body as the *exigence* of the poem too. Unlike the Fair Play system, which disembodies reproductive labor into cards, *WORK IS WORK* insists that the reader associate reproductive labor with the life-times of the migrant domestic worker body.

Both WORK IS WORK and *Fair Play* argue for visibility, albeit in very different ways and to very different ends. In *Fair Play,* Rodsky realizes that part of the issue with her partner not doing his "fair" share is that he didn't *see* her work. In her words, "You can't value what you don't see, right?" (17). Rodsky then begins making a list called "Sh*t I Do" to show to her husband, which yields some empathy, but is not the ultimate solution. In similar fashion, WORK IS WORK visually and discursively represents the work of migrant domestic work ers. For instance, one mini-essay, "my work is work!" lists all the daily duties of a domestic worker in Hong Kong who works for three families. The essay is accompanied by a hand-drawn illustration of a piece of paper enumerating all the tasks. While both texts *make labor visible*, each text's approach to and purpose for making labor is radically different. Rodsky argues, similar to her corporatist rhetorics in the earlier section, that "Visibility = Value": "I'd begun to create a comprehensive list that makes the invisible visible… and thereby, quantifiable" (18-19). In contrast, the point that the writers of WORK IS WORK are making is that "Visibility = Resistance" — that if only readers knew, and could *see*, their struggle, they might

stand in solidarity with these women. In other words: while Rodsky uses visibility to further systematize the distribution of reproductive labor, the writers of WORK IS WORK use visibility to *break* the system, because the system only benefits from notions of privacy and secrecy.



Conclusion

What I hope speculative linking, and these two readings of wildly different texts offers, is a broadened conversation that amplifies nuanced and more activist voices, and holds regressive perspectives to gentle account. Though *Fair Play* and *WORK IS WORK* are two vastly different texts, speculatively linking the two texts clarifies how, rhetorically, labor politics shapes women's material experiences. As a framework, speculative linking of texts allows us to read temporally, materially, and ideologically disparate texts, and models a broader notion of the textual archive possible in rhetorical study. My hope is that transnational feminist rhetoricians claim expanses between texts, and their incommensurability, not as a conceptual gap, but rather, a space to imagine differently, to offer new readings, and to place various women's voices into conversation.

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Transnational Counterstories: Autoethnographies of Bangladeshi Women in USHigher Education

Abantika Dhar and Ridita Mizan

Abstract: This article shares the transnational counterstories of two Bangladeshi female graduate students in UShigher education in a hybrid genre of autobiographical reflection and theoretical discussion. It also employs the theoretical perspectives of critical race theory and transnational feminism to claim the significance of the transnational counterstories related to UShigher education, from the voices of underrepresented and marginalized student populations. In this article, the authors, Abantika Dhar and Ridita Mizan, share transnational counterstories related to their developing academic identities, countering the idea of model minorities and representing a (w)holistic version of international students, their needs, struggles, as well as their prospects in higher education.

Tags: CRT, transnational counterstories, transnational feminism, USHigher Education, International Students.

Doi: doi.org/10.37514/PEI-J.2025.27.3.04

Introduction

Under the intersectionality of critical race theory (CRT), this paper utilizes counterstory as a method in a hybrid genre of autobiographical reflection and theoretical discussion to share the transnational counterstories of two female Bangladeshi graduate students/PhD graduate writing instructors in higher education. This discussion addresses themes like: balancing coursework and teaching labor, transnational writing and teaching differences, ways of knowledge making in western discourses, adapting to a new culture, self-doubt, underpayment, loneliness, survivor issues of single females in a foreign society, imposter syndrome, and invisible disability. In this paper, the transnational counterstories shared by two Bangladeshi female graduate students also incorporate transnational feminism as a theoretical viewpoint to share the underrepresented Bangladeshi transnational voices of women of color. As noted by Ghabra and Calafell, "In the racist, sexist, and imperialist US imaginary, third-world women are read as ignorant, poor, and subservient. Their stories often remain untold or filtered through hegemonic narratives of needing to be saved. Therefore, work is needed to bridge the gap between US and transnational women of color" (63). Hence, as suggested by Ghabra and Calafell, this work shares the non-hegemonic transnational counterstories of two "so-called" third-world Bangladeshi transnational women graduate students of color in UShigher education as a means

Abantika Dhar is currently pursuing her PhD in English Studies in the Department of English at Illinois State University. Her primary research interest is in the field of Applied Linguistics/TESOL, with a secondary focus in the area of Composition/Rhetoric and Writing Studies. She also works as a graduate teaching assistant/instructor, teaching both Linguistics and Writing courses in the Department of English at Illinois State University.

Ridita Mizan is a PhD student in English Studies at Illinois State University, USA, and an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh. Her research interests include transnational modernism, decolonial theory, cultural studies, and critical pedagogy. Her doctoral work examines the disciplinary identity of English Studies and explores possibilities for delinking and decolonizing the field in postcolonial and settler colonial contexts.

of empowering other marginalized and less represented women of color graduate students/academics to share their stories of struggle and survival.

This paper approaches "critical race conterstory as a rhetorical research methodology and method" inspired from *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* by Aja Y. Martinez (Martinez 2). According to Martinez, "A critical race methodology includes a range of methods such as family history, biography, autoethnography, cuentos, testimonios, and counterstory" (3). Hence, this paper uses autoethnography as a method under the methodology of critical race counterstory to share transnational counterstories based on issues related to transnational academic identities and approaches the following research question in its discussion:

- What is the significance of transnational counterstories in sharing the voices of Bangladeshi women of color in UShigher education, discussed through the theoretical perspectives of CRT and Transnational Feminism?

Author 1: Abantika Dhar

Bio/Positionality

I have always lived as a minority in the lenses of conventional social strata. I am a woman from a religious, cultural, and linguistic minority group in Bangladesh. I have learned English as a foreign language. I started my career as an English language teacher in K-12 education in Bangladesh after completing my undergraduate & graduate studies in English Language & Literature. I came to the United States in 2021 to pursue my second master's in English in the TESOL track. Currently, I am a non-native English speaker enrolled in a PhD degree in English Studies (in the areas of Applied Linguistics and Writing/Rhetorical Studies), as a transnational/international South Asian Bangladeshi graduate student. Also, I have been working as a writing instructor/graduate teaching assistant in the United States since 2021. I identify myself as a linguistic, racial, gender, and cultural minority living in the United States. Focusing on ethnicity, once, I had to fill out a survey questionnaire about racism on campus during my graduate studies in the United States. In that survey, I was required to check my ethnic group from a few options, but unfortunately, I could not find any option matching my actual ethnicity. The closest option matching my ethnicity that I could check was "Asian American," however, I am not an American. I am a South Asian international/transnational student, to be precise.

In this autoethnograpical study, I share the personal narratives/transnational counterstories from my positionality as a multiply marginalized transnational woman of color graduate student in the English departments in US higher education. The counterstories I share are focused on themes related to my own transnational academic identity. My stories revolve around the following themes: experiencing imposter syndrome after being assigned to teach writing to a predominantly native English-speaking student population, despite being a non-native English speaker (NNES) myself; difficulties navigating different writing practices as a Bangladeshi transnational graduate student in the United States; dealing with the feeling of alienation

and loneliness as a transnational minority graduate student; and the pressure of balancing coursework and teaching labor as an international graduate student/teaching assistant.

Author 2: Ridita Mizan

Bio/Positionality

I am an international graduate student, born and brought up in Bangladesh. My parents are first-generation university graduates, which provided me with certain privileges but also came with heightened expectations rooted in racialized, gendered, and ableist social norms. Because of it, my academic journey has been one of constant change and adaptation. During my undergraduate and master's studies in English at the University of Rajshahi, my department transitioned from a British academic system to one influenced by USstandards. This shift was both disorienting and thought-provoking, as it made me question the systems shaping my education. For my master's thesis, I explored these ideas by focusing on "The Politics of Identity and Representation in Postcolonial Discourse."

Later, I pursued a second master's degree in England and studied issues of identity, home, and belonging. While this experience broadened my perspectives, it also revealed how deeply colonial and neocolonial systems influence education globally. In 2021, I began my Ph.D. in the United States to further engage with the educational systems that have shaped Bangladesh's academic practices. Studying and living in the UShas been both rewarding and challenging. As a neurodivergent woman of color with other invisible disabilities, I often find myself navigating transitional spaces. This involves constantly questioning my ways of thinking, unlearning the "normals" and trying to adapt to functional ones as best as I can.[1] It has been unsettling at times but also has worked as an opportunity for personal growth and self-discovery. Through my counterstories presented in this paper, I reflect on my experiences as a Bangladeshi woman in UShigher education. My stories highlight my struggles with colonial legacies, systemic challenges, and personal growth. It is part of a larger conversation about the resilience and strength of international students navigating transnational academic spaces.

Transnational Counterstories: Developing Academic Identities

A.1 Dealing with Imposter Syndrome: Abantika Dhar

According to Mullangi and Jagsi, "Imposter syndrome is a psychological term that refers to a pattern of behavior wherein people (even those with adequate external evidence of success) doubt their abilities and have a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud" (403). When I started my second master's in the United States, I often dealt with imposter syndrome in my initial days of working as a writing instructor/Teaching Assistant (TA) in the English department. I used to have the feeling that I was not good enough to teach a

1 I am pursuing my PhD at a university which is located in the city called "Normal." I have explored the irony in an upcoming publication titled "Unlearning Normal."

majority of the native English-speaking white student population, despite being a non-native English speaker (NNES) myself. I was also conscious of my non-native English accent and, sometimes, my difficulty in understanding instantly what some of my students were saying. I often had to ask my students to repeat twice so that I could understand something they were saying, as it was my first experience interacting with North American non-academic/informal speakers of English from the Midwestern part of the United States. I had never interacted with any North American native English speaker (NES) earlier. The only kind of American English I had exposure to was via media, news channels, academic language teaching materials, or written discourse, which were quite different from the regular North American spoken English used by 18-year-old freshman college students in the Midwest. Though currently, I am a third-year doctoral student and have been teaching college students for about four years in the United States, I still feel that I am not good enough to be teaching students who are mostly native English speakers. Though I believe that the notion of the native and non-native dichotomy of English is problematic and flawed, I still use the terms in this article to analyze my experiences of being a non-native English-speaking teacher in UShigher education.

Additionally, such an experience regarding being conscious and anxious about one's own transnational NNES teaching identity is not something that I have only experienced in isolation. Other international Asian and South Asian TAs have also experienced degrading comments on their accents from students in end-of-semester course evaluation reports and on RateMyProfessors.com, which is a "commercial website designed to allow students in the US to provide anonymous feedback about instructors with the intention of allowing students to figure out who's a great professor and who's one [they] might want to avoid" (Subtirelu 38). Nicholas Close Subtirelu's study is focused on the discussion about NNES teachers often being subjected to criticism based on their accent on RateMyProfessors.com, which "can be understood as manifestations of a broader project of social exclusion operating, in part, through the ideological construction of the NNES as incomprehensible Other" (35). Correspondingly, the development of such insecurity about my own NNES accent might stem from my preconceived notion regarding the idea that NES teachers from the USA or UK would be better suited to teach any college-level writing course with a majority of white monolingual English-speaking student population, in comparison to an NNES teacher like me from Bangladesh. And such perception about NES being better English teachers than NNES can be called native speakerism. According to Brooke R. Schreiber "the image of an ideal speaker of English remains that of a White, monolingual person from the United States or the United Kingdom," regardless of their language proficiency is called native speakerism (1116). Furthermore, Su Yin Khor et al.'s study also emphasizes multilingual teacher identities and institutional ecology in the English Departments in UShigher education. One of the co-authors in this autoethnographic narrative-based study is Mijan, a Bangladeshi transnational writing educator, who came to the United States to pursue his doctoral studies. While sharing his experience of teaching First Year Writing (FYW), Mijan notes that the internalized discourse of his accented English and "the native and non-native dichotomy left an indelible print on [his] English teacher psyche," which made "the responsibility of teaching writing to the native English-speaking students...a very daunting and intimidating task" (52). In such situations, the intersectionality in CRT can be an influential approach to investigating and comprehending the effect of native speakerism on Bangladeshi transnational identities in UShigher education; one of the

most prominent tenets of CRT is the "Centrality of experiential knowledge and/or unique voices of color" (Martinez 10). The intersectionality in CRT has the potential to be an efficacious theoretical perspective to deduce how marginalized and transnational underrepresented graduate student populations, such as Bangladeshi women of color academics, survive in UShigher education. Similarly, Rebecca Dingo et al. discuss the relevancy of the transnational feminist rhetorical method as a strategy emphasizing women's educational and linguistic experiences, among others (181). Hence, the issue of native speakerism faced by transnational women of color in academia can be discussed informed by and associated with the theoretical ground of transnational feminism.

A.2 Walking Along with Imposter Syndrome: Ridita Mizan

In Fall 2021, during my first semester in USacademia, I enrolled in a seminar course on Native American literature. This subject was entirely new to me, as my previous coursework in American literature had never included Native American texts. Reflecting on this gap, I now wonder whether integrating Native American literature into American literature courses could provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of anticolonial and decolonial perspectives. However, I also recognize the risks of tokenization, reducing Indigenous peoples to a "special" category within the curriculum. As a postcolonial academic, my focus has been on exploring ways to challenge and decolonize systems that perpetuate colonial legacies. Yet, engaging with Native American literature exposed the limitations of my own understanding. My thinking has been shaped by colonial and neocolonial frameworks that define standards and values in contexts like Bangladesh, which continues to operate as a "remote colony" (Tuck & Yang 36). The seminar was a critical starting point for my journey in the U.S., helping me confront my limited knowledge of Indigenous sovereignty and land fluency (Tuck & Yang 30). It also provided a lens to examine "settler moves to innocence" and the ongoing effects of coloniality in the context of Turtle Island (Tuck & Yang 22).

Although I performed well in the initial stages of the course, I struggled with the final paper, where I attempted to analyze the ethics of the trickster in Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart*. My ideas felt scattered, and this difficulty was compounded by visible and invisible health challenges. I was unable to complete the course in the end. I initially tried to move past this experience, focusing on completing my other coursework. But it lingered, prompting me to revisit my understanding of colonialism, which I realized was shaped by a "confused mental model" (Anupam 32). In Fall 2023, I decided to enroll in additional courses in Rhetoric, focused on the themes of space, place, and decoloniality. Although these courses were not required for my degree, I still enrolled in them in order to develop a deeper understanding of colonialism. Looking back, this decision was pivotal for my pedagogical development, as it allowed me to critically examine my own assumptions and to contextualize, consolidate, and refine my understanding of decolonization (Tuck & Yang 35).

Coming from Bangladesh, my conceptual frameworks were shaped by different historical and cultural contexts. I initially tried to understand the ethics of the trickster through Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry and the idea of *partial presence*. According to Bhabha,

> It is from this area, between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess of slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence. By 'partial' I mean both 'incomplete' and 'virtual'. It is as if the very emergence of the 'colonial' is dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition *within* the authoritative discourse itself. The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace. (*Of Mimicry and Man* 415-416)

Bhabha conceptualizes mimicry as the process by which colonized subjects imitate the culture, behavior, manners, and values of the colonizing power, resulting in an imitation that makes the colonized partially present. This mimicry, characterized by ambivalence, contains elements of both resemblance and menace, reflecting a flawed colonial mimesis that disrupts colonial authority and undermines the dominance of colonial discourse (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 86). This ambivalence can be seen as an attempt to see beyond the Eastern/Western binaries and reconcile the epistemological and ontological cultural differences. I have been trying to understand this hybridity through an ethic of pluralism (Sen). The issue of Indigenous Sovereignty, however, challenged this view for me; it became conceptually impossible to imagine myself as anything more than a footnote or an asterisk who can be "a body count that [does] account for Indigenous politics, educational concerns, and epistemologies" (Tuck & Yang 23). For me, it meant not just feeling like an imposter but being structurally positioned as one. The racialization process imposed through the upward mobility agenda of the colonial-capitalist higher education system is relevant here. Macaulay, in British India proposal to create a class of individuals "Indian in blood and color but English in taste and intellect" (Macaulay, qtd. in Cutts 825). It highlights how colonial education systems are designed to produce educated subjects within local populations. This legacy persisted in Bangladesh during my student years, where educational standards and worldviews continued to reflect imperial and colonial influences. An example of this can be seen in the historical pass mark of 33% in many South Asian institutions, a legacy of the British examination system (Karim and Hossain 64). I began my undergraduate studies in 2007, the same year my department transitioned to a U.S.-based grading system, and I witnessed firsthand the confusion and adjustment challenges that followed. While under the British system an "A" grade began at 60%, the USstandard typically requires 80% for the same distinction. This stark difference in evaluative benchmarks continues to affect perceptions of academic performance and reinforces systemic inequities inherited from colonial models of education.

These ideological conditioning shaped more than my academic benchmarks; they shaped how I learned to inhabit academia itself. I had long internalized the belief that visibility required conformity and that competence was performance. As a neurodivergent woman of color, I masked my differences to survive within systems that recognized only specific kinds of merit. I initially understood Bhabha's concept of mimicry as a functional resistance strategy, but I later began to recognize it as a form of masking, a coping mechanism shaped by trauma, i.e., fawning, and an enforced proximity to the dominant ideal that rendered me legible, but never enough. Thus, my struggle to understand the ethics of the trickster reflects the broader

tension between my cultural conditioning and the frameworks I encountered. As Gonzalo Lamana notes, colonial perspectives often assume that Indigenous people "did not know that they did not know," while Indigenous thinkers reverse this narrative to expose the colonizers' ignorance (Lamana 66). Similarly, I realized that my own readings of Native trickery were limited by colonial and racialized assumptions. My understanding of mimicry, whiteness, and patriarchal norms often led me to mask my thinking in ways that aligned with external expectations rather than my own values. This realization intensified in the UScontext, where my presence, enabled by the global knowledge economy's promise of learning and mobility, positioned me by default within settler colonial logics. It became structurally impossible not to be an imposter and to experience myself as such. My readings on Indigenous sovereignty forced a reckoning as the pluralist ethics I had inherited from certain liberal postcolonial frameworks could not account for the epistemic responsibilities that come with being on stolen land as an international student. I was not just misreading the trickster; I was misreading the terms of relationality altogether. Over time, I came to understand that my experiences with imposter syndrome were not merely psychological. They reflected the inauthenticity imposed by internalized norms. I had been living as an imposter, masking my true self to conform to standards that were inconsistent with my worldview. Through further study, including critical race theory and rhetorical thinking, I began to unpack these internalized biases and see how my actions were shaped by the colonial and racialized frameworks I had absorbed. This counterstory has allowed me to document my evolving understanding of mimicry, trauma, and the terms of relationality. It has been a process of unlearning and relearning, helping me move beyond masking and internalized norms toward a more authentic way of being. My journey underscores the importance of critically examining the frameworks that shape our thinking and the need for inclusive, decolonial approaches in education.

B.1 Developing Transnational/Translingual Writing Identity: Abantika Dhar

I have learned English as a Second/Foreign language in Bangladesh. I have the experience of writing in English in different academic and transnational spaces. As a second language speaker and writer in English, my translingual writing identity is an inherent part of my writing practices across borders. English, and mostly British English, is a mandatory subject for all Bengali medium students (I was also a Bengali medium student from K-12) in Bangladesh since the beginning of their education at kindergarten levels, maybe due to the country's long history of being colonized by the British empire. I basically learned to write English in a very monolithic and standard way, using a limited number of academic genres. However, after coming to the USto pursue my graduate studies, I had to switch the variety of English I used to speak and write from British to American English. In addition, I had limited ideas about genre-based writing and the notion that even academic writing may vary based on different genres. I have also written an article based on my translingual writing identity, titled "The Transition of Writing Researcher Identities: From a Self-Conscious Second Language Writer to a More Confident Graduate Student Writer and Researcher." In Bangladesh, I mostly wrote in 5 paragraph essay formats. A few other common writing practices I followed were using common phrases at the beginning of different writing tasks and the use of high-end words (advanced English vocabulary) (see Dhar). Additionally, during my undergraduate studies in Bangladesh, I usually wrote literary papers focus-

ing on English literature. After completing my undergraduate studies, I had to prepare for IELTS in order to fulfill the English proficiency test requirement to get admitted to a USgraduate school. I moved to the USto pursue my second master's in TESOL at a midwestern university. After completing my second master's, I am now continuing my PhD at another midwestern university. However, due to a lack of genre awareness and monolithic writing practices during my undergraduate studies and for IELTS test preparation, I have struggled with my academic writing in the USMy struggle with academic writing is also because of the writing differences I had experienced in UShigher academic spaces and my previous writing practices from Bangladesh (see Dhar).

Sonya M. Alemán and Enrique Alemán Jr. suggest a racial realist viewpoint to "(re)claim the silenced histories and narratives of persons and communities of color to create content that is pedagogical and transformative" (307). Therefore, the translingual writing identities of Bangladeshi graduate students and transnational Bangladeshi women of color can be understood and analyzed to investigate the evolution of their writing practices in different transnational and academic spaces, which would also have effective pedagogical, informative, and research potentiality in the fields of both Applied Linguistics and Writing Studies from a racial realist viewpoint informed by the theory of CRT.

B.2 Designing Transnational Teaching Identity: Ridita Mizan

My research focuses on critical pedagogy and exploring possibilities of decolonizing the field in both postcolonial and settler colonial contexts. In my teaching practice as a graduate assistant, I initially approached this work with a strong belief in the power of mental decolonization as a pathway to liberation. Over time, however, I began to recognize the limitations of that earlier understanding, especially as I encountered the complexities and contradictions within the very metaphors I had relied on to frame teaching and learning across diverse cultural and colonial conditions. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang helped me see that viewing decolonization as *mental colonization* oversimplifies the issue, focusing only on internal transformation while neglecting the structural and material conditions that must also be addressed. They emphasize the importance of asking the deeper question: "What, fundamentally, is colonization?" (Tuck & Yang 20-21). Even after recognizing these limitations, I struggled to move beyond theory, as I lacked the pedagogical tools to translate these insights into practice. This disconnect between theoretical and pedagogical frameworks became especially clear when I began teaching as a graduate instructor.

In my first year of teaching, I tried to introduce decolonial perspectives by including Native American texts in my syllabus. However, I lacked a deep understanding of the settler colonial context of the U.S., which made it difficult to connect these ideas with my students' experiences. This gap, combined with my own background in the Bangladeshi education system, highlighted the challenges I faced in bridging my knowledge with the needs of my students. In Bangladesh, I completed my BA (2007) and MA (2011) in English at the University of Rajshahi, a public university where education was free of cost. However, the system relied on what Paulo Freire calls the 'banking model' of education, where students are passive recipients of knowl-

edge. This model, shaped by colonial rule and cultural traditions like the *guru-shishya* system, emphasized memorization and obedience over inquiry (Raina). Access to resources was also a significant challenge. In my city, books and scholarly materials were expensive and difficult to obtain, and internet access was limited. Students relied heavily on professors' lectures, which often served as their primary source of knowledge. Feedback and formative assessments were absent; grades were assigned after exams, and students rarely received individualized guidance. This system left little room for genuine critical thinking or personal growth. As Freire describes this approach, "In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (Freire 72). This model shaped my early education, and I didn't question it until I encountered Freire's ideas and began exploring alternative approaches.

My second master's degree in England (2016) introduced me to the idea of feedback in assessments, allowing for discussions about my progress. However, upon coming to the USA, I encountered a completely different educational landscape. The terms, concepts, and practices were unfamiliar to me, and I had to reorient myself even though I was supposedly familiar with the grading system. Edward Said writes,

> Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another. Cultural and intellectual life are usually nourished and often sustained by this circulation of ideas, and whether it takes the form of acknowledged or unconscious influence, creative borrowing, or wholesale appropriation, the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another is both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity. Having said that, however, one should go on to specify the kinds of movement that are possible, in order to ask whether by virtue of having moved from one place and time to another an idea or a theory gains or loses its strength, and whether a theory in one historical period and national culture becomes altogether different for another period or situation. (226)

This has been true for me; I was unaware of rubrics and their components, as they were not used or shared in Bangladesh or England. Terms like "assignment sheet" and "prompt" were also new to me, and I never had formal guidance for approaching reading and writing. Occasionally we were offered informal instructions, but that has been the extent to it regarding "prompts." Concepts such as ungrading, contract grading, and labor-based grading were entirely new, and I am continuing to educate myself and experiment with these approaches. I received support, guidance, and direction from my classes and the ISU Writing Program. While I was happy to find effective methods and approaches for teaching and learning, I continued to question if the classroom space within a settler colonial nation-state could be used to engage with decolonial thinking in genuine terms, rather than merely as a metaphor.

Recently, I have begun to develop a system that makes better sense to me. The Cultural Rhetorics courses that I had taken, particularly the one on space, place, and border, provided invaluable insights for decolonizing the classroom. Along with it, my graduate assistantship with the Center for Integrated Professional Development (CIPD) as part of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) team exposed me to additional conceptual and pedagogical tools. Equipped with new pedagogical tools, I began designing more

effective lesson plans and started thinking about decolonization in more specific and actionable ways. This gradually evolved into a rhetorical methodology for engaging with texts from diverse contexts. I am currently refining this approach, drawing inspiration from Aimé Césaire's Discourse on Colonialism. My aim is to foreground the effects of colonialism on both the colonized and the colonizer, and to unpack how it sustains systems of oppression and dehumanization. Through this, I hope to cultivate critical rhetorical consciousness in students and challenge dominant narratives, particularly those rooted in the myth of meritocracy. As a practitioner of English Studies from a neo/postcolonial context now teaching in a settler colonial environment, my goal is to develop a culturally sustainable pedagogical framework that resonates with both my students and myself. I envision this methodology as a scaffold for pursuing decolonization across varied educational settings

C.1 Negotiating Alienation, Anxiety & Loneliness: Abantika Dhar

I have lived my life being multiply marginalized in the transnational spaces of both Bangladesh and the United States. I am a woman from a religious/cultural/linguistic minority group in Bangladesh. Currently, I am a non-native speaker of English enrolled in a PhD program in English Studies as a South Asian international graduate student and a college writing teacher in the United States. I still had the feeling of being 'different & minority' as a Bangladeshi South Asian international graduate student and writing instructor, when I came to the United States for my master's in English. During my second master's in the U.S., most of my cohort members in the English department were white Americans. However, there were three other international graduate teaching assistants (GTA) from Iran, China, and Macedonia who had joined the department with me. Though I had a cordial relationship with all white classmates/colleagues, I was closer to the international GTAs. I used to bond with other international graduate students and GTAs over our shared struggles of adjusting to a new place and culture. However, I would often feel invisible in a room full of my white teaching cohorts, especially when they talked about something related to North American culture, food, music, movies, etc., as I did not have any prior experience or knowledge related to many of those topics. I remember taking a class as a graduate student where the teacher used to provide references to North American pop culture and/or classic movies which I had no clue about. I was often the only student in class who did not get the joke about those references, whereas the rest of the class burst into laughter. The feeling of alienation continued to be prevalent when I started my doctoral studies at another school in the Midwest. Another issue that I have dealt with as an international graduate student along with alienation is loneliness. As Wendan Li and Christopher S. Collins state, "Although international students annually contribute billions of dollars to the US economy, meaningful intercultural interaction between international students, peers, and faculty is often missing at US host campuses. Feelings of isolation, loneliness, and alienation are pervasive among international students at US campuses; these feelings can negatively impact students' ability to engage in academic and social activities" (32). Unlike a lot of people in the United States, South Asians and especially a lot of Bangladeshi people live with their parents even after they become adults in Bangladesh. I always lived with my parents until I came to the United States for my graduate studies. Hence, I would often feel lonely in a foreign land that would sometimes lead to a lack of motivation in doing rigorous academic work

expected from a doctoral level graduate student and teacher.

Accordingly, while discussing the major tenets of CRT, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic elucidate that "No person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity" (10). Different international/transnational graduate students come from diverse racial, national, historical, cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds in UShigher education. These international students struggle through various psychological and social issues while trying to adapt to a new cultural, social, and education system, which ultimately might affect their academic progress. Hence, under the intersectionality and antiessentialist approach in CRT, various psychological and social struggles of international graduate students, such as Bangladeshi women of color graduate students, should be addressed with apposite intercultural interactions and accommodations to ensure a more welcoming educational/institutional ambiance for their greater academic progression and success.

C.2 Rethinking Pedagogy through World Citizenship: Ridita Mizan

In navigating my existence as an international student within a settler colonial nation-state, the idea of world citizenship offered me a meaningful framework. It provided a way to locate myself ethically and relationally across borders, without needing to align with the elitism of cosmopolitanism, the market logic of globalization, or the individualism of neoliberalism. I approach world citizenship as a critical and relational practice rooted in interconnectedness, responsibility, and an awareness of our shared rights as beings. It allows me to foster solidarity across struggles while remaining attentive to place, history, and power. Based on this understanding and drawing from CRT and transnational feminist perspectives, I began to reorient my teaching approach toward world citizenship education. To make these themes accessible and engaging, I used interdisciplinary materials from pop culture to sports to encourage students to think critically about systems of power. Framing class activities through the lens of critical spatial awareness (Hurley), I guided students to reflect on their own positionality and the ethical implications of knowledge production. I am still refining this work, but I do think through pedagogical praxis, it is possible to promote decolonial thought and enact tangible changes within individuals' academic and professional communities. To achieve this, I am exploring alternative assessment approaches, such as incorporating experiential assignments that encourage students to engage directly with real-world issues. For example, in one project, students conducted interviews with faculty and librarians to explore research ethics and disciplinary conventions. These conversations helped them identify dominant norms in their fields and propose remediations that center on ethical and inclusive practices. In their final projects, students reimagined specific research conventions to better reflect their own values and commitments, contributing to ongoing decolonial efforts within academia.

My pedagogical approach is informed by critical race theory and transnational feminism, both of which have provided me with insights into the intersectionality of power structures and the global manifestations of coloniality. By integrating these frameworks, I aim to help students move beyond dominant global narratives and advocate for meaningful change within their communities, grounded in their own positionality and their relationship, or lack thereof, with power, privilege, and dominant discourse. Paulo Freire's work

on critical pedagogy has also played a pivotal role in shaping my thinking. I view his framework as extending beyond mental liberation, offering individuals tools to create safer spaces for themselves and others. From this perspective, I consider human and civil rights–based social justice projects necessary scaffolds for accessing the very concepts of sovereignty and decolonization. Building on these ideas from anti-racist, anti-colonial and decolonial thought, I hope to continue refining and developing pedagogical tools that meaningfully contribute to decolonial efforts to the best of my abilities.

D.1 Balancing Coursework & Teaching Labor: Abantika Dhar

As a PhD student, I needed to complete two years of coursework (9 credit hours per semester), along with teaching two sections of college writing courses for 20 hours per week as part of my graduate assistantship. Though I officially teach 20 hours per week, the teaching labor outside the actual teaching time in class is mostly over 20 hours per week. Preparing teaching lesson plans, corresponding with students outside the classroom time, grading their work, and providing them additional feedback are a few examples of teaching labor that takes a significant amount of time per week. Along with teaching, international graduate students are required to take at least 9 credit hours of course per semester. Though international graduate assistants are allowed to take 6 credit hours of course per semester, that is not a feasible option if someone wants to complete their program on time (as the department does not guarantee assistantship/funding after a certain period). International students also do not have the option to complete their PhD degrees part-time and/or work outside the campus, which eventually makes them financially vulnerable. Not maintaining a certain GPA per semester can also hamper their student status and funding resulting in a possible drop out and deportation.

In the above-mentioned circumstances, balancing between coursework and teaching labor becomes extremely difficult during the regular semester. I often spend seven days per week working both in-person and asynchronously to complete the coursework and teaching duties, leaving limited time for any personal work and socialization. Doctoral students are also expected to attend conferences and publish work to a certain extent before graduation. Again, publishing in English Studies, especially in Applied Linguistics and Writing Studies (my area of research interests), is time-consuming and rigorous at times. After balancing the coursework and teaching labor, I struggle to find the time to work on possible publications, which makes my already-existing imposter syndrome more severe.

According to Delgado and Stefancic, critical race theorists "have written parables, autobiography, and 'counterstories' and have investigated the factual background and personalities..." (46). Therefore, it can be inferred that similar counterstories and lived experiences shared by Bangladeshi women of color graduate students in UShigher academia can be utilized to comprehend various factual struggles related to balance between course and teaching labor, financial situations, funding requirements, visa status related shortcomings etc., and the effect of such issues on their academic and social development under the intersectionality of CRT.

D.2 Navigating Disability & Academic Labor: Ridita Mizan

Navigating health challenges while adapting to a different culture, managing Ph.D. coursework, and working as a graduate assistant has been an incredibly difficult journey for me. Each semester since Fall 2021 has brought at least one major health issue, compounding the complexity of my experience. I arrived in the USA in July 2021 during the global pandemic. My city was still under lockdown, and my flight had been canceled twice due to worsening COVID-19 conditions in Bangladesh. When I booked a third flight, I was desperate not to miss it, viewing it as my only chance. To avoid further lockdowns or cancellations, I traveled early, a decision that carried significant health and financial consequences. Over two weeks, I had to move my belongings to four different locations before finally reaching my destination. I tried to condense my life into two 23-kg suitcases and a 7-kg carry-on, uncertain when I might return to Bangladesh.

Flying alone across the Atlantic for 22 hours, I pulled my luggage from the belt upon arrival and felt an uneasy strain on my back. Despite being cautious due to a previous injury, the damage was done. Without immediate access to medical assistance (my student health insurance became effective three weeks after my arrival), the pain worsened from tolerable to unbearable. When my classes started on August 9, I was still determined to overcome and continue. Eventually, I was diagnosed with a spinal injury and underwent surgery in October 2021. My parents applied for visas to visit me, but as of 2024, their applications are still pending. While I began to recover from spinal issues, I continued to experience nerve pain. In spring 2022, during my second semester, I contracted COVID-19 for the second time. This brought new challenges, including language processing difficulties and trouble comprehending texts. I initially attributed these issues to stress or COVID-related brain fog. However, I later realized I was experiencing executive dysfunction, which limited my ability to follow multi-step instructions and manage tasks. The shame and guilt about falling behind made matters worse. The harder I tried to keep up, the more I struggled, until I eventually stopped and let things be as they were.

In Fall 2022, I encountered the concept of neurodiversity for the first time. While I knew about neurological conditions, I was not aware of the diversity in how brains can function. I explored the topic hoping to help my students better, but the more I read the more I realized how much of my own experiences are reflected in the narratives and how difficult it has been for me to navigate academic spaces (Nerenberg). I was officially diagnosed as neurodivergent later in 2023. All these unfolded during the time I was learning to teach in a foreign country. I know there were times I couldn't show up in the ways I wanted to, but I remained committed to the learning community as best I could. Despite the difficulty of balancing teaching and personal challenges, I found joy in interacting with the class community. For the first time, I stopped being self-conscious about my identities as my department not only allows but rather encourages discussing and practicing linguistic justice. These experiences profoundly influenced my teaching, learning, and overall academic practices. As I struggled with language processing due to initially undiagnosed invisible conditions, I learned to be patient with myself, which unexpectedly helped me to improve as a teacher as well. Reading about unconditional positive regard, ethics of care, and asset-based pedagogy helped me shift my

perspectives in the right direction (Swarra et al., Kittay, Lopez, Sarangapani). Rather than viewing challenges from a deficit perspective, I began focusing on growth and potential. My experiences have taught me not to judge students or perceive them as lacking but to recognize their unique strengths and support their growth (Dweck). I apply this same approach to life as well, embracing a growth mindset and striving to create inclusive spaces. Living alone in a foreign land while managing health challenges has been isolating, but it has also been a journey of growth and resilience. I have learned the importance of being open and transparent about my struggles. Sharing my story has allowed me to connect with others and build a narrative of hope. The role of a teacher can be isolating, but it does not have to remain that way. By sharing our struggles and supporting one another, we can foster a sense of community and understanding as we navigate life on this floating ball that we call home.

Discussions

The Emergence of Bangladeshi Transnational Counterstories under the Intersectionality of CRT

According to Delgado and Stefancic, the central emphasis of critical race theory (CRT) is to discuss race and racism, focusing on intersectionality to understand the lived experiences of racialized people. Correspondingly, drawing on the issue of comprehending the lived experiences of racialized people, Ryuko Kubota states, "focusing only on a single category creates the problem of homogenizing and essentializing the group members that belongs to that category" (717). Kubota further notes how the antiessentialist perspective in CRT centralizes intersectionality to move beyond the black-white binary and endeavors to acknowledge the ways racism works in the lives of people from diverse backgrounds, giving rise to different specialized racial theories within CRT: LatCrit, AsiaCrit, etc. (717). Moving the discussion about people from diverse ethnic groups forward, Mahmud refers to Bangladeshi Americans as one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in the United States (1). Additionally, the enrollment rate of Bangladeshi students joining edcuational institutions in the United States is increasingly rapidly. [2] UNESCO data from the 2022/23 academic year reveals that the United States hosted 13,563 Bangladeshi students, establishing Bangladesh as the thirteenth-largest source market for US education (Walker). A significant number of these Bangladeshi students enroll in the graduate level programs. Over the last ten years, the number of Bangladeshi students studying in US institutions has surged by over 300%, rising from 3,314 in 2011-2012 to 13,563 in 2022-2023. This positions Bangladesh as the seventh-largest source of graduate student enrollment in the United States worldwide (US Embassy Dhaka). Therefore, the inclusion of personal narratives of Bangladeshi students into the discussion of CRT would be an important addition, especially of those who are new to the US education system (transnational) and who might be in several vulnerable positions (underpaid, women of color, etc.).

Using personal stories and lived experiences of minority people as methodology and method to analyze hierarchical issues inherent in such marginalization as a form of empowerment can be aligned with

2 *Number of Bangladeshi Students in the United States Reaches All-Time High.* https://bd.usembassy.gov/28812/

the methodology of counterstorytelling. As stated by Martinez, "Counterstory is methodology that functions through methods that empower the minoritized through the formation of stories that disrupt the erasures embedded in standardized majoritarian methodologies" (3). Previous studies (Buenavista et al.; Liu; Kim) have particularly focused on the lived experiences of East Asian and South-East Asian people in higher education in the United States. Based on Asian American Critical Race Theory (AsiaCrit), scholars have studied different issues faced by Asian Americans in USbased institutions (e.g., Buenavista et al.). Scholars in the field of education have also used personal narratives and autoethnographies to discuss the intersection of critical race theory with issues like academic imperialism and Asian Americans in higher education (e.g.,Liu; Kim). However, there are distinct socioeconomic and cultural differences between East Asians and South Asians. Focusing on the South Asian American population, Rupam Sharan has incorporated counterstories of Asian Indian students' stereotypical representation as a "model minority" by focusing on "Asian Indian students in mainstream society and their understanding of Americanization, social inequality, diversity and multiculturism" (i). Scholars like Daniel G. Solorzano and Tara J. Yosso have also incorporated counter-storytelling as a method in their study to examine racial and gender discrimination experienced by Chicana and Chicano graduate students via the diverse framework of CRT. Hence, similar to the transnational personal narratives we share in this study, transnational counterstorytelling can be a significant method for Bangladeshi graduate students from marginalized backgrounds to share their lived experiences of struggle and resistance in higher academia.

Transnational Counterstories Connecting to Transnational Feminism

Emphasizing feminist research in rhetoric, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch's book calls for a rhetorical methodology that integrates women's "lived, embodied experiences" (22). Similarly, the transnational counterstories we share in this article revolve around our lived and embodied experiences of struggle while adjusting to the UShigher education system as Bangladeshi transnational female graduate students. According to Dingo et al., Royster and Kirsch's book also claims the need for a rhetorical approach that employs "women's experience, voices, knowledge, and language practices that are retrieved and brought into the present" (181). Dingo et al. further focus on Royster and Kirsch's call for the "transnational turn in feminist rhetorical theory" as one of the significant shifts happening in the field (181). In this regard, Royster and Kirsch also suggest feminist rhetorical scholars "analyze the many vectors—economic, political, religious, cultural, educational—that intersect with rhetorical activities and social change" (37). According to Dingo et al., by analyzing such different economic, political, religious, cultural, educational aspects, feminist rhetorical scholars can "make space for not only the inclusion of women's voices, experiences, and perspectives but also for drawing attention to the many powerful contexts (local and global) within which rhetorical practices develop" (181). In addition, Dingo et al.'s work signifies transnational feminist rhetorical scholarship as a crucial approach to representing women and other marginalized people (181). In this study, transnational counterstories serve as an appropriate rhetorical method to share our narratives based on our academic and language experiences of struggle and non-linear trajectories of knowledge-making from the perspective of transnational female graduate students in UShigher education. Based on transnational counterstories, this

study particularly engages with transnational feminist rhetoric in analyzing the academic aspects of UShigher education and developing transnational rhetorical practices. In the counterstories shared in this study, for example: Abantika Dhar discusses her experiences of comprehending and navigating her struggles related to her developing transnational academic translingual identity; and Ridita Mizan shares her experience of transnational academic practices and her knowledge-making process regarding issues like world citizenship and civic engagement. Lastly, this work is significant in representing the voices, narratives, and experiences of underrepresented Bangladeshi women of color in higher education.

Additionally, Wendy Hesford and Eileen Schell's work on feminist rhetoric and transnationalism challenges feminist narratives and women's rhetoric only "within the borders of the USor Western Europe" that might produce "institutional hierarchies" (463). Hesford and Schell further advocate the potential of "transgeographical concepts" and "transnational concepts" by centralizing narratives of transnational people from Asia and many other geographical spaces, in benefiting the field composition and rhetoric studies (463). Hesford and Schell's special issue promotes a "remapping of feminist rhetorical scholarship along transnational lines, building on transnational feminist and postcolonial work emerging both outside and inside the academy..." (466). Similar to Hesford and Schell's suggestion, the transnational counterstories shared in this article centralize transnational feminist narratives and women's rhetorics from the voices of female graduate students in academia from outside the borders of UShigher education from South Asia/Bangladesh to be specific.

Implications & Conclusion

According to Liu, "A CRT framework provides a situational context for exploring the impact of race and ethnicity on students' self-image and interactions with others, which is fundamental to better understanding Asian Americans' educational experiences" (5). In addition, "Counter-stories make the study of race so salient and dynamic because they unveil intricate racial nuances embedded in everyday life" (Gillborn; Solórzano and Yosso, qtd. in Matias 3). Transnational and international students from different parts of the world come to the United States for higher studies. These students belong to different races, ethnicities and nationalities. The framework of CRT can be used to investigate the effect of race and ethnicity and nationality on the Asian students' lived experiences in higher education by analyzing their personal narratives and transnational counterstories. However, Liu also notes that "Asian Americans should not be considered as one monolithic group, but rather their educational experiences and outcomes should be disaggregated" (10). Therefore, the educational experiences of South Asian Bangladeshi students should also be discussed with equal significance. The positionalities, lived experiences, and transnational identities of South Asian international students (who are not Americans) in the United States, especially an underrepresented graduate student population from multiply marginalized backgrounds like Bangladeshi transnational women of color, should also be emphasized from the viewpoint of transnational feminism, within the theoretical framework of the intersectionality in CRT.

Moreover, regarding transnational rhetoric, Hesford and Schell note that "A transnational rhetorical perspective, however, strives to address how rhetorical concepts are shaped by cultural, social, and economic interconnectivities and interrelations and cross-border and cross-cultural mobilizations of power, language resources, and people" (465). The transnational counterstories shared in this article also create transnational rhetoric regarding several issues and struggles transnational graduate students might face in the UShigher academia, stemming from the cross-cultural interrelations and/or differences in various aspects like power, language resources, discourses, writing conventions, etc. Additionally, Hesford and Schell mention the relevance of feminist rhetoric and transnational policies between domestic and international spaces, affecting women's lives (468-469). Likewise, this article synthesizes the theories of transnational and feminist rhetorics to discuss how cross-cultural and transnational academic systems/policies affect the academic lives of two marginalized women of color in UShigher education through our autoethnographic reflections/counterstories. Similar to this study, other underrepresented and transnational marginalized students from higher academia might also be able to produce more valuable transnational rhetoric based on their autoethnographical personal narrative/counterstories, in the hope of bringing change and individualized accommodations in dealing with important survival issues like adapting to a new academic culture, the struggles of single females in a foreign society, imposter syndrome, and invisible disability.

Furthermore, the Bangladeshi Bengali identity operates at the intersection of ethno-religious, cultural, and national dimensions, raising critical questions about the categorization and understanding of race. This complexity becomes especially salient when considered through the lens of CRT and transnational feminism, as such frameworks provide tools to examine how power, identity, and history interact to destabilize conventional racial categories. As Ranjoo Seodu Herr (2014) notes, "Transnational feminists by and large consider nation-states and nationalism as detrimental to feminist causes, whereas Third World feminists are relatively neutral to, and at times even approving of, nation-states and nationalism" (3). The Bangladeshi context underscores the need for such nuance. The Radcliffe Line, a border hastily drawn during the partition of India in 1947, exemplifies the violent reconfiguration of identities along ethno-religious and national lines. As Akhilesh Pillalamarri observes, "The basic principle underlying the border, and the decision to partition India itself, was the two-nation theory," which assumed an irreconcilable division between Hindus and Muslims. However, this framework failed to account for the complexities of identities such as Bengali Muslims, who were suddenly split between East Bengal (modern Bangladesh) and West Bengal (India).

The Bangladeshi Bengali identity provides fertile ground for research that bridges CRT and transnational feminism. Such scholarship could 1) investigate how colonial policies and the partition of Bengal institutionalized divisions within Bengali identity; 2) analyze how language and nationalism intersect to produce unique forms of identities in Bangladesh; and 3) challenge universalist approaches to race and feminism by highlighting the specificity of Bangladeshi experiences. By incorporating these perspectives, scholars can contribute to a richer understanding of how identities like Bangladeshi Bengali disrupt and expand traditional notions of race. This work aligns with Herr's call for "inclusive and democratic feminisms that accommodate diverse and multiple feminist perspectives of Third World women on the ground" (4), fostering a deeper

engagement with the complexities of identity in a globalized world.

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Syrian Refugee Women Producing Counter-stories: Countering Female Fragility

Nabila Hijazi

Abstract: This paper examines the racialized, gendered, and religiously charged discourses surrounding refugee representations, with a particular focus on Syrian Muslim refugee women. It critiques dominant narratives within mainstream media and policy that homogenize refugees, portraying them as threats, burdens, or passive victims devoid of agency. Drawing from critical race theory (CRT) and transnational feminism, the analysis reveals how systemic structures of power and oppression--rooted in colonial, racial, and gendered frameworks--continue to marginalize refugee voices, particularly those of Muslim women. The study interrogates the elemental metaphors and criminalized depictions used to "other" Middle Eastern and Muslim refugees, especially Syrian males and women, reinforcing public fear and legitimizing exclusionary policies. By advocating for counter-storytelling through writing curricula, this paper positions refugee women as complex historical agents, whose stories challenge prevailing stereotypes and offer nuanced understandings of displacement and resilience. Ultimately, it calls for a shift in writing pedagogies and public discourse to include refugee women's own narratives, resisting their persistent victimization and tokenization.

Tags: refugee (mis)representation, Muslim women, othering, media stereotypes, critical race theory (CRT), counterstorytelling, transnational feminism, Syrian refugee women, writing pedagogy, refugee agency

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Mainstream migration and refugee discourses often portray refugees in biased and reductive ways, shaped by their racial, religious, and gender identities. Scholars have examined this through the concept of "othering," which helps explain how dominant narratives construct refugees as fundamentally different and inferior. Refugees are frequently depicted as a homogeneous group lacking the skills, agency, and complexity of settled citizens. They are often described using elemental metaphors such as "flood" or "swamping," which frame them as overwhelming forces rather than individuals (Behrman; Pulitano). In contrast, host country citizens--the "Self"--are portrayed as "bewildered Westerners" caught off guard by unexpected demands for compassion or aid. This dichotomy positions the "Self" as entitled and morally upright, while casting refugees as undeserving and burdensome (Behrman; van Schaik). Such representations are not only inaccurate but also dangerous, as they erase refugee agency and perpetuate the false idea that paints refugees as a homogeneous group. Ultimately, "othering" reinforces harmful narratives, with far-reaching implications beyond mere representation.

Confronting additional layers of misrepresentation, refugees from Middle Eastern countries, and especially those who identify as Muslims, are always depicted according to a certain narrative that has been ratified and recirculated—representing them as criminal and more threatening (Shaheen). A particularly

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marginalized and misrepresented group, Syrian refugees[1] have often been depicted in ways that reinforce specific, often negative narratives that have been attached to the identities of Middle Easterners and Arabs (Shaheen). Research has shown that the portrayal of Syrian refugees in media is frequently skewed, emphasizing themes of threat, burden, and victimhood, which contribute to a narrow and distorted public perception (Aswad; Irom; Mustafa-Awad & Kirner-Ludwig). Syrian males are presented as violent, terrorists, and rapists—threats to national security, often linking them to terrorism and criminality. Noor Ghazal Aswad posits that "Syrian refugees were at times constructed as potential terrorists intent on carrying out indiscriminate acts of extreme violence to achieve religious, political, or ideological aims" (Aswad 365). Similarly, Jill Walker Rettberg and Radhika Gajjala argue that with the height of the Syrian refugee crisis and the flood of Syrian refugees into Europe, anti-immigrant discourses casted doubt on refugees and their integrity, spewing hateful, racist, and derogatory comments such as, "Won't be long before the rapes start" (Rettberg & Gajjala 179). This type of representation fosters public fear and legitimizes restrictive and discriminatory policies against refugees.

Despite global and national immigration trends of Muslims and the recent waves of refugees, specifically Syrian refugees, the long history of colonialism and racial violence, and the centrality of gender and gender-based practices to the colonial project, little attention has been given to the racialization of Muslim refugee women, particularly Syrian Muslim refugee women. While these dynamics are evident in national contexts such as the United States, this discussion focuses on the broader transnational patterns through which Muslim refugee women are marginalized and misrepresented. Thus, there is a growing need to understand the complex experiences of refugee women and the structures—both local and global—that produce conflict and undermine their post-displacement lives and the efforts refugee women undertake. Katty Alhayek emphasizes that "Syrian refugees are portrayed as a homogeneous group of powerless, victimized women and oppressive men who sell their daughters as commodities for rich Arabian men" (Alhayek 698). The simplistic and damaging stereotypes frequently employed to depict Syrian refugees overlook the unique narratives and diverse circumstances among them, thereby obscuring the intricate realities of their existence and erasing the complexities of their lives.

Critical Race Theory (CRT), a framework that examines society and culture as they relate to categorizations of race, law, and power, can be applied to address the misrepresentation of refugee Muslim women by highlighting and challenging the systemic and structural factors that contribute to their marginalization. By examining how media, politics, and social narratives depict these women, CRT can reveal the underlying biases and prejudices that shape these representations, promoting the use of counter-narratives to challenge dominant discourses. Transnational feminism complements this approach by emphasizing the need to situate these narratives within global power structures, including imperialism, capitalism, and cultural hegemony, frequently furthering the continued marginalization of refugee women. By amplifying the voices and stories of Muslim refugee women themselves, CRT and transnational feminism together provide a more nuanced

1 Following the Arab Spring and the subsequent protests and civil war, Syrians fled in massive numbers, escaping the brutal war. While Syrians sought refuge in neighboring countries, many undertook the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea to migrate to Europe (UNHCR, 2023a).

understanding of their experiences, countering the often one-dimensional portrayals in mainstream media and policy discussions. This intersectional approach highlights how systemic inequalities intersect with gender, race, and geopolitical contexts, challenging the paternalistic frameworks that characterize these women solely as victims in need of rescue by Western institutions.

Departing from the prevailing understandings of Muslim refugee women as victims, problems, and objects of rescue, I (re)consider refugee women as fluid subjects and historical actors, inquiring into their social and cultural positioning counter-story to the dominant, normalized image of refugee women lacking agency. Building from the premise of CRT and transnational feminism and in contrast to the potent images circulating in the media, through which refugees are often reduced to sheer numbers, I call attention to the way refugees, and in my case Syrian refugee women, are portrayed. I argue that refugee stories need to be heard and studied in writing classrooms, but from refugee women themselves, to stop reinforcing the victimization image that is attached to their intersectional identities. It is critical to shift the perception of refugee women from victims to valuable resources for their families and communities, while also understanding the complex experiences and structures that produce conflict and hinder their efforts. While CRT scholars perceive storytelling as rhetorical means to document, centralize, and share the voices of marginalized populations, the purpose of the counter-stories of refugee women is to oppose the language of hegemony and oppression associated with their identities. Counter-storytelling, "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (Solorzano & Yosso 26), provides a platform for voices that are often excluded from mainstream narratives, highlighting perspectives and experiences that are not commonly represented.

Transcending "the argument that Syrian refugees are terrorists [which] allows for the construction of a 'them' versus 'us' narrative" (Aswad 365), I invite their stories into the writing classroom. In this essay, I explain how I apply counter-storytelling as a powerful instrument of resistance to unpack, problematize, and fight labeling practices portraying refugee women as deficient and in need of saving. I analyze the ways in which race and gender intersect to shape the experiences of Syrian refugee women facing particular forms of discrimination and marginalization and detail the ways in which intersecting forms of oppression impact their lives. In doing so, I draw from transnational feminist approaches, which critique Western feminism for universalizing women's experiences and overlooking the specific, contextually rooted struggles of women in the Global South. Transnational feminism emphasizes the importance of context, voice, and power, helping to frame Syrian refugee women not as passive victims, but as historically and socially situated agents. I foreground my argument in counter-stories, as methodology and intervention in rhetorical and composition studies, to show how these women are active agents in (re)shaping their resettlement process, highlighting their rhetorical agency and resilience in the face of adversity. Specifically, I explain how I bring refugee women's counter-stories into the college writing classroom and invite my students to research and examine the various (counter)stories told by refugee women to dismantle the various systems of oppression that perpetuate dominant narratives that paint them as powerless, incapable, and agentless. I posit that writing classrooms and composition and rhetorical practices are means for counter-stories to expose, analyze, and

critique the racialized reality in which those experiences are contextualized, silenced, and perpetuated, and examine the lived experiences of refugees, while making those experiences the basis for social change, starting with the writing classroom.

Layers of (Mis)representation of Middle Eastern Muslim Women

Although there is significant interest in the Arab,Muslim,Middle Eastern subject, it is frequently depicted as a homogenized and racialized other (Alsultany; Narayan; Semati; Semati & Brookey). The portrayal of Middle Eastern Arab Muslim women in Western media, however, is complex and multifaceted, often marred by negative stereotypes that obscure their diverse realities; these women are often misrepresented as oppressed, subjugated, and voiceless, needing Western intervention to be "saved" (Abu-Lughod; Mohanty; Rettberg & Gajjala). This depiction enforces a sense of "otherness" and cultural superiority, overshadowing their diverse and nuanced experiences and choices. The misrepresentation of Middle Eastern Muslim women is perpetuated not only by mainstream Western media but also by Western feminism which involves several problematic dynamics that undermine the goals of inclusivity and understanding within feminist movements. Western feminism has been criticized for universalizing the experiences of women, ignoring the specificities of race, class, and geographical location. Such approaches can inadvertently reinforce colonialist attitudes by imposing Western ideals on non-Western women (Mohanty), hence perpetuating stereotypes and failing to address the specific needs and challenges faced by these women. These approaches can undermine the agency of non-Western women by suggesting that they need to be "rescued" or "empowered" according to Western standards. This perspective overlooks the existing forms of empowerment these women already possess within their own cultural and religious frameworks. Instead of validating these women in ways that align with their own goals and contexts, such approaches risk further marginalizing them by disregarding the value of their voices, lived experiences, and proposed solutions.

Transnational feminism critiques Western feminism for overlooking the diverse experiences of women across global contexts (Abu-Lughod; Mohanty). By examining the intersecting oppressions faced by Muslim refugee women, it highlights the complexities of their identities and challenges the racialization of the "other" in both the Global North and South. This perspective underscores the importance of situating these women's lives within the broader framework of global power dynamics, migration, and cultural politics. It advocates for a critical and intersectional approach that recognizes the agency of Muslim refugee women, challenges reductive stereotypes, and addresses the structural inequalities that shape their lives. This perspective seeks to build genuine solidarity and understanding across cultural and national boundaries while resisting the co-optation of feminist rhetoric for exclusionary purposes. Transnational feminism is antiracist as it aims to create a more just and equitable world for all women, challenging and transforming existing power structures both locally and globally.

Scholars of transnational feminism critique Western feminist approaches for their tendency to homogenize women in the Global South, often portraying them as passive victims rather than active agents,

thereby overlooking their agency. Inderpal Grewal challenges traditional Western feminist perspectives for their universalizing tendencies, which often overlook the diverse and intersectional realities of women shaped by varying cultural, social, and geopolitical contexts. They highlight the necessity of contextualizing feminist struggles within global power dynamics while emphasizing the interconnectedness of race, nation, and gender in the treatment of displaced populations. Similarly, in their essay, "Toward a Cogent Analysis of Power: Transnational Rhetorical Studies," Rebecca Dingo, Rachel Riedner, and Jennifer Wingard argue for a more comprehensive approach to analyzing power within rhetorical studies by adopting a transnational perspective. They critique traditional rhetorical frameworks for often being confined to localized or nation-bound contexts, which overlook the global flows of power, capital, and culture that shape rhetorical practices and discourses. The authors advocate for transnational rhetorical studies to interrogate how power operates across borders, emphasizing the interconnectedness of geopolitical, economic, and cultural forces. They examine how rhetoric both reflects and sustains global inequalities while providing tools for resistance and reimagining agency, emphasizing the need to analyze rhetoric within broader global power systems, rather than isolating it within narrowly defined national or cultural frameworks.

Wendy Hesford and Eileen Schell explore the intersections of feminist rhetoric and transnational studies, emphasizing the importance of analyzing rhetorical practices within global and cross-border contexts. They argue that feminist rhetorics must account for the complexities of transnationality, including how gender, race, class, and nation intersect to shape power dynamics and communicative practices across different geopolitical spaces. They highlight how transnational feminist rhetorics can reveal the ways in which rhetorical practices both sustain and resist systems of domination, such as imperialism and patriarchy. By situating feminist rhetorics within transnational contexts, Hesford and Schell advocate for more nuanced and intersectional analyses that reflect the lived realities of women and marginalized communities worldwide. In a similar vein, Rachel Riedner critically examines how the rhetoric of globalization constructs narratives about women's autonomy and freedom by often framing women, particularly from the Global South, as victims of cultural patriarchy and negligent nation-states in need of rescue by Western institutions. Riedner critiques how neoliberal and nationalist discourses often exploit or erase the contributions of these women, framing them as victims or symbols rather than active agents. She argues for a feminist rhetorical approach that amplifies their voices and examines the ways they navigate and resist transnational structures of oppression. Such representations are circulated through powerful platforms, reinforcing the idea that Western agents and policies are benevolent forces liberating oppressed women. These acts—though they may appear to promote civic engagement—ultimately reinforce and contribute to the systemic structures that uphold colonial power (Nish). This rhetoric presents first-world interventions as the solution to third-world problems while ignoring the structural and systemic causes of inequality, such as global capitalism and imperialism. These narratives often marginalize the agency of the women they claim to empower and serve as tools to reinforce global systems of economic and political domination.

In "Gender Violence as Global Phenomenon: Refugees, Genital Surgeries, and the Neocolonial Projects of the United States," Sara McKinnon critically examines how gender-based violence is framed as

a global issue, exposing the neocolonial lens through which Western powers, particularly the United States, memorialize cultural dominance. She argues that narratives surrounding gender violence—such as the experiences of refugees—are often employed to justify interventionist policies and reinforce Western superiority. These narratives construct women from the Global South as passive victims in need of rescue, obscuring the structural violence rooted in imperialism and global inequality. Furthermore, McKinnon critiques USasylum law for its Western-centric perspectives, which marginalize and misrepresent the lived experiences of non-Western women. She contends that these biases perpetuate colonial power dynamics by ignoring the systemic factors, including US foreign policy, that contribute to persecution and displacement (McKinnon *Gendered Asylum: Race and Violence in USLaw and Politics*).

Furthermore, there is a tendency in Western feminism to portray Middle Eastern Muslim women predominantly as victims of patriarchy and religious oppression. This narrative can strip these women of their agency and reduce their identities to one-dimensional stereotypes (Haq). Adopting a paternalistic, "rescue" mentality, believing that Middle Eastern Muslim women need to be saved from their own cultures, is patronizing and dismissive of the ways in which these women are already advocating for their rights and making changes within their own societies (Korteweg & Yurdakul). Additionally, viewing veiling as a symbol of oppression, Western feminism often ignores and overlooks the complex and varied reasons why women choose to wear it, including personal, religious, and cultural motivations, which can lead to misunderstandings and alienation (Zine). For many women, veiling is an expression of their identity, a way to assert their individuality, or a means of finding comfort and confidence in their daily lives. For numerous Muslim women, veiling is an act of faith and devotion, a way to adhere to religious principles and connect more deeply with their spirituality. Ignoring this aspect reduces a profound spiritual practice to a mere political statement, stripping it of its religious significance and potentially alienating those for whom it holds great meaning. This view not only undermines the diverse realities of Muslim women but also silences their voices and experiences and hinders efforts to build solidarity across cultural and religious divides.

Due to the lack of adequate representation of Middle Eastern Muslim women, Western feminism often imposes its own values and norms, disregarding their unique cultural and religious contexts.This approach is a form of cultural imperialism, where Western standards are viewed as the benchmark for women's liberation, ignoring the specific socio-political contexts in which Middle Eastern women live (Abu-Lughod). Western feminist perspectives often homogenize Middle Eastern Muslim women, failing to acknowledge the vast diversity within this group. This tendency can erase important distinctions in their experiences, identities, and backgrounds, shaped by differences in nationality, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Specifically, such reductionist views overlook the complexities and variations that exist across Middle Eastern societies

Portraying Syrian refugee women as passive victims denies their agency, reinforces a patronizing attitude, and reduces their experiences and contributions to simplistic, dehumanizing tropes. The repetition of these narratives in mainstream media serves to entrench stereotypes and biases, making it difficult for Syrian refugees to be seen as individuals with diverse backgrounds and aspirations. It also impacts their ability

to integrate into host societies, as public opinion shaped by these narratives can influence policy decisions and social attitudes towards them. These portrayals are not accidental but are often shaped by the interests of powerful groups that control the media and the narrative. By framing the narrative to emphasize threat and burden, these groups justify exclusionary practices, maintain social and political hierarchies, and sustain policies that marginalize and disadvantage refugees. This framing cements refugees' position as outsiders, reinforces their societal misrepresentation, and leads to tangible impacts—shaping public perceptions, influencing policy decisions, fueling Islamophobia, justifying discriminatory practices, and hindering efforts toward mutual understanding and respect (Semati). Ultimately, many refugees come to realize that the safe haven they imagined is nothing more than a facade and a sham.

CRT: Combating Misrepresentation

To combat misrepresentations, it is crucial to promote diverse and accurate portrayals of Middle Eastern Muslim women by amplifying their voices, sharing their stories, and challenging stereotypes. This effort should expand CRT on the educational implications of refugees' legally sanctioned, economically constrained, and racialized experiences. The fundamental principle of CRT is to highlight the narratives of oppressed peoples, examine how racism permeates instructional, curricular, and assessment practices, and critique inadequate practices in schools. CRT emphasizes counter-storytelling to illuminate the experiences of refugees and conceptualizes them as individuals who are racialized, othered, and legally classified, experiencing systemic oppression both in their countries of origin and even in resettlement. Utilizing CRT, I demonstrate the emancipatory role of counter-stories in (re)telling racialized narratives, specifically the story of Syrian refugee women. As tools of accountability, counter-stories can reveal and challenge the oppressive forces and hidden structures that shape racialized social norms and behaviors.

The importance of storytelling to CRT is well-documented. Scholars such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Aja Martinez, and Bronwyn Williams have employed narratives to challenge preconceived notions about race and enhance our understanding of contemporary race relations. They argue that counter-stories allow marginalized groups to affirm their experiences beyond the dominant White supremacist narrative, thereby fortifying their communities. More importantly, these narratives challenge hegemonic discourse by rejecting color-blindness and exposing racism as a central factor in American societal inequities. In fact, "stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (Delgado 5). However, CRT scholarship has largely overlooked storytelling as an empowering tool for refugees, especially in undergraduate courses (Pulitano). Refugee stories challenge dehumanizing metaphors like "floods," "waves," and "victims," often used in popular discourse. They offer a stark contrast, inviting readers into complex realities, humanize suffering often overlooked in statistics, and inspire empathy and action against the dominant culture of fear and intolerance, which has led to a resurgence of nativist sentiments and xenophobic acts. Additionally, these stories showcase refugees' resilience and agency, highlighting how their movements and transactions in a new land involve not only new communities but also the exchange of goods, services, capital, and ideas across borders.

Welcoming Refugee Women's Counter-stories into the Writing Classroom

Scholars like Mais Al-Khateeb have advanced feminist methodologies to better understand and address the complexities of our changing world, including the migration of people to the United States. Including the voices and experiences of refugee women in educational curricula fosters student awareness of the diverse and complex realities refugees face. Counter-storytelling as a methodology highlights the experiences of refugee women—telling the stories that are often left untold—and serves as a tool for analyzing and challenging the majoritarian or single story that stereotypes refugee women, focusing on their deficits rather than their decision-making, strengths, and agency. Integrating the voices of marginalized groups into broader conversations about race, gender, and justice fosters a more inclusive and accurate understanding of their experiences. Incorporating refugee women's stories into CRT, in particular, can broaden the focus beyond Black-White racial dynamics to include other marginalized groups, such as refugees.

With synergy between my research and teaching, enhancing and informing each other, I have crafted curricula on CRT and counter-story. As I joined the George Washington University, I decided to theme my first-year writing class on refugees. I focus on refugee women as the primary case study. With my students, we engage with the lived experiences of refugee women to evaluate their construction of agency—how they are agents in finding ways not only to survive but also to thrive and gain economic mobility. Engaging in various texts, including academic arguments, personal narratives, TEDx Talks, documentaries, guest speaker lectures, and personal interviews, we explore how refugees are complex individuals experiencing immense challenges but also exerting great resilience. Students learn to ask critical questions about issues related to refugees, conduct research, explore possible arguments, consider counter-arguments, form their own claims, and reflect on their position as it takes shape. In the major research assignment, titled, "Interview and Position Essay," and in conjunction with secondary research, students interview refugee women and inquire about their lived experiences navigating the system in the United States, more specifically the Washington D.C. region, while constructing a home away from home. The goal in this essay is to build on the writing and research (including the interview) to offer the argument they find most persuasive within the issue they are examining. They learn how to take a position within the debate, address competing positions and alternatives, and effectively and efficiently organize their ideas.

While students are allowed to choose the refugee women population they want to research, work with, and interview, I structure the curriculum on the Syrian refugee crisis, due to my expertise on the topic. In the first few weeks of classes, and as I am teaching summary and rhetorical analysis, I explain the context that led to the Arab Spring and the subsequent civil war in Syria and the largest exodus of the 21st century, with nearly two-thirds of displaced Syrians being women and children. As we approach the Interview and Position essay, I spend time preparing students for primary and secondary research and specifically the interview process. First, I conference with them to go over their topic choices and the research question they hope to untangle throughout the semester. Also, I go over the interview process and encourage them to allow the interview to happen organically—going off script and asking follow-up questions. We discuss the type of

questions to ask and ways to get the interviewee to engage in open dialogue, which functions as an outlet to give voice to refugee women and a space to explain their choices and express their feelings while the interviewers (students) are engaged in rhetorical listening, which Krista Ratcliffe defines as a "stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture" (Ratcliffe 17). While listening, students visualize and picture the interviewee's experiences and empathize. Rhetorical listening encourages understanding and allows for cross-cultural communication and open, honest dialogue. It is an approach to communication that emphasizes understanding and considering the perspectives and experiences of others, especially those who may be marginalized or different from oneself. It requires not only listening to what is being said but also actively engaging with the cultural and social contexts that shape the speaker's message, promoting deeper empathy and understanding in the conversation.

I played a pivotal role in mediating relationships, offering guidance on respectful communication, and ensuring that both students and refugees were comfortable throughout the process. To initiate contact with refugee women, I facilitated connections by collaborating with local organizations and community centers that maintain established and trusted relationships with refugee communities. Partnerships with local non-profit organizations, such as those focused on refugee resettlement and empowerment, served as key pathways for students to engage with participants. I leveraged my own networks and acted as a bridge to connect students with refugee women. This direct facilitation ensured that students could build relationships with participants in a respectful and ethical manner. To address linguistic and cultural differences, I occasionally served as both a translator and a cultural informant during the interviews with Arab speaking refugee women. My presence not only facilitated effective communication but also provided critical cultural context, ensuring that the participants felt understood and respected. These efforts helped to mitigate potential misunderstandings and fostered a more authentic and meaningful exchange.

The course design also incorporated preparatory activities to build cultural competency and promote ethical research practices. Students underwent preparatory training on qualitative research interview methods, informed consent, cultural sensitivity, and active listening. Emphasis was placed on creating a safe and respectful environment for storytelling. Students engaged with documentaries, case studies, and academic readings on Syrian refugees across various contexts and countries. These activities helped them develop a nuanced understanding of the socio-political and cultural dynamics shaping the lives of Syrian refugees. By the time students reached the interview stage, they were equipped to approach the conversations with sensitivity and respect. Reflective discussions and debrief sessions after the interviews provided an opportunity for students to critically evaluate their approaches, address challenges they encountered, and learn from the experience. These steps ensured that students not only engaged ethically and effectively with Syrian refugee women but also deepened their understanding of the complexities and transformative potential of cross-cultural research.

To better prepare for the interview, we conduct a mock interview in class where a group of students interviews me, given my identity as a Syrian immigrant woman who has worked closely with refugee wom-

en. During this mock interview, one student verbally asks me questions—crafted ahead of time—while another takes notes, reflecting the roles I envisioned when designing the assignment. The rest of the class observes and listens. Students' questions vary widely, often focusing on how I became invested in academic and volunteer work with Syrian refugees and how my Syrian heritage and academic background influence my research and relationships with refugee communities. Follow-up questions frequently arise during the process, allowing for a more organic and dynamic exchange.

To further prepare for their personal interviews with refugee women, we collaboratively create a pool of questions students can use. Each student is asked to post 5-6 potential questions on the course's discussion board, encouraging thoughtful and varied contributions. I guide students to craft open-ended questions that go beyond simple yes-or-no answers to foster richer, more meaningful dialogue. For example, students have developed questions such as: "What challenges did you face when resettling in a new country, and how did you overcome them?"; "Can you share a story about how your family has adapted to life in the diaspora?"; "How do you navigate preserving your cultural identity while integrating into a new community?"; "What role does storytelling or memory play in your life and that of your family?"; and "Have you encountered racism or discrimination during your resettlement journey, and how has that shaped your experience?". I also emphasize two key points as students prepare for their interviews: first, they should let the conversation flow naturally, understanding that topics may arise in an unexpected order or that the respondent may choose not to answer certain questions; second, I encourage students to take detailed notes and, if the interviewee consents, to record the conversation. These practices help ensure accuracy and allow students to focus more fully on the exchange. By crafting thoughtful questions and approaching interviews with flexibility and sensitivity, students not only gain valuable insight into refugee women's coping mechanisms and familial roles but also explore deeper issues, such as racism and systemic challenges. This approach integrates counter-story methodology, offering students the opportunity to critically engage with the lived experiences of refugee women while addressing the intersectional challenges they face, including racial and cultural marginalization.

After completing the research process and workshopping their position essays, students reflect on the experience and the knowledge they have gained. Their reflections reveal recurring themes, such as the defiance exhibited by refugee women against dominant narratives. These disparaging narratives often portray refugee women as lacking agency, entirely dependent on male partners, and incapable of leading their families to financial stability. Students also challenge the oversimplified master narrative that depicts all refugees as desperate to leave their countries for the United States, perceived as the ultimate destination of the "American dream." Through these reflections, students deepen their understanding of refugee women's diverse experiences and the complexities of their stories.

Female Financial Prosperity Against Projected Fragility

The interviews revealed to students how refugees often construct their own identities or resist those imposed on them. The political climate has essentially put an entire group of people—refugees—under a microscope to scrutinize. Students learned that refugee women, without formal education even in their first language, have been able to have their own businesses and support their families from their domestic spaces. Many women have become breadwinners and sustainers of their families either because their male partners or supporters passed away or because the system in the United States does not recognize their human capital, the skills and knowledge they must posess to be economically and financially productive. Many of their male partners are unable to work, or even if they work, the jobs available for them can hardly provide for them or even enable them to have a decent income or life. Ultimately, refugee women have stepped in and utilized and leveraged their domestic skills, such as cooking and sewing, to create successful home-based businesses. For example, some women have started catering services, preparing traditional dishes for local communities and events, while others have launched sewing businesses, making and selling clothing and accessories, or offering alterations.

The systemic barriers in the United States, such as the non-recognition of foreign credentials and skills, often leave refugee men and women underemployed or unemployed. Despite having valuable skills and knowledge, these individuals struggle to find jobs that match their qualifications. For refugee women, this challenge is compounded by cultural and linguistic barriers, yet they have shown remarkable adaptability and ingenuity by turning to entrepreneurial ventures within their domestic spheres. Also, the shift in traditional family roles, with women becoming the main economic providers, has significant implications for family dynamics and gender roles. This role reversal challenges conventional gender norms and highlights the adaptability and strength of refugee women. Students learned that these women's contributions are not only economic in nature but also serve to empower them within their households and communities, fostering a sense of agency and self-worth. By running their own businesses and generating income, refugee women achieve a level of financial independence that allows them to make important decisions about their lives and families. This economic contribution shifts the power dynamics within the household, granting them greater control over financial resources and expenditures. Students came to realize how through financial autonomy, refugee women are often more involved in making decisions that affect the family, from daily budgeting to long-term planning. This increased participation strengthens their voice and influence within the family unit.

Countering the Imagined American Dream

At the beginning of the semester, many of my students had limited understanding of what it means to be a refugee and the various reasons refugees come to the United States. They believed that everyone is desperate to be in the United States, seeking economic prosperity and chasing the American dream, when in fact, many, such as Syrians, wish Syria was safe to go back to. Many wished they had never left their homes or endured the loss or the brutal violence they had witnessed. My students watched the documentary, "This

Is Home: A Refugee Story" which provides an intimate look into the lives of four Syrian refugee families who have been resettled in Baltimore, Maryland. The film captures their experiences over an eight-month period, highlighting the challenges and triumphs they encounter as they adjust to life in the United States. The documentary delves deeply into the personal stories of the individuals, revealing how Syrian men and women regret the decision to come to the United States. One of the caseworkers interviewed in the documentary noted about Syrian refugees' experiences and reactions: "I am originally from Baghdad, Iraq, and I came as a refugee and I understand that when you're coming from a war zone and you feel like you reached your haven and you're gonna be safe, and suddenly, this place is not haven anymore" (*This Is Home: A Refugee Story* 00:49:58-00:50:13). Finding employment has been difficult for Syrian men, especially since their qualifications are not recognized and many face language barriers. Besides, experiencing discrimination or hostility from locals has made them feel unwelcome and unsafe. Some indicated that they wish to go back to Syria once it is safe for them to make that transition. The difference in family and community dynamics makes it harder for them to flourish in a new and different environment. The so-called "American Dream" has become a nightmare for many of the Syrian refugees as they must navigate and maneuver multiple layers and types of struggles ranging from economic independence--which they enjoyed when they were in Syria--to xenophobic policies that limit and hinder their prosperous resettlement. Others indicated that if not for the safety of their children, they would not have left their home country, Syria. The myth of the "American Dream" reflects and reinforces Western biases and misconceptions about refugees, contributing to Islamophobia and xenophobia, while perpetuating a narrative that dehumanizes Syrian refugees and justifies discriminatory attitudes and policies against them. In the documentary, an ESL teacher working with Syrian refugee students reflected on their struggles: "I think the hardest thing is realizing that we're bringing people from another country and we're telling them that we are helping them, like, I'm gonna move to America and I'm gonna live the American dream, and yet you get here, and the American dream is nothing like what TV or movies tell you. And we want to be the greatest country in the world, but we don't treat people like we are the greatest country in the world" (00:50:57-00:51:20). This testimony highlights the gap between the promise of the American Dream and the lived realities of many refugees, urging a reflection on the nation's values and actions. It calls for a reassessment of how the country lives up to its ideals and treats those who come seeking a better life. It captures a sense of disillusionment experienced by refugees who find that the reality of life in America does not match their expectations. This disparity calls for a critical reassessment of how the United States upholds its ideals and treats those who arrive seeking safety, opportunity, and a chance at a better life. The disillusionment experienced by refugees stems from the stark contrast between the idealized promise of the American Dream—characterized by prosperity, freedom, and equality—and the harsh realities they often encounter upon arrival. These realities include systemic barriers such as limited access to resources, economic hardship, discrimination, and social alienation.

Building on this reflection, it is essential to dispel the misconception that the American Dream is the primary incentive for Syrian refugees' immigration to the United States. While the allure of economic prosperity and upward social mobility has historically been a significant factor in attracting immigrants, it is far from the only reason people choose to relocate. For many refugees, their decision to flee is rooted in survival

rather than aspiration, underscoring the urgent need to reframe narratives about their journeys and motivations. Many immigrants have been driven by a complex mix of factors, including political persecution, war, and violence in their home countries, the pursuit of educational opportunities, the desire for family reunification, and the need to escape environmental disasters. Reducing the motivation for Syrian refugees to the singular notion of the American Dream ignores the diverse and multifaceted realities of those who come to the United States.

The narrow focus on the victimization of refugees and their desperation to come to America is often used to promote American exceptionalism as it plays well into the American nationalistic agenda in which outsiders are desperate to sacrifice their lives to make it to this sacred land and have a chance to achieve the idealized American dream. The refugee stereotypes played up by the media and state paint refugees as victims desperately trying to settle into the United States while ignoring America's historical colonial injustices in the region. These racist stereotypes serve to accentuate and highlight America's own moral and cultural superiority while simultaneously *othering* those who are painted as different, such as Arabs and Muslims. Many students seriously get to reevaluate what they have been taught about American ideals of freedom, democracy, liberty, and human rights, and how America operates under these higher moral grounds and effectively allow the United States to act as a moral arbitrator of the world.

Counterstories Making a Place in Academia: Disrupting Mainstream Narratives

Disparaging narratives about Syrians in general, and Syrian women specifically, can be actively shifted not just through the act of telling other stories but also by amplifying the voices of Syrian women migrants and immigrants. Through interviews, readings, and documentaries, my students were immersed in the lived experiences of refugee women, gaining a nuanced understanding of their struggles, resilience, and the practices that have shaped their identities and choices. These interactions fostered open dialogue and organic conversations, revealing intimate details that allowed students to imagine themselves in the place of the other. This process encouraged students to engage deeply with rhetorical listening, storytelling, and counter-stories, transforming these tools into means of empathy and critical reflection. By confronting their assumptions, students gained a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers faced by refugee women and the extraordinary resilience they demonstrate, equipping them to advocate for and support marginalized communities in their future endeavors.

Critical Race Theory and Transnational Feminist Theory offer complementary and intersecting frameworks for first-year writing classrooms, providing powerful tools to analyze refugee women's counter-stories and the ways intersecting forms of oppression shape their experiences and impact their lives. CRT's focus on counter-storytelling and systemic inequities intersects with transnational feminism's emphasis on respecting cultural differences and fostering solidarities across borders. Teaching first-year writing and CRT while incorporating refugee women's narratives and counter-stories can be profoundly impactful. Incorporating case studies of refugee women who have successfully started their own businesses can inspire stu-

dents and provide concrete illustrations of the challenges and successes faced by these women. Additionally, assigning projects that require students to research and present on the entrepreneurial endeavors of refugee women—while developing business plans, marketing strategies, or community support initiatives that highlight their ingenuity—can be extremely productive and eye-opening. Also, facilitating discussions on how systemic barriers and structural inequalities manifest in the lives of refugees, including the devaluation of foreign credentials and skills and the barriers to economic and social integration, encourages students to critically examine how policies and societal attitudes can be reformed to better support refugees, recognizing them not as liabilities but as an asset and valuable contributors. Transnational feminism complements this by urging students to respect and value the diverse cultural and religious contexts that shape refugee women's choices, even when these differ from Western feminist ideals. This multifaceted framework challenges students to critically reflect on their own biases and assumptions, fostering a deeper understanding of global power dynamics.

This comprehensive approach equipped students to engage meaningfully and respectfully, providing a replicable model for similar projects in other courses. By integrating these perspectives and activities into the curriculum, students can appreciate the profound impact of refugee women's entrepreneurial endeavors. They will see that these contributions are not just about economic survival but also about fostering dignity, agency, and empowerment within and beyond the household. Incorporating these theories into first-year writing curricula provides students with a robust framework to understand and analyze complex social issues and systemic forces shaping refugee women's lives, while appreciating their agency and contributions. This approach enhances critical thinking and writing skills while fostering a deeper awareness of social justice and the importance of amplifying marginalized voices. By engaging with these intersections, students develop a greater appreciation for the multifaceted experiences of refugee women and the systemic forces shaping their lives, ultimately cultivating a more informed and compassionate worldview, and moving beyond a *single story* approach: Appreciating and respecting refugee women's choices even when they do not align with their Western views of liberation and empowerment. Moreover, transnational feminism emphasizes building solidarities and coalitions across borders, advocating for a politics of solidarity that acknowledges and respects differences while striving toward shared goals. This approach encourages Western feminists to engage in genuine partnerships with feminists from diverse backgrounds, learning from their experiences and supporting their struggles without imposing their own agendas. By following these strategies, educators can better equip students to appreciate the intricate intersections of gender, culture, and religion in transnational contexts, promoting a more comprehensive and empathetic understanding of various feminist movements.

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To Gather Amongst the Olive Trees: Counterstorytelling through Palestinian Feminist Survivance Rhetorics

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Abstract: We are in unprecedented times as genocide continues across Palestine, including occupied Gaza and the West Bank. Palestinian narratives are systemically targeted and contested historically to deny their visions of reaching a liberated Palestine. Evidenced by the ethnocide and genocide in the 1982 Invasion of Lebanon and today's ongoing, accelerated genocide in Palestine, narratives are paramount to understanding how genocide occurs, how audiences process it, and possibly acted upon by outside actors. This article focuses on our Palestinian counterstories to understand what we can learn from our narratives. We develop Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics as a crucial rhetorical aspect at the intersection of Palestinian Critical Race Theory (PalestinianCRT), Palestinian feminism, transnational feminist literacy, and survivance rhetorics. Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics contain three tenets: infinitive temporalities, feminist collectivity, and counterstory dialogics. Infinitive temporalities explain how Palestinian counterstories disrupt Western time, calling audiences to understand Palestinian narratives differently. Feminist collectivity acknowledges our Palestinian feminist ancestors and broader feminist community and activists as part of our theorizing and embodiment. Counterstory dialogics names how, in dialoguing together, we resist the stock stories that seek to erase us. Palestinian feminism remains critical to understanding how to survive and resist genocide, whether in Palestine or the shatat (diaspora), through how we embody and narrate our experiences in the face of Zionist settler and U.S.-imperial propaganda.

Tags: critical race theory, praxis, decolonial theory, embodiment, survivance

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> Contrary to liberal notions of stories as
> depoliticized acts of sharing, we must recognize
> stories as acts of creative rebellion.
>
> Sium and Ritskes, 2013, p. v

I interview my Tía and Tíos in preparation for my dissertation, and they tell me: "lo llevo en la sangre. Yo tengo 2 corazones—uno Chileno y otro Palestino" (I carry [my Palestinian identity] in my blood. I have two hearts—a Chilean one and another Palestinian one).

As a child, I took a strange Catholic pride in being able to say, "My grandfather was born in Belén, igual que Jesús!" And there I was, walking the streets of Bethlehem. I called my dad. Despite stereotypes of Palestine as a backwards society with little access to technology, I connected to Wifi and called my dad on Facetime.

"¡Papi, mira! ¡Mira estas vistas!"

I see the tears well up in his eyes. The pride. The excitement. The nostalgia. The heartache. He has only ever been to the region under Israeli control, not on our own terms like I am today with Palestinians at the helm, narrating our own journey, sharing the truths of our existence and struggle.

He tells me that Abuelito's house used to be so close to the Church of the Nativity that you could see it from his house. As I rush through our tour and walking through these streets, stopping at a shop to buy all the Bethlehem Olive tree wooden pieces I can to share with my family back in Miami and Chile, I try to take in the views, and imagine my Abuelito at 7 or 8 years old, running through these busy streets with his siblings.

I am truly from here. This land birthed me, too.

In my journals, I write: We are not visiting. We are coming home.

We are the lost cousin, sisters…Coming together.

Coming home.

Bernardita

I grew up hearing the stories of my great-grandmother, Nadhmiyyah el-Hirbawi, when she lived in Al-Khalil. She would dress up as a man to listen to poetry at coffee shops and argue with men about philosophy and politics. She fled with her children to Gaza in 1953 and later had to restart their lives in Mecca. Her strength is what I have always aspired to be, and my family and I will Return[1] in her name. I am Palestininan Because of her steadfast courage and unfaltering stubborness.

sarah

What do we do when genocide occurs in Palestine, our homeland? As the genocide in Palestine continues, we wrote this article. As the genocide in Palestine continues, we are teaching, grading, shopping for groceries, caring for our families, and attending protests, never forgetting our people who cannot do the same. As the genocide in Palestine continues, we are here, watching our kin in the homeland be starved, bombed, and slaughtered. As the genocide in Palestine continues, we witness the same decimation spread to Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria.

Since October 2023, we have entered a new era of Palestinian-experienced violence as the most documented genocide in history unfolds through news and Palestinian accounts on X (formerly Twitter) tweets, Instagram posts and reels, and TikTok videos. Each displays Palestinians trapped under the rubble, struggling to find food and water, and bombs dropping across the entirety of occupied Gaza. In the occupied West Bank, we witness refugee camps bombed, residents abducted, city roads blocked, and more settlements built on stolen Palestinian land. To be Palestinian is to contend with the ongoing destruction of our homeland, culture, and people while imagining our collective Palestinian liberation. We hold all our grief along with our hope to demonstrate our *sumud* –steadfastness– as our ancestors and land show us while experiencing ongoing genocide.

This is not the first time Palestinians experienced genocide at the hands of a Zionist settler colonial state while global powers deny it. Writing about the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Edward Said detailed Israel's genocide and ethnocide against Palestinian refugees and the Lebanese in South Lebanon (28). Just like today, reports and first-hand accounts were not enough to stop this ongoing violence against Palestinians and those living in the broader Southwest Asia and Northwest Africa (SWANA) region. "Facts," Said writes, "require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain and circulate them" (34). Yet, Zionist settler colonialism and imperialism alter Palestinian facts of the past and present (Tawil). Rather than understanding Palestinian narratives as part of a more extended archive of trauma, Zionist settler colonialism characterizes these narratives as the cause of violence upon Palestinians and others. This framing of Palestinian-experienced trauma as a justification for violence against them *is* the socially acceptable narrative (read: *nightmare)* that we experience.

1 We capitalize Return as a recognition of the right to return for all Palestinians. Due to Return looking different for Palestinians based on their location, familial history, and experiences with ongoing Zionist settler colonization, we recognize that this term has various meanings for Palestinians

These socially acceptable narratives continue today to justify genocide and target Palestinians and allies across the globe who fight against it. For example, Palestine Legal, a nonprofit organization defending the civil and constitutional rights of those who speak out for Palestinian freedom in the United States, reports a surge in cases of those receiving negative consequences for posting in solidarity with Palestine on social media during the 2023-2025 genocide in Gaza (Saba). (One of our authors was doxxed and received harassment online, calling for her firing and removal merely for calling for an end to this genocide). To discredit such narratives when, as early as October 13, 2023, leading scholars in genocide studies called what is occurring a "textbook case of genocide" (Segal), in January 2024, the International Court of Justice ruled that it is highly probable that Israel violated the Genocide Convention (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, "Gaza: ICJ Ruling"), and in November 2024, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant for "for crimes against humanity and war crimes" (International Criminal Court) demonstrates how power sidelines crucial narratives in the service of maintaining its privilege to oppress.

To combat these colonial yet socially acceptable narratives, we employ a "transnational feminist literacy practice" (Dingo 535) to challenge powers that endorse genocide and ongoing Zionist settler colonization. Scholars (Dingo et al.; Nish) call for research that can, as Dingo writes, "push readers to unveil the[...] macro-level power structures and better understand the multiple scales that cause women's oppression" (Dingo 535). Nish's work on representing precarity reminds us of the critical importance of shifting our representative foci, so we do not further enact the "systems of imperialist violence" that already organize our lives (365). By utilizing this framing, we notice how systems of violence require naming and critique as part of combating them.

In light of this, we look at narrative's role in an ongoing genocide. How do rhetorical studies offer particularly crucial tools to address the immediacy of ongoing, accelerated violence and genocide? In response to these questions and calls from transnational feminist rhetorical scholars, we offer Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics as a rhetorical tool to classify how Palestinian narratives fighting against this ongoing, accelerated genocide.[2] Survivance, as Vizenor (vii) terms it, recognizes the duality of Indigenous survival and resistance that occurs under continuing genocide facilitated by settler colonialism. For Palestinians, survivance as a concept describes our fight against the continued murder of our people in Palestine, land grabbing, resource deprivation, dispossession, and violence against all Palestinians in the homeland and exile.

We argue that, especially in this moment of ongoing, accelerated genocide, Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics is a critical methodological praxis framed within Palestinian Critical Race Theory (PalestinianCRT), which relies upon survivance rhetorics and Palestinian feminism. Due to the precarity and urgency surrounding ongoing Zionist settler colonization and genocide, we contend that counterstories as a methodology highlight our survivance rhetorics to name and describe Palestinian experiences. By linking these seemingly disparate concepts together, we recognize the importance embodied narratives play in

2 We utilize the term, ongoing, accelerated genocide and ongoing Zionist settler colonization to highlight that these violences have not ended against Palestinians. Additionally, as Wolfe (2006) identifies, settler colonialism is a structure, so by terming genocide and Zionist settler colonialism as such, we note its systemic nature as something that occurs to Palestinians and others across the globe.

processing and acting against violence that occurs globally, including ongoing Zionist settler colonization. In this piece, we frame our counterstories as a methodological act of refusal to the genocide and ongoing Zionist settler colonization of Palestine.

Through our writing, we show how Palestinian narratives are part and parcel of a Palestinian vision of a fully liberated Palestine because these are denied, targeted, and censored in the United States and the West since our counterstories contend with the Western-sponsored settler narrative. To do so, we first connect transnational feminist rhetorical theory, PalestinianCRT, survivance rhetorics, and Palestinian feminism to demonstrate rhetoric as a throughline between these concepts. Second, we illustrate the connection between survivance rhetorics and PalestinianCRT through embodiment, illuminating how we contend with ongoing Zionist settler colonialism through our testimonies as Palestinian women. Third, we develop three tenets of Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics: infinitive temporalities, feminist collectivity, and counterstory dialogics. Through our counterstories, we uncover the importance of Palestinian feminist ethics, guiding how we perform our survival and resistance amidst a genocide targetting our Palestinian kin in occupied Palestine, including Gaza and the West Bank. We conclude by reflecting on how rhetorical studies must address ongoing violences across the globe, including ongoing Zionist settler colonialism in Palestine. If we believe that rhetoric has material impacts, we must believe in its transformative power and ability to change realities. Therefore, it is imperative for us as rhetoricians to speak on this to first name a genocide in order to end it.

Past

I don't think I have been able to sleep a full night since October 7, 2023. I have nightmares of settlers stealing my childhood home, being denied entry into Palestine after an arduous interrogation at the jisr (Arabic for bridge; this is the colloquial name for the King Hussein Bridge to enter the occupied West Bank), and family members interrogated and beaten at checkpoints. These nightmares manifested through these concurrent experiences of the past and present are a collective Palestinian experience. All of us are stuck in time, carrying our ancestors' trauma in the present as we see more land and life stolen from us every day. Each Palestinian murdered in this genocide is my uncle, brother, sister, cousin, and grandparent. Every day that unfolds in this genocide, I see a distance grow between myself and my homeland that I hoped to travel back to. What if I am now never able to return to Palestine, just like my teenage grandfather? None of us knew that when we said goodbye, it would be permanent. None of us knew our last time would be that - the last.

sarah

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I am so exhausted. I keep having the same conversations. I keep posting the same posts. Sharing Bisan's stories and the Daily Updates from LetsTalkPalestine. And we're seeing our starving children, their lifeless bodies as parents weep for them. The numbers continue to grow every day. Now we see their tanks proudly rolling over Gaza's entrance in Rafah… but the Hollywood elite paid $75,000 dollars to get spruced up for the Met Gala, on the day of Holocaust Remembrance, as Netanyahu proudly embarks on this ground invasion and the onslaught

of Rafah.

I am tired.

Bernardita

Transnationalizing Palestinian Feminist Rhetorics

Communication studies and rhetorical studies have a responsibility to fight the censoring, silencing, and erasure of our Palestinian identities and enabling this genocide (Muhtaseb 4; Editor's Collective 1). This is especially imperative since multiple individuals from the National Communication Association (NCA) office, on November 18, 2023, censored and banned a Palestinian professor, Dr. Ahlam Muhtaseb, from delivering her invited speech at the NCA Presidential Address due to it containing "references to genocide and 'free Palestine' in the speech" (Muhtaseb 3). Matar contends that Palestine is communication, necessitating an investigation of how discursive means invite audiences into understanding and advocating for Palestine (2). To understand Palestine as communication, especially rhetorically, calls for scholars to approach writing and studying about Palestine in a way that reflects the lived experience of Palestinians in Palestine and the *shatat* (diaspora), and advocates for material land back and Return.

In genocide, Palestinians living in Palestine and the shatat narrate their experiences, showing the world their reality for the past 470+ days and 76 years.3 In this colonial torture, we are told to keep our grief, pain, disappointment, and anguish to ourselves. While we may feel fear, we also understand what is at stake, and what we must do for Palestine and our people. Alternatively, we employ a Palestine analytic to articulate Palestinian experiences (Qutami and Zahzah 84). Through this framing, we bring Palestine into rhetorical studies with a transnational focus on how concepts such as feminism, survivance, and Palestinian-ness transcend borders, definitions, and experiences.

Transnational rhetorical scholars, feminist or otherwise, note the crucial nature of tracing global rhetorics. Transnational rhetorics can foster public coalitions (Yam 2) and relationality across borders (Yam 4). Transnational feminist research complements this by noticing how these rhetorics can identify solidarity and coalition-building across shared struggles (Yam 4). While we, as Palestinians, cannot be in solidarity with ourselves, as Nada Elia (144) reminds us as Palestinian feminists, we must continue to uncover layers of joint-struggle against all oppressions, where we see the Palestinian cause intertwined within.

Tracking transnational rhetorics and how they build communities of joint-struggle requires us to trace how ideas travel, morph, change, and develop within networks (Yam 5) through constant dialogue to create rhetorical foundations of shared and different struggles (Yam 21). Mais Al-Khateeb (12) reaffirms this notion by encouraging glocal (simultaneous global and local) perspectives on how rhetoric travels to critique

3 We name time to situate this violence and our writing kairotically. We recognize that these numbers may be incorrect as time passes, as we are unsure when this ongoing genocide and Zionist settler colonialism will cease and Palestine will be liberated.

systemic violences and provide future possibilities through culturally-relevant meaning-making practices. This "geopolitics of knowledge production" (Al-Khateeb 15) reaffirms the critical value of our Palestinian epistemologies that we share through our counterstories and Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics. As two Palestinians who were raised across different borders yet share a national identity, we utilize transnational rhetorics to understand ourselves through English, Spanish, and Arabic when writing, chatting, and processing. At the same time, our counterstories add to the network of Palestinian perspectives that call *out* power and call *in* our people to create holistic and coherent narratives about who we are and what Palestine is to us.

As we build these joint-struggle coalitions through our transnational feminist rhetorics, we engage in networks that Dingo describes as a metaphor for feminist rhetoricians to interrogate transnational policies tied to transnational systems of power (492). While we recognize the importance of metaphorical networks to map power and policies, our transformative networks move beyond metaphor. Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics materially challenge transnational policies and systems of power, whether it is colonial feminism, Zionist settler colonization, USimperialism, the military-industrial complex, or Orientalist complacency. Through counterstories, we hold all actors ultimately responsible for this ongoing genocide, following the lead of organizations such as the Columbia University Apartheid and Divest's (CUAD) pamphlet of political economy maps shared at their encampment (Tooze). CUAD's pamphlet maps how Columbia University's Board of Trustees, war profiteers, the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), the New York Police Department, Zionist cultural organizations, and Columbia University's investments are all interconnected.[4] Identifying these networks, whether as a graphic or in counterstories, elaborates on how we uplift voices who experience repression by calling out manufactured militarized and Zionist settler colonial violence.

PalestinianCRT to Enact Our Survivance

I don't know if I can hold all this catastrophe within me. It's so hard to speak; what else do I say? How did my great-grandmother hold all this during the 1948 Nakba and wake up the following day?

sarah

*Everyone should be f*cking outraged. How is everyone not talking about Palestine all the time? Every day, a new nightmare is unfolding. And we're all just living every day as if normal? What is even happening? How are we supposed to keep going? How am I supposed to shut up about this?*

Bernardita

Anti-colonial approaches to research and rhetorical theory are praxis-driven. Rather than developing

4 We name the Israeli "Defense" Forces the Israeli Occupation Forces, following the lead of activists and Palestinains living in the homeland. This rhetorical move calls out the Zionist military only functions to uphold occupation rather than defend.

theory and imprinting it onto communities, a colonial endeavor by rhetoricians, praxis-driven theory begins with community knowledge as an anchor and referent for how theory, method, and study in rhetorical studies can be done (Lechuga 384). Additionally, Palestinian knowledge is systemically erased and not neatly categorized disciplinarily (Dutta et al. 61-62), making praxis-driven theory paramount for research on Palestine. We turn to highlight our Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics that uplift our community knowledge and oppose the methods and rhetoric of the oppressors. The need to shake free of the *ghassa*, or lump in one's throat preventing speech, displays our refusal of complacency in this genocide (Ihmoud, "'Ghassa'") and drives our praxis in this piece.

As we do this work on building Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics, we name the importance of this work as a rhetorical praxis of PalestinianCRT. To do this, we highlight how PalestinianCRT and counterstory enact survivance rhetorics and connect our work with how Wieskamp and Smith delineate survivance rhetorics at play in Indigenous rhetorics (74-75). Their analysis offers instructive ways for us to delineate how Palestinian CRT's counterstory methodologies enact survivance rhetorics that fight the erasure of our people. Specifically, we connect with CRT through PalestinianCRT as a "race-based epistemology" that allows us to critically situate conversations about colonialism, migration, diaspora, and Palestine (Harris et al. 21). By emphasizing PalestinianCRT's origins within the tenets of CRT, we start with understanding the rhetorical racialization of Palestinians by ongoing Zionist settler colonialism and that our work is a direct challenge to this violence upon our people. Our counterstories are meaningful interventions that tackle the broader systems of violence that organize our societies (Ladson-Billings), precisely a world society that chooses to accept a Zionist settler occupation state and deny the existence of a people.

It is in the face of this denial of our existence that Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics function to challenge violences and erasures. Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics act in response and as a direct confrontation to the Zionist settler-colonial occupation. A PalestinianCRT framework allows us to see the Zionist entity mobilizing dominant narratives through white supremacy and colonialism (Yunis Varas and Tanksley 133) supported through the current genocide, "sophicide," and "scholasticide" brutally carried out by Israel in Gaza (Palestinian Feminist Collective, "A Feminist Praxis For Academic Freedom"). Additionally, PalestinianCRT is grounded in Palestinian feminist epistemologies, is intersectional, and "gives us a vision for Palestinian survivance, healing, and liberation that dismantles the cisheteropatriarchal violences" (Yunis Varas and Tanksley 132-133). Why else is the Zionist settler state so intent on destroying all forms of our existence if not because it understands the power of our culture and heritage to challenge its dominance over our lands? Our community cultural wealth, a foundational framework of CRT, enacts itself through cultural traditions and celebrations, and in our survivance rhetorics and *hakawati* (storytelling), both in the homeland and throughout the *shatat*. Continuing to *live* and *speak* and exist as we do in the face of an ongoing genocide is how we disrupt the violent Zionist narratives through counterstories that dismantle the idea "that position us Palestinians as racially and culturally inferior and thus deserving of colonial erasure and extermination" (Yunis Varas and Tanksley 133). We speak and share our stories and challenge the colonial lies of our limited worth and value.

Through our counterstories here and our writing and existence everywhere (but especially in the homeland), we demonstrate the centrality of experiential knowledge that CRT names not only as legitimate but "critical to understanding racial subordination" (Yunis Varas and Tanksley 133). These engagements demonstrate why PalestinianCRT is foundational for developing Palestinian survivance rhetorics that extend the work of transnational feminist rhetorical theory. Baniya and Chen discuss the importance of storytelling within transnational and transcultural contexts because of the work it does to create an "antenarrative." This recognizes, reveals, and rejects "various forms of oppression and replacing them with socially just practices that account for the complexities and nuances of global crises" (75). Our Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics through counterstorying extends Baniya and Chen's work on critical storytelling. We also understand how critical storytelling "provides space to share stories of personal experiences, observations, critical reflections, and interrogations to challenge injustices," allowing us to "offer political awareness and contextualize injustices" through our rhetorics (Baniya and Chen 79). Yes, we counterstorytell to amplify the voices of people not represented in mainstream media (Baniya and Chen 79) and to reveal communication's importance in calling out inequities and injustice (Baniya and Chen 80). We extend this work by showing how our counterstorying enacts our survivance as we resist our annihilation.

These embodied methods of counterstory through narrative and storytelling are rhetorical ways that we, as Palestinians, enact our survivance. Not only does PalestinianCRT embrace these embodied praxes of transformational resistance, but in the face of brutal, genocidal violence and the intentional targeting of journalists and other storytellers native to Palestine, as we have seen in the last 15 months, we also more intimately understand this as resistance to death, murder, erasure, and historical amnesia. It is more evident now, as social media broadcasts a genocide before our very eyes, that Palestinian storytelling and narratives *are* transformational counterstories that directly challenge the Zionist settler colonial state. We understand our existence is a threat. We have seen the Zionist settler colonial project before and after 1948 spew their narrative-myth of Palestine as being "a barren land" until they arrived (Pappé 6; Sharif 18, 22-23). We experience violence when we dare to speak of the truth of our existence that our ancestries go back hundreds if not thousands of years in Palestine to contest this Zionist myth. And we also know that if we do not speak on our terms, we allow their violence to succeed in erasing us.

Our engagement with these transnational feminist theories and PalestinianCRT in developing this praxis works as a form of social justice, putting to work our "decolonial praxis and anticolonial project to dismantle the racialized violence of the [Zionist] settler colonial state and its genocidal efforts to erase and remove Palestinians from existence and history" (Yunis Varas and Tanksley 133). As Palestinians, we know the work of liberation demands constant vigilance against the subtle and pervasive ways in which the ongoing Zionist settler-colonial project takes more power and land, further enacting violence and erasure of our people. We understand then that our voices provide direct challenges to the racism that is built into the fabric of the Zionist settler state. As we witness the genocide live on our phones, speak on it, and receive repercussions for our advocacy, we realize and understand that the silencing we are facing is evidence that what we have to say–our Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics–challenge the USpolicy and narrative that excuses

Zionist settler colonial violence.

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Students are being harassed and attacked, treated as comfortable college brats who are attending to the latest fad instead of righteously enraged that we are waging this violent genocide on a people an ocean away. Megyn Kelly literally made a segment to say that they're all ugly, and that's why they are protesting. What is happening? How is this reality? How do people feel ok saying these things? Have none of them read any history? Hind's Hall was not an accidental choice. That place carries histories of protest. And they named it for her because the violence she endured was a psychological terror as well as brutal assault on her, her family, and the rescuers attempting to get to her for 24 hours. All murdered.

The students have given us hope. They are telling us they see *what is happening, and mainstream media and elderly politicians' extreme gaslighting propaganda is* not working on them.

There is *hope.*

Una esperanza que no pensé que podría sentir. Y siguen.

We read and learned in school of the Civil Rights Movement. Of the Vietnam War protests. We learned all of this, no? Columbia brags of having learned its lessons. What lessons did they learn? They are repressing student activists again, like they did in 1968.

Biden speaks of student encampments and protesters as anti-Semitic, yet again violently conflating critiques of the violent Zionist settler state of Israel with critiques of Jews. Yet we see our Jewish siblings also being beaten by our police state, our Jewish faculty and heads of department thrown to the floor for pointing at the violence, arrested, and fired.

Instead, it is Zionist sympathizers at the pro-Israel counterprotests doing the very same *physical and psychological torture that the IOF enact in Palestine–they throw firecrackers into encampments, beat students with wooden planks, play sounds of roosters in the middle of the night, or worst yet, children crying, just as the IOF did to lure Palestinians out of their homes to then bomb them.*

They are now doing it here, *in our so-called Land of the Free.*

What is happening? What kind of dystopia are we in?

Bernardita

Present

We are all exhausted, unable to afford the time to cry, mourn, process, or be with our families because it feels like we are the only ones who are against this genocide. The world watches, but we work. In between grading, I read lists of new martyrs to see if family members, loved ones, or families of my friends experienced a new loss. Before I teach, I take a deep breath to focus on what I must do for the next hour. Before I go to bed, I pray that this genocide ends the moment my eyes close. But this is nothing - absolutely nothing - in comparison to my siblings in Gaza. If I constantly feel this ghassa grow larger every day, unable to process this horror, what are they going through? This is why we work around the clock - we can sleep when Palestine is free.

sarah

Embodying Palestinian Feminism's Survivance Rhetorics

My message to all women and feminists is to just keep posting about Palestine and Palestinians, and to spread the truth, to spread the news as much as they can, to keep talking about us. We are not numbers. Tell the world that we are not only under bombing as every time before, but that this time we are under a genocide. Tell the women and feminists that huge numbers of mothers lost their children and huge numbers of children will complete their lives without their mothers. Keep posting and posting and posting about us … keep us in your prayers. – Mona (Ihmoud, "Love in a Time of Genocide" 88).

The quote from Mona, a Palestinian woman from Gaza and a student of feminism, illustrates the exigencies of survivance in an ongoing genocide. As of January 6, 2025, over 17,492 children have been murdered by indiscriminate Zionist settler state bombings (AJLabs), pregnant women in Gaza are malnourished and without proper prenatal care (Nadworny), and infections and curable diseases run rampant amongst babies and children (Husain). As the genocide continues, we witness the survivance of Palestinian mothers who make diapers out of scraps from tents, go to sleep hungry to ensure their children's bellies are full, and give birth without medication or anesthetics. Palestinian feminism "offers an expansive vision of Palestinian survivance" (Ihmoud, "Palestinian Feminism" 1), providing embodied ways to understand the world, our actions, and our place when advocating for the decolonization and liberation of Palestine. In this section, we connect survivance with Palestinian feminism to illustrate the importance of embodiment within counter-story. Through this, we counter colonial feminist framings of Palestinian women as passive and defenseless beings needing to be saved (Ihmoud, "Love In A Time of Genocide" 88). Additionally, we build upon how PalestinianCRT and survivance are crucial within a Palestinian feminist orientation.

A Palestinian feminist analytical frame focuses on anti-colonial and decolonial resistance to the elimination of all Palestinian people and land and recognizes the importance of embodiment in feminist

rhetorics. Johnson et al. declare that feminist rhetorics require the body to be recontextualized to understand experiences and meaning-making through rhetorical and signifying power (39). For example, classifications of Palestinian women's bodies as security threats under a lens of colonial feminism (Palestinian Feminist Collective, "Shut Down Colonial Feminism") call on rhetoricians to understand embodiments of experience narrated to contest racist, Orientalist, and colonial stereotypes. Rightfully so, embodied methodologies, such as counterstory, help contest hegemonic rhetorics that seek to dismiss Palestinian women's bodies as determined targets by the Zionist entity aiming to eliminate future generations. Indeed, these methodologies allow us to accurately contextualize how, fifteen months into the genocide, women and children make up a majority of those murdered (Motamedi and Chughtai).

At the same time, Palestinian feminism contends that Palestinian bodies, despite gender and sexuality, are under threat by Zionism. Bodies carry signifying power (Johnson et al. 40), and Palestinian bodies are no different. The intersections of racialization and sexualization of Palestinian bodies and embodiment explain the sexual violence against Palestinian men, stripped, blindfolded, and assaulted, while at the same time recognizing the rampant, systemic sexual violence against Palestinian women and girls perpetrated by IOF soldiers in occupied Gaza and the occupied West Bank (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, "UN Experts Appalled"). Embodied grammars of Palestinian feminism function through Palestinians' continued ability to survive genocide and resist the erasure of violence through sharing testimonies and calling audiences to bear witness to their daily violence (Ihmoud, "Palestinian Feminism" 3). Palestinian feminism acknowledges the continued creation of new generations, songs, laughter, food, and investment in our communities as embodied actions of Palestinian feminism. Each of these exists to contest ongoing Zionist settler colonialism, carried in our voice and bodies to share with our kin and the world. The necessity of the body and voice in understanding Palestinian survivance exhibits how embodiment simultaneously encompasses Palestinian history, memories, and visions of the future. Concurrently, we witness the embodiment of power to narrate as we hear Bisan Owda, a Palestinian *hakawatiyeh* (storyteller) turned journalist after the start of the genocide, begin her daily updates in Gaza by instructing her audience that she is still alive.

Power structures, such as ongoing Zionist settler colonization, also affect how narratives are shared. As discussed in our introduction, Palestinian narratives of massacres, ongoing Zionist settler colonization, and genocide are systemically censored and ignored. Digital apartheid, coined by Omar Zahzah in 2021, continues during this genocide through censorship and shadowbanning many popular social media accounts on platforms such as X, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Khan). Palestinians and allies experience account restrictions, content removal, and accusations of hate speech on social media platforms. In contrast, other accounts of hate speech, such as the one million classified cases of hate speech against Palestinians between October 2023 and November 2023 on various social media platforms, remain (7amleh). A focus on embodiment to battle such power (Johnson et al. 39) allows Palestinians to speak directly to audiences to whom they are systemically denied access by other means. Palestinian feminism and survivance rhetorics, connected through embracing and analyzing embodiments of experience, remain within and carried by our bodies. In developing Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics, we note the importance of embodiment as a central

aspect of survivance rhetorics, Palestinian or otherwise.

As part of our praxes, we are deeply imbued with and birthed from Palestinian feminism, a political project (Ihmoud, "Palestinian Feminism" 1). Thus, Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics discursively and materially affect how we communicate about ongoing genocide and ongoing Zionist settler colonization of Palestine. Dually, it allows audiences to understand Palestinian narratives through a lens that embodies infinitive temporalities, feminist collectivity, and counterstory dialogics, the tenets we define as Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics. In the following pages, we perform and define the building blocks of our Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics, solidifying the bridges we build across disciplines, across countries and oceans, across violence and death.

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Despite this brutality on all fronts, our sisterhood is strong. We connect, we console, we encourage each other. Maybe we need to get punching bags to let out some of this rage. Because, unlike how the mainstream media paints us (I'm looking at you, Dana Bash, Mika Brzezinski, CNN, MSNBC, and the rest of you all who are peddling a propaganda so egregious most people can see it as you spew it)--our beautiful community of students are not *the violent ones.*

We gather. We create signs. We sing and dance. We organize donation drives to have food and other resources for student encampments, even as we continue to fundraise to pay private Egyptian travel coordination firms to get our people out of Gaza.

*We come together. In group chats. At protests. To support our students. To remind each other we are not losing our minds, and everything that is happening is completely f*cked. And it* is *all happening. We see it with our own eyes. Our people text us and write to us, post to social media, and share these realities. We see it. We know it is truth. And we know it is* wrong.

We will continue to come together, to hold each other through this moment, to get us through, and to fight for all of our liberation from this irrational colonial violence–here in our police state, and in Palestine.

Bernardita

Future

How else do I persuade (I can't believe I have to persuade…) people to understand that genocide is happening? How else do I shake people out of their ignorance? How else can we amplify our voices as the House of Representatives votes on declaring the phrase "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" as anti-Jewish? You may not see it, but we are broken, burned, and hurt. We maintain our principled values as we fight from *within the belly of the beast. Gaza's job is to survive. Our job is to amplify our voices, signs, disruptions, encamp-*

ments, and collective action to burst out of the belly and expose the beast's innards full of mass graves, murdered children, war crimes, human rights violations, and decimated environments. Once the beast is killed, we are all free. It is on the horizon, I promise I see the sun rising.

sarah

Enactments of Palestinian Feminist Survivance Rhetorics

Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics provide new heuristics to understand how survivance rhetorics, PalestinianCRT, and Palestinian feminism merge through our counterstories. Counterstories help communities pursue epistemic justice against settler colonialism and disenfranchisement to create a community for those who narrate pain, hope, and violence (Atallah et al. 684). Utilizing counterstory within transformative healing also assists in uplifting "women leaders collectively reflecting and sharing narratives and knowledges about strategies that challenge these hierarchies, patriarchies, geographies, and multiple entry points for resisting intersecting oppressions in daily life…" (Atallah et al. 685). As Palestinians, our counterstories travel across borders, time, and experiences to detail a broader Palestinian political national narrative since the Nabka in 1948, which altered time, history, and memory for Palestinians. Against the backdrop of genocide, our counterstories respond to an urgent exigence to stop the ongoing Zionist settler colonial violence happening in Palestine and across the SWANA region, and all violence across the globe. This section introduces three tenets of Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics: Palestinian infinitive temporalities, feminist collectivity, and counterstory dialogics that we discovered through our process of writing and counterstorying. These tenets add to the map of Palestinian feminism that Ihmoud outlines in her article, identifying key rhetorical elements enveloped within Palestinian feminism.

Our counterstories find Palestinian infinitive temporalities as a tenet of Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics. Infinitive temporalities challenge the movement of time in a linear fashion, a characteristic of settler colonialism. Instead of linearity, "survivance enables the past, present, and future to circulate freely and embraces the role of one's past to influence one's present and future" (Wieskamp and Smith 81). Additionally, infinitive temporalities in storytelling promote collective agency and healing while concurrently providing structural critiques (Wieskamp and Smith 85). Through this, Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics identify the importance time holds in how we understand and process the ongoing genocide in Palestine today and open up space to imagine futures absent violence and oppression. As we stated at the beginning of this piece, witnessing an unfolding genocide is not enough for those in power to halt the violence, nor has it in the past, such as in 1948, 1967, 1982, or today.

With infinitive temporalities, we highlight the importance of our orientation towards time. We understand the root of ongoing Zionist settler colonial violence began during the 1948 Nakba and continued throughout the decades to the siege on Gaza starting in 2007. Yet all these moments collapse together–we carry this moment of genocide and Zionist settler colonial occupation while holding trauma from pre-1948,

at the turn of the century under Ottoman rule, and beyond. Students have in the past and continue to protest today the genocide, settler colonial, and imperial violences such as in South Africa, Vietnam, and Palestine. Our counterstories are critical because, with this understanding of all histories and current moments, we can contest Biden's accusations of the Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza faking death tolls (Harb), that this new "conflict" began on October 7, 2023, or that student activists are terrorists on their campuses (Korte). As Within Our Lifetime, a grassroots organization based in New York City, writes in their statement about the encampments that grew across the nation and world in the Spring 2024 semester, "We have been marching, chanting, engaging in mass protest and direct action for decades, trying to show the world that our people in Gaza are worthy of life as they bear witness to 75 years of genocide" (Within Our Lifetime). This specific disruption to common understandings of genocide is crucial—genocide has persisted as long as Palestinians are subject to Zionist settler colonialism. As our counterstories disrupt time itself, Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics provide new possibilities for alternative ways of understanding Palestinian existence, resistance, and Return. Our grief and loss do not stand alone but instead, influence new Palestinian futures that collapse time upon ongoing Zionist settler colonialism and open new decolonial opportunities for the future. This future, though, is not just for us as individuals but for our entire Palestinian community spread across the globe.

In writing these counterstories and this article, we discover our feminist collectivity as pertinent to Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics. Feminist collectivity describes an ethic and understanding of how Palestinian feminism circulates and grows with community, not absent one (Ihmoud, "Palestinian Feminism" 2). It relies upon our Palestinian feminist ancestors, who each elevated how we embody and showcase Palestinian feminism today. Palestinian feminism is a collective liberatory praxis that is labored and built by us all, so within our Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics, we recognize the shoulders we stand on. As we, sarah and Bernardita, sit on Zoom and in our shared Google document, writing, processing, thinking, editing, and affirming each other and our realities, we enact the praxis we write about–our Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics. This notices the pluralities of Palestinian feminism within us, guided by our own life experiences and others who surround us. For example, we collectively found our Palestinian survivance rhetorics through our research, interactions, and processing of our experiences. We share gratitude for our Palestinian feminist inspirations who brought us to this moment to co-write this article. Together, we grieve, we recoup and replenish, and we come together to restrengthen and keep fighting for a liberated Palestine.

This piece grew in community from beginning to end, not absent from it. Feminist collectivity acknowledges how these rhetorics circulate, finding similarities among our experiences. Due to our collective trauma of ongoing Zionist settler colonization, including the genocide happening to our people in Palestine currently, feminist collectivity defines the importance community holds in sharing and uplifting ideas that we co-create together. It is naive to say that this article is absent from our organizing, interpersonal, and social lives, which influence how we process, understand, and theorize information. Returning to praxis-driven theory, Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics emerge from our feminist collectivity, with commitments to movement building to ensure all of our kin are free.

Finally, we ground our Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics in this counterstory dialogic, a process of counterstorying in dialogue together, constantly challenging stock stories. Martinez reminds us that "[s]tock stories feign neutrality and at all costs avoid any blame or responsibility for social inequality" or, more insidiously, the violences that they perpetuate (Martinez 34). We enact our counterstory dialogics in our writing as we co-write, co-think, and co-feel our pain and anger. We live it as we gather to write and spend large parts of our meetings discussing the latest *hasbara* from both the Zionist settler state and its significant upholder, the USimperial power. [5] We rage discussing Hillary Clinton's latest assault on our mobilized youth and student movements as ignorant of history merely because they fight against the stock story that she and others in this imperial government peddle for their benefit and maintenance of power. We understand our imperative: our counterstories are necessary because the propaganda machine maintains its power in our silence. At this moment, we are facing the profound necessity of contending with these–now clearly evidently–violent stock stories that relegate us to ignorance or, worse yet, terrorism and evil.

Thus, engaging in our counterstory dialogics is a critical part of our survivance. Dialoguing our experiences with this psychological warfare to gaslight our understanding of the realities we clearly see is vital. Palestinians and those now fighting in the trenches of this ideological propaganda war are doing so because, daily, we must contend with the constant denial of our realities. We write, come together, and speak because we know that will liberate us. As we know, "[c]ounterstory as methodology serves to expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege and can help to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Martinez 34). In our embodied dialogues, as Palestinians in academia, in rhetorical studies, constantly in precarity, we are always embattled in this fight for our survivance.

As a recalibration of rhetorical engagement and theory, this article begins with and is informed by Palestine to develop our understanding of Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics. Counterstory "interrupts the status quo of rhetoric and writing studies theory to drive home the necessity for, and viability of, creative, narrative modes of analysis" (Maraj 199). Our disruptions to scholarship-as-usual challenge how contemporary rhetorical theory does not position itself to respond to our experiences and people while genocide ensues in Palestine as part of more prolonged Zionist settler colonization. Instead, we focus on the transformative networks that shed light on how Palestinian feminism and survivance rhetorics intertwine to challenge the powers that extend this genocide. This is why defining and expanding Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics is fundamental to recognizing the rhetorical power of Palestinian counterstories.

We return to our claim at the beginning of this article – that rhetoric materially affects the world around us. Choices of how we narrate our experiences, whether audiences accept or deny invitations to that worldview, map how hegemonic narratives continue and are disrupted. Palestinian feminist survivance

5 Hasbara is a Hebrew word for "explaining," and is now popularly used for Israeli propaganda. As described in Al-Shabaka brief, "Rooted in pre-existing concepts of state-sponsored propaganda, agitprop, and information warfare, hasbara aims to shape the very parameters of acceptable discourse. This involves a coordinated effort by both state institutions and NGOs to bolster Israeli domestic unity, secure support of allies, and influence how media, intellectuals, and influencers discuss Israel" (Kenney-Shawa).

rhetorics through counterstories create fissures in this hegemony. As this genocide continues, there is not a lack of response to the brutal murder of Palestinians in occupied Gaza and the occupied West Bank. The National March on Washington was the largest protest for Palestine in UShistory on November 4, 2023 (H.). We see the global student movement demand divestment from Zionist institutions and war profiteers at their colleges and universities. In response, the militarization, policing, and surveillance of students on campuses called by university presidents and boards of trustees resulted in over two thousand students, professors, and community members arrested to date. Global protests, such as on Tax Day (April 15, 2024) and May Day (May 1, 2024), called on unions, the working class, and citizens to block economic pathways across the nation. An uncommitted vote campaign grew in strength against sitting president, "Genocide" Joe Biden, one of many complicit actors enabling this genocide to continue. Each of these modes of protest centers on Palestinians in occupied Gaza.

As brave students across the nation in encampments faced Zionist, police, and university repression, they remind us that the violence they experience is minimal to what those in Gaza do (Kestler-D'Amours). It is for this reason that these same students liberated buildings by renaming them Intifada Hall at California Polytechnic University - Humboldt, Hind's Hall at Columbia University, Diana Amari Sabbagh Library at New York University, Fathi Ghaben Place at the Rhode Island School of Design, and Refaat Alareer Memorial Library at Portland State University, and more. These examples are one way that we see Palestine's martyrs' narratives and lives re-centered as hegemonic powers deny them; in fact, these efforts directly counter these gaslighting narratives that erase us by placing our martyrs front and center to be un-denied. More broadly, grassroots movements in the United States and globally showcase what it means to resist an ongoing genocide. We follow this lead.

We all can make changes, whether it is following the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaigns against companies directly profiting off of Palestinian genocide and land theft, protesting on the streets, speaking out in meetings and the classroom, or blocking celebrities complicit or silent about the ongoing genocide. Despite what we can do, all of these actions rely on people listening to and believing Palestinian counterstories, which prompt the globe into action. This is why we write and name these frameworks and methodological praxis–because we see how our counterstories shatter the master narratives of white supremacy and the Zionist settler state. The socially acceptable narrative is changing in front of our eyes as genocide persists. We are no longer accepting the lies we have been fed, and we are listening to ourselves, to each other, and to Palestinians. With Palestinian feminist survivance rhetorics, we can speak our truths into existence. In response, the world is accepting our invitations to a Palestinian analytic to create a world where we are all free. And so, we continue to call out, unafraid: From the river to the sea, Palestine will be Free!

Fighting for *Jannah* (Heaven)

Bernardita: Do you ever feel afraid, sarah?

sarah: I don't know anymore. All the fear I experienced in my life doesn't even compare with what I see coming out of Gaza. Am I allowed to be afraid anymore? Or maybe a better question, what is fear really?

Bernardita: Right? How can we feel afraid? I feel afraid for my daughter. I don't want her life at risk. But if I am afraid for her, and I see all the bloodied babies with shrapnel and concrete dust on their faces, and know the thousands of *people*, real human lives–mothers, fathers, children, brothers, sisters, tatas… I have to keep fighting for them. What example would I be giving my baby if I don't fight for all the families?

sarah: I am scared of being afraid - what if it consumes me and I can't do anything to combat it? I guess I am afraid of being afraid. But then I see videos of Palestinians in Gaza singing *Jannah,* a Palestinian folk song, during Ramadan, when they didn't even have food or water to break their fast with. While I know my feelings are valid, I don't think fear is the right word to characterize what's in my body. It's anger, frustration, a pit of unknowingness. But as our people sing outside their tents being multiply-displaced, "Palestine in heaven." We are fighting for heaven itself.

Bernardita: I have a sticker on my laptop that reads, "They used to say Palestinians fight like heroes. Now they say heroes fight like Palestinians." I understand it so much more deeply now. There's something about living through this moment, witnessing our fight, our resistance, our spirit, our *hope* enacted in this way. Our joy. Yes. We are fighting for heaven itself. How can we not have hope? When we see what our people have survived already, and lived through, and keep enduring. They are the strength. They are why we keep going.

sarah: I cannot stand it when people try to just characterize us as weak and helpless. They don't understand our strength and love in our hearts and souls. We never inherited these false narratives, just the hope that we will Return and the struggle to fight against our oppression. My dad always told me that we are from the land of giants - I see us tower over the world as we demonstrate what real freedom is. I wonder if the world sees that, too.

Bernardita: Beautiful. I believe it. I believe things are changing. We are being seen. The youth sees us, and are mobilizing. Their power is beautiful and inspires me, because after having been afraid for so long, to have to be scared of how people in this country might receive my identity as Palestinian because of so much ignorance, hate, and anti-Arab and Palestinian racism, people see us now as living, breathing humans. Their narrative about us is failing. Like Ahlam told us back in November, Palestine will liberate the world. Yeah, part of me feels a sinking fear right before I am propelled by our strength and bravery. We are unafraid because we have to–to honor our ancestors, to honor our people in the homeland now.

sarah: I really think that our ancestors and people are with us, always pushing us forward. And we are with them until we can all sit amongst the olive trees in a free Palestine.

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Response to Peitho Special Issue on Transnational Feminist Rhetorics Spring 2025

Transdisciplinary Contiguities and Disjunctures: The Present and Future of Transnational Feminist Rhetorics

Belinda Walzer, Tarez Samra Graban, Jennifer Nish, Sweta Baniya

Abstract: This collaborative response foregrounds key questions that challenge the field to remember its theoretical histories and reassert its political commitments. We raise key questions about Transnational Feminist Rhetoric's (TFR's) disjunctures and contiguities with other critical frameworks, including intersectional, postcolonial, and decolonial feminisms that seek similar ends, by asking several questions: For what or for whom are we disciplining, and to whom do these disciplinary boundaries matter? How does TFR contend with the disjuncture between expectation and experience, for example in the ways in which scholars replicate or produce notions of US academia as something that exists only outside of itself? Drawing from the essays in this special issue, we highlight TFR as a framework for fostering transnational solidarities and epistemological justice in the face of colonial, imperial, and neoliberal legacies. We caution against the risk of TFR becoming a hollow signifier and instead advocate for an approach that remembers the field's critical roots. Ultimately, this multivocal response invites deeper dialogue and renewed commitment to the transformative impact of TFR on everyday lives.

Tags: transnational feminist rhetorics, transdisciplinarity, critical contextual ontology, ubuntu/abantu, hybrid listening.

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In the context of arguing for a transnational feminist cultural politics, Inderpal Grewal notes that "[w]hat we now call a transnational approach in feminist research emerged to make connections across feminisms and national boundaries by theorizing how feminist scholarship and feminist formations needed to contend with a history of colonialism, culture, and empire that spanned continents and nations" ("Rethinking Patriarchy" 56). We take up Grewal's call for this ongoing need to further critique the *transnational*; in fact, *need* is principal in driving the following work. The contributors to this special issue on Transnational Feminist Rhetorics (TFR) have collectively demonstrated the need for a roadmap that can develop and nurture connections and solidarities across cultures, economies, injustices, and epistemologies. In their own ways, they challenge readers to either question or understand various personal and political underpinnings of what Tambe and Thayer call a "disjuncture" that is shaped by the relationships and tensions between intersectional feminism and postcolonial and decolonial feminisms (5). They put localized personal and political experiences into global conversation in order to make space for feminist ways of knowledge-making.

In turn, when the editors of *Peitho* first approached a group of us to provide a response to these essays in this special issue, our immediate reaction was to draft the response through a reciprocal, collaborative, feminist method. After reading the essays, we generated several thematic questions that emerged not only from these essays, but also from the need for a larger reading of the field. The following response should be read as a multivocal call-to-action for scholars and practitioners in TFR. It is less an endorsement or response that presumes definitive answers to the questions that emerged from our reading of the essays gathered in this issue, and more an *opening* to future conversation, questions, and deeper dialogue around the need for TFR.

In particular, the questions that arose in our discussions of the future of TFR have to do with the transdisciplinarity and critical border-crossing that TFR encourages, even as we have observed the conversation moving away from its critical history and theoretical origins. For its attention to politics of gender, political economies, advocacy, and mobility, TFR scholarship—if not approached consciously, critically, and with care—can risk becoming an empty signifier, a nullity, an umbrella for projects loosely interested in cultural or international study and the effects of such study on feminist or gendered subjects. We ask, then: Have we arrived at a disciplinary stage in which TFR has come to mean everything and nothing, a critical frame that is simultaneously depoliticized even as it is used to critique everything?

Following from this is the question of how TFR is adjacent or contiguous to other current critical frames (e.g., Critical Race Theory, decolonialism, antiracism, queer studies, cultural studies, etc.) that may seek to achieve similar goals but which may or may not also be transnational. What do these other frames

enable or foreclose for TFR? And what do we gain and lose when these lines blur or when TFR slips away from its theoretical origins? Forty years after Chandra Mohanty's 1984 essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," if we have, indeed, arrived at a critical place in which the goals or outcomes of TFR have become blurred, what is gained or lost in holding on to or letting go of this critical space? Do we double down on the history of TFR, leaning heavily on the shoulders of the postcolonial critics that defined the terms of the field in its emergence decades ago, acknowledging the continuing relevance of their critiques, or do we embrace the slippery nature of the conversation as it merges and blends with these other critical frames?

This line of thought led us to the larger question of the stakes of this kind of disciplinary work: For what or (for) whom are we disciplining and to whom do these disciplinary boundaries matter? How can TFR scholarship move beyond stasis around its definitions and re-definitions, away from perpetual questions of "what *is* this?" and toward questions of "what does this *do*, and for *whom*?" Knowing that transnational feminist rhetorical theory both relies on and questions the politics of scale, and yet knowing that these politics themselves rely on a disruption or discomfiting of nationalist perspectives and ideologies, what other motives can or should guide TFR's comparative agendas and methodologies (Jiminez, "Speculative Linking")?

In thinking through the stakes of disciplinary integrity for TFR and its contiguities with other critical interventions, we turn to rhetorical philosopher Omedi Ochieng, who implores us to think about intellectual practices through their *critical contextual ontology*, or "a systematic, comprehensive account of knowledge as emergent in actually existing contexts as opposed to idealized scenarios" (*Intellectual Imagination* 4). In other words, we must recognize the ways in which intellectual thought is bounded temporally and socially, networked through operations of power so that outcomes and products of knowledge are "interanimated" with the structural and the material (*Intellectual Imagination* 2). This should ring true to TFR scholars as much of its foundational critical lens is to recognize and counter the problematically centralized world view of "Western" feminism (Al-Khateeb et al.). We think we should pay special attention to this critique given the mutually enabling relationships between the (historically often problematic) production of knowledge sponsored by US universities and our contemporary political moment in which institutions of higher education in the US are under grave threat.

For example, how does TFR uphold and break down the binaries of In/Out as identified in Anand's poem and as discussed by Dhar and Mizan, and the expectations that are generated through such binaries? Rather than reifying these idealized scenarios for knowledge production and thus the binary fixity of that which is being compared, Ochieng seeks to de-dichotomize comparative work in North Atlantic higher education. He argues instead that foundational constructs like "North America" or "Africa" are not "pure" or authentic, but rather mutually constituted by infinite influences in symbiotic ways (*Groundwork* 4). For the sake of the thought experiment, let's draw a parallel between the disciplinary conversation of TFR and ideological constructs like "North America." Although this is a bit of a false comparison, it helps us think through the larger point regarding how all critical thought is compromised by ideology. In other words, we must

think about our critical engagement in TFR as emergent habitus, "responsive to embeddedness, embodiedness, enablement, encounter, and engenderment" and it must be attuned to "intertwined, generative, and emergent practices" (*Groundwork* 3). Responsive to our precarity, vulnerability, and our distributed agency and subjectivity, this "ontology of knowledge as embodied habitus" can produce "solidarity and participatory world making" (*Groundwork* 4). Thus, through this lens of what Ochieng calls *critical contextual ontology,* we can reinvigorate the ethical intellectual work of TFR to become more attuned to "fugitive forms of knowledge pulsing below the frequencies of supremacist discourses" (*Intellectual Imagination* 4).

Beyond recognizing disciplinary integrity as something that is both constitutive and emergent, we also consider what it could mean for TFR to both highlight *and* question decolonizing agendas or other critical frameworks. For example, we think of how Zimbabwean-born writer and scholar Panashe Chigumadzi necessarily complicates indigenous terms of identification in pan-African and African diasporic discourse, such as *ubuntu*. Chigumadzi argues that, contrary to popular belief, *ubuntu* did not only come of interest during South Africa's late 20th-century democratic transitions, reminding us that, in the long nineteenth century, *ubuntu* had historically provided isiXhosa-speaking intellectuals with "an indigenous ethics of 'conquest and incorporation.' The idea of *umuntu ebantwini* (a person amongst people) is a more accurate way of understanding this concept that is simultaneously central to pan-African identity and yet so variant across and within cultural and linguistic regions in Africa" ("Can"; *Nineteenth*). For Chigumadzi, appropriating *ubuntu* without understanding *abantu*—the isiXhosa term that differentiates between people of the land and generations of colonists, oppressors, settlers, and their dependents—constitutes its own form of dispossession of heritage, or its own re-settling of colonized thinking (*Nineteenth*). Chigumadzi may or may not self-identify as a transnational feminist rhetorical theorist, but in her careful articulation of latent perspectives about togetherness, we see TFR's persistence in questioning how particular ideologies become privileged in the cross-national borrowing and co-optation of key terms associated with or as markers of decoloniality. Additionally, we think of the problem of the transnational archive (Graban; Lowe), about the interstitial realities of TFR archival work, and the necessity of approaching "archives" in and within transnational spaces with expectations other than re-positioning, reclamation, restoration, or sovereignty. Their instability and dispersal requires a different kind of curational knowledge, and potentially muddies questions of ownership and appropriation. Put another way, we recognize in TFR agendas a commitment to breaking the status quo around decolonizing arguments, even when that status quo is informed by culturally corrective ways of thinking.

Broadly speaking, then, transnational *feminism* has its greatest potential in limning neoliberal agendas and diffusing the liberalization of markets and media (Tambe and Thayer 2), whereas transnational *feminist rhetorics* has even greater potential to extend this limning toward discomfiting contemporary methods of feminist analysis and activism. Part of this limning involves recognizing critical narratives that emerge from multi-, cross-, and hybrid cultural spaces and how those narratives raise timely questions about allyship, solidarity, and coalitioning together (Al-Khateeb et al.). For example, in Dhar and Mizan's essay in this special issue, the main ethnographic subject represents a "triple positioning": they are Bangladeshi, female, and a graduate student. In the U.S., as the authors argue, even among linguistically, culturally, and spiritually

diverse South Asian communities, Bangladeshis stand out, partly due to the number of borders they share with other republics, and partly due to their expansive USimmigration pipeline. The added epistemological challenge of being a *female* Bangladeshi graduate in the USwho seeks to ally with global minorities makes for a rich transversal of perspectives, experiences, and struggles. But part of this limning also lies beyond the recognition of multicultural, cross-cultural, and hybrid identifications, and even beyond discomfiting racial, cultural, ethnic, national, or linguistic claims to positionality. Just as LuMing Mao (and Ed Schiappa before him) articulated a critical turning point in comparative rhetorical studies—by directing rhetorical philosophies away from "facts of essence" (questions of "what this is") toward "facts of usage" (questions of "how this comes to be known")—we see a critical turning point in TFR in that it does not content itself with the validation of experience. Instead, it looks critically at what occurs in the interstices of/across/between national and colonial contexts.

Finally, as we consider future directions in and for transnational feminist rhetorical theory, in what ways do TFR writers and scholars contend with this very disjuncture between expectation and experience, for example in the ways in which we respond to and sometimes produce a notion of US academia as a myth that exists only outside of itself, such as configuring/imagining the US (higher education) as a "safe" or productive space for critical thought? How does our scholarship perpetuate or get supported by this myth? Just as Ochieng encourages us to attend to the broader histories of encounter (e.g., between "East" and "West" or "Africa" and "North Atlantic"), how can we invent new spaces for TFR that don't co-produce this myth? These questions seem especially relevant given the current radical dissolution of this myth in a moment when higher education and TFR in particular are under siege.

Most obvious, for example, is the recognition that, as transnational feminist rhetorical scholars, we are not currently in equally precarious positions–some academics are experiencing more threat and precarity than others. This has always been the case, but it is especially visible now. In our discourses of coping and critique, are we moving toward new agencies and belongings, or are we repeating older patterns—for example, by constructing some US states as "safe" and others as "unsafe" (a pattern that has been intensifying even prior to 2025) (Hijazi, "Syrian Refugee Women")? Less obvious is that inasmuch as these expectations can become disrupted by experiences with broader educational and national policies, cultural assumptions, or jurisprudence (Anand, "My Queer"; Dhar and Mizan, "Transnational Counterstories"), how do we approach academic work without the promise of intellectual and material safety (Dweik and Varas, "To Gather"; Dhar and Mizan, "Transnational Counterstories")?

In fact, the practical, material realities of transnational encounters are often disconnected from these theoretical and ideological promises. In her research on branch campuses of American universities in the Gulf Arab States, Neha Vora cautions against the pervasive myths about the American university that recur in conversations about the globalization of higher education and "easy dismissals or celebrations of the practice of global higher education" ("Is the University Universal?" 20). Instead, she encourages nuanced attention to the ways that the travel of higher education, exemplified in international branch campuses of US

institutions, involves complex and multidirectional exchange and knowledge production informed by diverse configurations of people, ideas, cultures, institutions, and geopolitical relationships. Vora calls these branch campuses of US academia "sites of new agencies and belongings" (*Teach* 29), in contrast to critics' objections to these branch campuses that "ironically rely upon facile and Orientalist understandings of Gulf governments, people, and politics in order to argue against American neocolonialism in the region…[and] venture dangerously close to moral judgments and civilizational discourse about which places in the world are ready for democratic government, Western education, or civil society" (21).

Vora's observations match many of ours as we find our respective scholarly backgrounds in transnational feminist rhetorical studies sometimes clash with the other ways we have been trained as faculty or with the demands of being writing program administrators and/or program directors. In fact, still relatively few scholars in transnational feminist rhetoric engage with the practical and material ways that TFR might inform writing program administration and/or composition instruction, within or outside the US. For example, a material problem faced by a group of instructors at American University of Beirut (where one of our co-authors administered the writing program) involved creating a custom textbook that did not merely reproduce a North American orientation to the field. As they co-edited a custom reader, they recognized an ideological challenge: most of the readings they could find about core aspects of writing instruction (e.g., texts about the writing process or the rhetorical situation) were written by US authors and assumed an audience of US students. While AUB's identity as an "American-style" university provided an easy dismissal of this problem, such an approach would completely miss the opportunities for rich cultural, political, and knowledge production and exchange that institutions like AUB (and the branch campuses Vora describes, despite their different context) make possible. Our interest in the globalization of higher education stems from our experiences grappling with the US-centrism of rhetoric and composition, which became especially evident as our colleague at AUB realized that the history of composition and writing studies she learned as a graduate student narrated a trajectory from Harvard in the 1800s through various key developments in 20th century US universities without referencing locations beyond the US. Even scholarship that engages with questions of identity and difference tends to focus on North American contexts. This orientation creates a disjuncture between practical experience and the material needs of students, instructors, and the discipline around which their work is oriented. It is these nested complexities that inspire us to push the limits of TFR beyond obvious comparisons of difference, pat identifications, and comfortable answers to uncomfortable questions as it scales outward in transnational contexts.

Perhaps one of TFR's greatest potentials moving forward, then, is in coming up with ways of *listening actively* to complexity and hybridity. In this way, TFR's disciplinary strengths lie also in its constraints: it requires antistasis and it both demonstrates and troubles the politics of scale—where scaling up attends to how the local informs the global, and scaling out attends to how a particular event becomes a mobilizing tool for other events. To "trouble" the politics of scale is to question enactments of decolonizing and other inclusive agendas so as to avoid falling into one's own representational traps whereby TFR becomes too much associated with only certain kinds of identity projects or becomes too much opposed to global or comparative work.

Instead, TFR is attuned to how and when experiences of hybridity require new ways of listening actively. The value of listening practices is not new to feminist rhetorical studies. From Jacqueline Jones Royster's multipart action for understanding voice as a code for cross-cultural conduct (38), to Krista Ratcliffe's negotiation of cultural identifications for interpretive invention (17, 25), *listening* has been theorized as equal parts engagement and inquiry. Yet listening as *cultural identification* and listening as *action* are not synonymous. The latter requires more than a unilateral understanding of culture—of what it is, whose it is, who "owns" it or claims its sovereignty—and requires more than the exchange of Eurocentric practices for more global ones (Kock and Villadsen). Listening actively to hybridity—or *hybrid* listening—requires the ability to think creatively about how to interrogate each interlocutor's own cultural trusts along various axes of epistemology, and further, how to use that creative, interrogative energy to recognize the deeply ingrained cultural biases that shut down conversation before it can even begin.

Thus, we argue that perhaps it is more productive to consider the dialectical relationship in which the discourses and experiences being compared are mutually constituted and are only "disciplined" by their metatextual comparison. Rather than thinking about what is gained or lost in the potential depoliticizing of TFR through its disciplinary muddying, we suggest that a better question for these times is the following: What is gained or lost in policing these discursive categories when there is a much more urgent demand to speak truth to power in more mutually care-*ful* ways that are attuned not to our institutional demands, but to our communities and relationships? To ask the needful question of whom the conversation serves is to embrace the critical contextual ontology thrumming through the discipline even as we seek to preserve the deeply political and critical nature of the question and the field.

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Book Reviews

Review of *Failing Sideways: Queer Possibilities for Writing Assessment*

Thomas Gurinskas

West-Puckett, Stephanie, Nicole I. Caswell, and William P. Banks. *Failing Sideways: Queer Possibilities for Writing Assessment.* Utah State University Press, 2023.

Tags: assessment, book review, composition studies, education, embodiment, feminist killjoys, innovative educational practices, queer methodology, queer rhetoric, teaching writing, writing studies

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Failing Sideways asks readers to consider how queer theory and rhetoric can be brought to bear on writing studies and educational assessment in order to push back against the limited modes of assessment that emerge when we only consider a flat binary of success/failure. Through the use of Sara Ahmed's "feminist killjoy," West-Puckett, Caswell, and Banks define what it means to be an "assessment killjoy" and invite readers to consider a new methodology of writing assessment via queer validity inquiry (QVI). Building on the model of critical validity inquiry, QVI-centered methodology foregrounds failure, affect, identity, and materiality as ways to resist rigid ideas of success, commodification of education, emphasis on reproducibility of numbers, and mechanization of the bodies that make up the system, providing pathways for writing professionals to build an "affective writing construct" (27) based around agency, consent, radical justice, lived experience, and embodiment.

The book is broken up into seven chapters with a foreword and acknowledgements. I want to linger briefly on the acknowledgments, because they provide an important frame for the rest of the book. In addition to the common acknowledgement of support from others, each author takes the time to acknowledge themselves, their embodied experiences, positionalities, and collaboration with each other. The authors present more than just a list of names and organizations: they pause to acknowledge the effort that providing assistance on a book project takes. They speak to their personal experiences with writing that led to this project and how important their collaboration has been to the production of this book, down to how they considered the order that their names would take on the cover (xvi). This expanded acknowledgement was their way of sharing some of the embodied process of writing *Failing Sideways.* Before we are even introduced to QVI and shown how it is designed to draw attention to the emotions, identities, and bodies that are all too frequently obscured in traditional assessment methods, the authors have modeled what acknowledging those things looks like.

Thomas Gurinskas is a Master's student in Composition and Rhetoric at Miami University, where he teaches first year composition and rhetoric. He specializes in queer and transgender rhetorics in the early-mid 20th century, and his Master's thesis focuses on the rhetoric of early twentieth-century trans memoirs. Thomas has published book reviews covering a wide range of genres including historical fiction, graphic novels, and LGBTQ literature, and has been a guest author for the *Making Queer History* project. Thomas recently served as historical consultant, researcher, and translator for Adam J. Rineer's *THIRD SEX: 1930s Transvestite Lieder (Songs)* in workshop.

This attention is also baked into the structure of the book. Chapter one is a summary of the whole book, with contextualizing history of how writing assessment reached where it is today; introductions to the important theories being drawn upon: the "feminist killjoy" (Ahmed), the queer art of failure (Jack Halberstam), disidentification (José Muñoz), among others; an introduction to QVI and its tenets; and a summary of the remaining chapters. Then, at the end of the chapter the authors pause to address the readers and provide non-linear ways of reading, providing specific suggestions for teachers and instructors; writing program administrators; and writing and rhetoric scholars.

With a book review in mind, I kept reading linearly, but their attention to me as a reader, giving me agency and consent to do with the book as I wished, again models the values of QVI. Chapter two takes the reader through an in-depth presentation of QVI. The authors start by defining a theory of failure that provides new ways of making meaning from "failed" moments in learning. They explore what being an assessment killjoy can do to reorient existing, troubled frameworks and bring missing voices back into the conversations around assessment, particularly in terms of the hierarchies that exist in education. For example, how does a graduate instructor navigate teaching in a classroom when they have little to no say in choosing the assessment models being prioritized by their institution? This chapter also speaks more in depth to the conceptual 3D model that the authors use to showcase the movement and reorientable nature of QVI as a methodology. Using a tetrahedron as a base-shape, the point of this model is to draw attention to what it could mean to "unflatten" and make three dimensional our methods and methodologies, as such a model allows for a visualization of how different methodological elements intersect and brush up against each other.

Chapters three, four, five, and six each dive into one of the four core tenets of QVI: failure to succeed, failure to be commodified, failure to be reproduced, and failure to be mechanized. The way they define "failure" is multifaceted, drawing on the productive potential of failure alongside the way that systems fail certain groups who do not meet the often privileged "standard." Each chapter focuses on particular tools, methods and models of assessment that fail to engage with the actual nuance of writing, even if they come from a place of good and progress initially. They give examples both of the failures of what exists and the ways that they have tried to push back in their own classrooms, programs and writing centers. In chapter three the focus lies with writing portfolios, the failures of existing modes of student self-assessment within that, and the shame involved in failing. One thing they note is that when students are asked to reflect on their writing, they often give a generic response more focused on following prompts for a grade than giving a genuine self-assessment of their learning.

Chapter four goes on to ask how we can push against writing assessment as commodity from the neat and tidy purchasable rubric sold by an education company to the commodification of writing center consultants via the treatment of "good writing" as a commodity. What the authors advocate for in response to this is a focus on vulnerability and consent, offering collaborative assessment as a way forward. Chapter five explores a queer framework for grading, exploring such options as grading contracts and digital badging (a system that replaces the requirement of "complete every assignment" with "complete a certain number

of badges and the corresponding assignments"). The chapter also considers writing centers and the idea of oversampling minority groups in order to fill the gap left when your outliers (minorities) are excluded from data on effective writing assessment. Chapter six concludes this section with a discussion of how we can resist mechanized styles of assessing writing that focus more on product than process. The authors introduce methods like learning stories, introducing elements of game play to learning and research, and using constellation to showcase the complex network of relationships in assessment. These all work to slow down the assessment process and push back against the dehumanizing, numbers-focused approaches to assessment by prioritizing embodied and lived experiences.

The last chapter of the book is an invitation for us the readers to take up the mantle of the assessment killjoy in our classrooms, programs, writing centers, institutions, etc. At the same time, the authors acknowledge that this is hard. Not only do they recognize that their book presents a lot of information about activities and program ideas that are not easily implemented, but we are also limited by our programs and institutions. This leads to their final note, which is disidentification and the double burden/boon of the assessment killjoy as we do the normative work our institution asks of us while also trying to *be* the assessment killjoy, the willful subject who pushes back. Given the current climate in education, it feels more important than ever that we find ways to productively push back, and this book provides a vital methodology for doing so.

Crucially, it is the wide audience of the book that makes it so valuable—K-12 teachers, graduate instructors and contingent faculty, tenured professors, writing program administrators. As a graduate instructor who has only been teaching since I began my degree program, the attention paid to the historical contexts of writing assessment methods were invaluable. I was not particularly familiar with the origins of the bell curve, but the book made room for me the young professional to learn while scholars who have heard it all before are given in-text permission to skip that part (147). As a queer instructor myself, finding ways to make my classroom equitable is always at the front of my mind, and I was thrilled to find that some of the attempts I've already made fall so nicely in line with QVI, such as collaborative rubric building with my students and opting to move to contract grading as soon as the choice was available to me.

Something else I appreciated deeply was the acknowledgment that this sort of push back is risky. I am a queer graduate instructor. I can only make so many waves. Finding the balance between being an assessment killjoy and having to keep to departmental and institutional standards is hard. I recently had to explain to my students (as part of our collaborative rubric building) that I could not remove a particular section of the rubric, because I do not have the power to restructure the core assignments of the first-year writing curriculum, which has been carefully tailored by my department to meet university requirements. This is the exact sort of thing that QVI is designed to help reorient us towards: these moments where we can create friction in the system. I know that I've already started considering some of activities showcased in the book for my own classroom.

Review of *Enduring Shame: A Recent History of Unwed Pregnancy and Righteous Reproduction*

Jessica Edens McCrary

Adams, Heather. *Enduring Shame: A Recent History of Unwed Pregnancy and Righteous Reproduction,* University of South Carolina Press, 2022.

Tags: 20th-century, age, cultural rhetorics, embodiment, embodied rhetoric, feminist praxis, feminist rhetorical historiography, health care, gender, public and private domains, reproductive justice, recovery, shame, rhetorics of shame, silencing, pregnancy

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In this study of rhetorics of shame, especially as they relate to pregnant people in the 1950s–1970s United States, Heather Brook Adams adds nuance to a systemically silenced part of women's history and shows that shame adjusts adroitly to meet changing societal parameters. Throughout each chapter, Adams illustrates how "shame does not disappear; rather, it becomes reassigned" (203). She challenges the conventional premise that shame attached to pregnant bodies has dissipated over time and instead illustrates—through interviews, archival material, and court cases—that premise as myth and shows the ways that shame has mutated and endured. The pervasiveness of a sexual double standard that removes men from responsibility for pregnancy paired with the regression of many gains for reproductive agency ensure that this recent history remains relevant and is useful for understanding current realities. Beliefs from the 1960s and 1970s "continue to shape expectations about sex today," Adams notes, and the longevity of those beliefs demonstrates "the extent to which women's claims over their bodies are fragile" (194). The historiographic and rhetorical analysis Adams conducts in *Enduring Shame* is useful for scholars working on shame rhetorics, reproductive history and rhetorical interpretation, reproductive justice, and the power structures that remain prescient "for all people to have sovereignty over their own sexual and reproductive lives" (6). The exigencies explored in this monograph are important for anyone studying gendered and embodied experiences of women and people with uteruses in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as shame casts a long, complicated shadow over the lived realities of so many.

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Enduring Shame uses the recent history of unwed pregnancy to explore righteous reproduction "as a gendered, racialized, and class- and ability-inflected purity code that took shape by mid-[twentieth]century and that has continued implications for how people understand, talk about, and advocate for issues of reproduction, pregnancy, and motherhood" (9). Adams considers aspects of moral and societal constructions of age, dignity, ability, neoliberal "value," innocence, gender-based exploitation and violence, and rhetorical empowerment, covering nearly three decades of how society reacted to, treated, and defined "unwed mothers" and "teen pregnancy." The key argument, supported throughout an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion, is that "shame related to sex, gender, and reproducing bodies remains a present, largely misunderstood, and decidedly rhetorical aspect of contemporary life" (6).

Adams performs rhetorical analysis using historiographic methodology and relies on reproductive justice and rhetorical feminism as heuristics. Adams resists "macronarratives" of the eras covered, especially the hegemonic narrative of unwavering forward progress in the women's movement's pursuit of the legal right to abortion. Instead, examples throughout the text illustrate that for Black and Indigenous women, low-income women, and those with less access to education or resources, the progress of reproductive rights and access looks far less even, and far less like progress, during the second half of the twentieth century.

Chapter one focuses on "radial rhetorics of shame" to explore how [primarily white] pregnant women in the 1960s impacted their family and community through the radial, outward impact of their pregnant bodies. The need to "send away" or hide a young white pregnant woman was due to societal obsession with "purity," and such purity is "intimately linked to her gendered role in relation to others in her life" (43). Unwed mothers, rather than be seen as agents over their bodies and the decision to become a mother or not, are held responsible for the symbolic and material implications of their pregnant bodies on the entire family—and radially, her community as well. The practice of secreting an unwed mother is an extreme manifestation of an embodied shame performance (52), which Adams explores through the rhetoric of maternity homes and interviews conducted with their residents and workers. Importantly, she recognizes the violent removal of young women's identity as mother, and the loneliness of returning to their lives post-partum and after giving up a child (often without agency in the "decision"), with the expectation that they resume life as if nothing changed. Severing both the identity of mother and the mother-child relationship are more examples of radial shame, which the women included in the chapter illustrate as a shame (often secreted) that remains with them throughout the rest of their lives.

Part of the exigency for this research is that many of the violences enacted on pregnant people sound so foreign to those who learn about these practices now. That foreignness contributes to the myth *Enduring Shame* dispels: that with time, shame rhetorics have decreased around unwed mothers and "teenage pregnancy." Chapter two shows how "new permissiveness" was not a lessening of shame rhetorics, but a redirection of them. Through the example of two legal decisions, Adams illustrates how the shift from hiding pregnancy to social stigma sustained power over pregnant bodies during the 1970s, an era of perceived loosening of attitudes toward sex and reproduction. Despite fewer women needing to "go away," shame had not been "washed

away by a new, culturally sanctioned, sexual permissiveness"; shame was now more publicly present through stigmatizing rhetorics (104). Chapter three focuses on reproductive agency and the stickiness of shame, especially in the face of two advances perceived historically as enabling universal agency: the development of the birth control pill and the legalization of abortion through *Roe v. Wade*. Technological and legislative advances will never work as wholesale resolutions to the limits of reproductive agency, since "agency is always contingent and contextual" (145). Adams illustrates this contingency and contextuality with specific cases and experiences—and through writings by Black and Indigenous writers and activists like Toni Cade Bambara and Katsi Cook respectively, and the group that wrote *Our Bodies, Ourselves*—that illustrate a far more complex and uneven history of sexual and reproductive agency. Those rhetors contributed to the collective work of change in a way that is harder to interpret in uncomplicated macronarratives of forward progress. However, as Adams argues, their rhetorical work was essential for shifting the ways women not only experience their bodies and reproductive lives but also how they situate those aspects of their lives against "long-held notions of sexual shame" (144).

The late '70s usher in the newly figured "teen mother" and the rhetorically shifted societal "problem" of teenage pregnancy. In chapter four, Adams shows the shifting of blame to young women and differently pathologized women (including aspects of race, class, and capitalist "productivity"). She compellingly engages epideictic rhetoric to illustrate a shift from private shame and blame to more public displays and suggests shame is an understudied subject in rhetorical theory (151). Adams observes fear over the changing idea of family units, neoliberal expectations for young people to contribute to economic agendas, and the invention of a "teen pregnancy" public health crisis that was not supported by data. This fascinating chapter breaks down the prototypical invented characters of the teen mother as manifestations of evolving societal fears: the rehabilitatable, infantilized (white) teen; the threatening, troubled, willful teen; and the willful, hyperfertile, unrighteous (raced) teen. Each construction acts as a reflection of social priorities, rather than the reality of who was having sex or getting pregnant (156). Through the texts Adams examines to explore these perceived categories, including popular magazine essays and articles, presidential remarks, and the Alan Guttmacher Institute's 1976 report on the "epidemic" of teenage pregnancy, she illustrates a key idea of the book: blame rhetorics are persistent tools that enable public and private shame and continue even as the location and definition of "righteous reproduction" shifts.

An exigency central to *Enduring Shame* is the value in resisting narratives of "macrochange," and the value in telling a more complete story of recent reproductive history, both for what we can understand about rhetorical practices around blame and shame, and also for how we might defend the agency of reproducing bodies. Adams is not only doing recovery work on the history of unwed pregnancy but *doing something with* the rhetorical knowledge resultant from collecting that history (189). Sitting with this complex history, *Enduring Shame* makes clear the "problem" of unwed pregnancy is "always tied to women's social identity, worth, and rhetorical power" (193). Adams calls for feminists to more fully contend with the myriad of complexities tied to shame, public and private, and its stickiness despite perceived and real progress. Feminist scholars can "imagine and amplify rhetorical strategies for operating outside the pale of shame altogether"

(198) to move us beyond the trappings of shame detailed in *Enduring Shame*.

My own research, which invites microhistory as a methodology for rhetorical recovery work of activists who worked in the women's movement in Atlanta, Georgia, also resists macro historical narrative. I found Brook's question on what macronarratives of reproductive and unwed pregnancy history *say* and also what they *deflect* especially relevant to my own scholarly investigations. In other words, when we recover the many conflicting and complicating experiences of unwed pregnancy, scholars and the public can begin to understand the parts of the history that were omitted, and why. This work allows feminist scholars to comprehend reproductive agency more effectively for present-day exigencies and positions rhetorical feminists to consider recovery work that complicates macronarratives of this and other "secreted and misunderstood" (35) recent histories.

Review of *Difficult Empathy and Rhetorical Encounters*

Tommie Leigh McPhetridge

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Content Warning: discussions of slavery, war and child abuse.

Upon first encountering rhetoric in my Masters degree program, I was completely rattled at the prospect of rhetorical belonging. I did not know that relationships and emotions had rhetorical weight, let alone that rhetorical belonging was a subject that I could study in relation to community rhetorics. A year after my initial study of rhetoric, I found Eric Leake's *Difficult Empathy and Rhetorical Encounters*, whose text also grapples with the social implications of empathy as a rhetorical subject. Leake's text is helpful for those who are seeking ways to engage with communities amidst conflicts, especially among those who are diametrically opposed in thoughts and beliefs. While many people believe empathy is a "net-positive", meaning that empathy always yields positive results in social encounters, Leake critiques this viewpoint and promotes using empathy as a recursive reflection when engaging with others.

Leake begins the introduction with an explanation of difficult empathy's exigence in the current world. Driven by declining reports of empathy, national political fissions, and a deep desire for community connection, his book comes during a kairotic moment for scholars. He begins with a definition of empathy from Amy Coplan: "Empathy is a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation" (5). Leake's main focus is on the situatedness of empathetic encounters. Some versions of empathy may aim to alleviate guilt or "be the better person," which turns empathy into a selfish act rather than a moment of genuine empathy for another person. Difficult empathy goes beyond the potentially selfish motivations of easy empathy. Difficult empathy instead "challenges the empathizer's conceptions of themself and others in ways that can make demands upon the empathizer" (11). The introduction concludes with the comparison of easy empathy and difficult empathy, acknowledging that easy empathy is too simple and doesn't inspire change or commitment, unlike

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difficult empathy.

Chapter 2 is Leake's brief explanation of easy empathy. He defines easy empathy as "often automatic, predominantly affective, non-reflective, and reaffirming of the desirable qualities of the self without challenging the social circumstances" (19). Easy empathy does not require effort and is too quick to fall to biases of proximity and familiarity, as identified by Martin Hoffman (37). People are more likely to empathize with those they are familiar with, as well as people who are in close proximity to them, either in location or in belief. These biases make it difficult to enact empathy for people who are strangers or who have beliefs in conflict with your own. One of Leake's concerns is that easy empathy does not prompt the empathizer to reflect and identify their own positionality. Easy empathy does not require change of the self or of structures that are creating difficult circumstances.

Chapter 3, "Difficult Empathy" is where the real work begins. Leake repeats multiple times that *he is not excusing the actions or behaviors of any of the identified subjects*, but calls readers to join in a journey of difficult empathy for those who seem impossible to empathize with. He begins with an analysis of Werner Herzog's film, *Into the Abyss*, a documentary about capital punishment in prisons. Leake remarks that to engage in difficult empathy requires an act of identification, even with those that you feel are too dissimilar. By beginning with capital punishment offenders, Leake calls readers to understand the importance of context and humanity. Herzog's documentary asks viewers to empathize with felons, people who typically are outcast from empathetic urge. Leake uses the documentary to ask readers to empathize with the humanity of the other, especially regarding the contexts that put them in their current situations. His call towards context becomes clear in a brief analysis of "muscular empathy" from Ta-Nehesi Coates. Muscular empathy is an exercise one must do repeatedly to combat empathy that positions oneself as morally superior to another. Coates calls white Americans to critically reflect on their condemnation of white slave owner's complicity in slavery. Leake calls readers to think about context and asserts that too often we think ourselves to be morally superior to our ancestors. Careful reflection reveals that there is nuance and complexity missing from this kind of moral positioning. The muscular empathy exercise is one of difficult empathy that acknowledges context and humanity. The final portion of "Difficult Empathy" is centered around an analysis of Allyn Walker and their book *A Long Dark Shadow: Minor Attracted People and Their Pursuit of Dignity*. To provide reasoning for his analysis, Leake notes:

In considering the difficult work of empathizing with MAPs as evident in Walker's work and the response to it, I want to better understand how empathy is extended to a despised group of people, the work and significance of recognizing their humanity in relation to the humanity of others, and the social pressures and consequences of extending such empathy. (52)

By positioning difficult empathy in relation to MAPs, Leake is practicing difficult empathy while also challenging the reader to do the same. Learning how to empathize with a despised group of people–MAPs, felons, or otherwise–is a big step towards developing difficult empathy practices.

Chapter 4 engages "The Social Conditions of Empathy". This chapter is filled with analyses of complex and contextualized rhetorical encounters (drawing on scholars such as Ratcliffe; Blankenship; Davis; Zhao; Edbauer; among others), principally that of Rodger Jacob's guest series in the *Las Vegas Sun* newspaper: "The New Homeless: My Story". Jacob's series details his own experiences with being homeless and follows months of him becoming homeless and struggling to find stability and earn empathy from other people. Here Leake situates empathy as a social phenomenon that exists outside the individual and is encountered in social situations. Leake uses Jenny Edbauer's work to explain rhetorical situations as lived practices and feelings that destabilize the borders of rhetoric. Doing so acknowledges that rhetoric is embedded into all parts of a situation and influences our perceptions of ourselves and others. This has particular potency when considering the intersectional lives of people we encounter–how the social situations and histories driving the encounter cannot be divorced from the lived realities of those involved.

Chapter 5 is driven by an analysis of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine and discussions around empathizing with political enemies. Leake emphasizes early on that an "enemy" is someone "whose success in a particular area is seen as coming at one's own expense" (93). This chapter remains potent, as all of the texts that Leake analyzes have come full circle in the continued war against Ukraine, the genocide of Palestinians, and Donald Trump's re-election. Leake promotes that if we are to have any hope living in a diverse and divisive society, we need to practice difficult empathy with the enemy. Leake never calls for forced empathy but rather acknowledges the complexity of empathizing with someone who is violent or an oppressor. Here, empathy with the enemy instead begins a reciprocal process where the purpose should be shared understanding and a more inclusive community. This form of empathy does not require agreement, but an understanding of the situatedness of empathy practices.Quoting Shui-yin Sharon Yam, Leake calls for deliberative empathy that does not reify difference but assumes an openness for change (107).

Chapter 6, "Critical Empathy" explores taking difficult empathy further into an area of action. This is where Leake calls for reflection and self-critique, recognizing our biases and subjectivities. Here Leake pushes against Rogerian rhetoric that would assume an equal encounter between all parties involved, forcing the marginalized to privilege their oppressor's points-of-view. By acknowledging subjectivity, context, and positionality, engaging in critical empathy can open conversations that acknowledge the whole of another and prime them for understanding. Leake provides examples of critical empathy by looking at texts from genderqueer authors (Marzano-Lesnevich), authors who engage with non-human animals (Nagel; Foster), and authors of color (Rankine). Through his analyses of these texts, Leake shows the reader how to acknowledge subjectivity without assuming equality and how learning can assist in self-critique and acknowledging the other in empathetic encounters.

Leake concludes the book with a look towards the practical uses of difficult empathy. Relating the topic to pedagogy within the university, he talks about how he emphasizes difficult empathy in his teaching. He identifies the values of difficult empathy as those of generosity, curiosity, and humility. Leake explains that practicing difficult empathy is vital to connecting to others and looking toward positive change.

Difficult Empathy and Rhetorical Encounters comes at a precise time, when wedges are being driven between groups across the US and around the world. Readers of *Peitho* can see both familiar feminist scholars amidst its pages and principles of self-reflection, community building, and an attunement towards understanding across difference. I believe that Leake's text would be helpful for feminist rhetorical scholars as we navigate relational engagement amidst social and political tumult. More specifically, this text gives readers the language and approaches toward difficult empathy that can better prepare us for connecting with others while remaining distinct in our differences. *Peitho* readers who are looking for ways to navigate difficult conversations with people and looking for ways to grow in their abilities for empathy will appreciate this text. I can recommend this book with a single caveat: *readers must be prepared to practice difficult empathy while reading*. This text will challenge your beliefs on empathy, your urges to only find community in the familiar, and your own identities and positionalities.