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Creative Approaches to Research is a trans-disciplinary journal for creative research. It reflects the convergences between epistemology, pedagogy and technology. It incorporates multiple forms of text including academic and creative writing, sound, images, and multimedia.

Creative Approaches to Research recognises the need to extend the range of voices and ways for doing, reporting, and discussing research. Academics from many disciplines have come together to create this journal who share a vision of it as a living and colourful text inviting engagement with multiple ways of knowing.

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THE CAUTIONER'S TALE

A PILGRIMAGE TOWARDS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN EDUCATION AFFECTED THROUGH THE ORDEALS OF DATA COLLECTION

PAUL G KEBBLE

When April arrived and the rain commenced
I was desperately looking for participants
who would join me on my research expedition
and allow me to investigate my long-term vision
of an online PD course for practicing teachers
of the English language, and which features
cultural empathy through professional guidance,
interacting with materials, and peer participants.

This would be achieved through an online environment
and present TESOL methodologies contemporary and current
supported by lesson plans and videos of teaching,
its electronic delivery designed to be far-reaching
offering PD to teachers working in any situation
whether it be urban, rural, international or out-station.
The course could provide teachers with the appropriate tools
to improve their language pedagogy within their own schools

The empirical issue I wished to evaluate was to provide a PD course that did not dictate on how the English language should and should not be taught rather, allow participants to decide what they thought would best be applied within their specific pedagogy anything else I believed would be professionally dodgy. A PD course grounded upon cultural empathy would be most appropriate, I think you'd agree.

Action Research was the paradigm, I believed, would allow course participants to experiment with methodology, and describe how, through a blog that was presented within the website they would implement the methodology, and through this insight make decisions on what was pedagogically worthwhile and by following course modules, allow them to compile materials and methodologies that could be implemented allowing their TESOL repertoire to be suitably augmented

Initially, I was buoyed by positive reactions from teachers, institutions and other teaching factions both within Australia, and from teachers overseas, Interest in Russia, Brunei and other countries At the beginning of my journey I had close to a 'ton' but by the end of my journey I had finished with one! How can this possibly happen? I hear you inquire well, it did, and I felt my empirical research was dire!

I came from a quantitative research background and to this form of data analysis I felt I was bound with over one hundred participants I could collect enough empirical data to be analysed, and to affect number crunching through appropriate formulae, this a must to provide statistical proof that my theory was robust through these figures my research would clearly demonstrate that my course was culturally empathetically, I would postulate

The score of practicing teachers in the city of Moscow looking at course requirements, inspiration became low there was no extrinsic motivational thrust for this work they felt a university certificate a must. Prolonged engagement in a project such as mine

required much effort with no reward, this their whine
The ensuing few months saw their correspondence peter out
but just a glitch to overcome, I really had no doubt

The Brunei Ministry of Education, initially enthusiastic
discussing up to sixty teachers' involvement, fantastic!
had a change of heart through a change of personnel
the incumbent minister was disinterested, I now could tell
again, my emails and phone calls all went astray
and I could feel this opportunity slipping away
However, CfBT in Brunei advertised in their newsletter
but after three months the outcome was no better.

At that point in my journey I had one teacher in Japan
and a school in Taiwan who wanted my course to plan
their professional development utilising all my course material
asking for everything to be delivered, hey, what's the deal?
I was suspicious that perhaps their only intent
was to appropriate my course, I refused, and they went!
The teacher in Japan asked if he could use all the course
but without engagement online, this I could not endorse

Nine months into my research project I was left with naught
but an electronic course and the hosting I'd bought
I had tried advertising through TESOL websites online
but to no avail, I was left with no participants, what a bind!
I returned to Brunei for an educational conference
hoping that I could meet with the minister, and build some confidence
in the research I was doing and what I wished to achieve
but an adverse ministerial decision was made, I have come to believe.

I discussed my dilemma with peers in the school of education
and one of them suggested a colleague out-station
principal of a school on the main island of Vanuatu
a school that taught in the medium of English, and without ado
I wrote an email explaining my course and my research plan
and within two days I received a reply intimating that I can
approach the teachers to offer my course as PD
and recruit those who were interested in working with me

At the same time a close friend at an international school in Fiji

asked if I was available for consultancy, for a limited fee including flights and accommodation, and a plan took shape I could visit both countries and perhaps I could scrape enough participants together to create a realistic cohort to provide validity to my research, at least that's what I thought and within the month there I was, off on my trip with renewed vigour to overcome this empirical blip

The teachers in Port Villa were a group of dedicated pros who welcomed me and listened, and their interest clearly rose After the introduction to my course they appeared highly motivated and their desire for professional development they believed could be sated by following my program, their drive purely intrinsic especially a course designed not to be culturally-centric The only drawback was the lack of internet access as their download rate at school was 48 bites/sec, at best

During my stay in Port Vila I met a businessman and philanthropist who was willing to finance a new computer room, but he did insist that I provide my course to the wider Vila teaching community a concept I had no problem with, and as far as I could see was exactly what I envisaged my research was designed to achieve wide dissemination to participants who wished to receive professional development that allowed them to make an informed choice, an evaluation that the online system would allow them to voice

My next port of call were the equally beautiful islands of Fiji where I was to make an assessment of TESOL, and from what I could see significant changes were needed for a positive learning environment where students needing ESL support would feel content to be sent I presented my recommendations to the principal and heads of school who accepted my advice, and asked to use my course as the tool for enhancing language learning pedagogy within the department The head of ESL opposed, reluctance for change she did vent

The eventual result of my well-intentioned intervention saw the head of department and a colleague's resignation They believed that a new system would burden them with more work and following a PD course certainly was no kind of a perk The heads of school were not actually upset with their leaving and promptly employed new staff, their departure relieving

The choice as to whether to follow my course
was then given to all staff, and they certainly weren't forced

Rema, a Fijian, chose to accept the challenge of online PD
and before I left I worked extensively with her to see
that she was able to work through the systems presented online
and when I left Fiji, her IT skills were really quite fine
So, there I was with twelve participants in the delightful town of Port Vila
and one more teacher working in the bustling city of Suva
This cohort, I felt, would be perfect to achieve
the data for assessment that I required..... how naïve!

The world went into recession and banks withdrew their finance
businesses everywhere were required to review their own stance
The philanthropist in Vanuatu had a serious change of heart
and the funds destined for the school were no longer a part
of the solution to the problem of limited internet access
meaning that these Port Vila participants were under duress
to be able to continue effectively as members of the research team
and they reluctantly withdrew, was this the end of my dream?

I now had only one participant, Rema, I'm sure you have gleaned
and I supposed with one, my empirical data was demeaned
How could I possibly make any kind of academic assertion
from data collected from one participant, where's the affirmation?
I turned to the professor who propounded qualitative research
and asked her opinion, my sentiments she did besmirch
Why possibly would one subject not provide rich data quite profound
with the right methodology your analysis will be sound

One journey was over, the next was about to commence
and the material I collected over the year was quite dense
I learned that one participant can provide a richness of data
that through a qualitative process of thematic analysis utilised later
so much of value can be gleaned from all interactions with the subject
and now this researcher is able to apply a lens of reflect
and state quite categorically that the journey, although stressful
has ended with an analysis that is really quite valuable

I am now a convert to the qualitative research process
my pilgrimage allowed me to cogently address
the need to be able to understand a subject or situation
in depth, and allowing the researcher meaningful penetration
that pure statistics, although having its place in empirical analysis
can never achieve through only numbers, I would now insist
perhaps a mixing of methodologies could be sometimes acceptable
for the triangulation for data analysis, in certain cases, to be reliable.

"THE JOY OF THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH"

THE REVELATIONS AT THE INTERSECTION OF NEW LITERACIES, A BLACK, FEMININE SELF, AND CHRISTIAN CONSCIOUSNESS

JEANINE STAPLES

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the interpretive, self-reflexive principles and practices through which an African American scholar and practitioner managed the emotional grief imposed by the loss of her sister, soul mate, and teacher, Joy Kristina. By framing a critical, autoethnographic inquiry into the principles and practices constructed by her Black, feminine self and its mergence with her Christian consciousness, the author conveys: 1) her method for understanding Black sisterhood as the fruit of a unique socio-spiritual and cyclical relationship, 2) Biblical scripture as living oracles that invoke order, assurance, and resolve, and 3) death as a meaningful, purposeful and glorious transition. By working to understand how her new literacies functioned as tools through which she invoked and embodied her Black, feminine, Christian consciousness from an autoethnographic standpoint, the author shows how she constructed a literacy event (Hornberger, 2000; Staples, 2011) to memorialize her sister's testimony and the great impact of her life. The literacy event also serves as a dynamic record of the significance of this relationship, particularly in the cultivation of the Author's womanhood and personal/professional trajectory. Finally, it points to important epistemological and onto-

logical risings at the intersection of new literacies, Black femininity and Christian consciousness.

Keywords

Black Feminist Epistemology, New Literacy Studies, Christian Consciousness, Critical Inquiry, Autoethnography

*8 So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. 9 And Nehemiah...taught the people; he said unto all the people, "This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep". For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. 10 Then he said unto them, "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our LORD: neither be ye sorry; **for the joy of the LORD is your strength**". 11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, "Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved". 12 And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.*

— *The Holy Bible*, the Book of Nehemiah, Chapter 8, verses 8-12.

Most pastors and ministers do not mention the book of Nehemiah. It is often overlooked. The omission of this book from pulpits and Bible studies is a real loss to anyone who cares about interpretive frameworks for sociocultural and spiritual evolutions. It is a loss because, as a governor and prophet, Nehemiah was an exceptional spiritual leader and literacy teacher. The book of Nehemiah reflects this. Along with Ezra and the Levites, Nehemiah facilitated knowledge, understanding, and action through reading, writing, speaking and listening. As such, I admire the book a great deal. This article rests on Ezra's declaration in Nehemiah (vs. 10, emboldened above). It presents the interpretive, self-reflexive principles and practices through which I – an African American woman, new literacies scholar and practitioner – managed the emotional grief imposed by the loss of my sister Joy, who was my soul mate and teacher. Herein, I convey my method for understanding our Black sisterhood as the fruit of a unique socio-spiritual and cyclical relationship, Biblical scripture as living oracles that invoke order, assurance, and resolve, and death as a personal event, one that can be designated as a meaningful, purposeful, and glorious transition. I accomplish this by framing a critical, autoethnographic inquiry into the principles and practices constructed by my Black, feminine self and its merger with my Christian consciousness. These principles and practices are socially situated and culturally informed and, therefore, function as new literacies (Staples, 2005, 2010, 2011, 2012).

By working to understand how these new literacies functioned as tools that were invoked and embodied through my Black, feminine, Christian consciousness, I show how they were instrumental in constructing a literacy event (Horn-

berger, 2000) that bears multiple meanings and signifiers. The literacy event (a digital composition) memorialized my sister's testimony and the great impact her life and our relationship had in the cultivation of my womanhood. It also serves as a focal point for my research, a sign of its synergistic nature, something through which the strength of my scholarship and teaching can be understood. As such, this event functions as an illustrative artifact that responds to Lewis' (2011) question: How might research not expend itself, but preserve and concentrate its strength (p. 505)?

Finally, this account of my new literacies, and their resulting literacy event, functions as a response to a question posed by my then 12 year-old-nephew Russell, my sister's son. As Joy was dying, he asked, "Auntie, what do you do?" I replied, "I am a new literacies theorist, practitioner and qualitative researcher." He paused, thought for a minute, then pressed further and asked, "What does that mean in real life? I mean, what good do you do? You know...how does your work help people...like, specifically?" I hope this article is an adequate response...one that satisfies him and makes him proud, when he is older. This paper then, serves a multifaceted and complex set of purposes. They are: to convey one example of the shape and scope of consolation, to honor my beloved sister's life and memory, to respond meaningfully to my nephew's inquiry into this aspect of my life's work, and to demonstrate how all of these purposes, themselves a cacophony of intentions and desires, are satisfied through new literacy practices and events.

THE SITUATEDNESS OF OUR SISTERHOOD

I am #3, the youngest of three girls. In private circles, that is how I have always described myself. Despite my independent nature, I have understood and embraced this position my entire life. Growing up, I found refuge in it. I thought of my two older sisters, Joy and Lori, as my undisputable allies. They were the people "over me". Lori is #2. She is 12 months and 1 day my senior. Our mother went into labor with me during Lori's first birthday party. I was born the next day. So, Lori was my first friend and continues to be my best friend. Joy is #1. She was our elder by seven years with respect to Lori and eight years with respect to me. Joy was bigger than life to us. She was our other mother, a true guiding light in our everyday lives. We were raised to be a team, tightly bound and interdependent. As a result, Joy and Lori are chief among my first loves. In fact, my first memories in life are of them, not of my happily married parents, who raised us all together, in one house. I simply always felt particularly covered and loved in the presence of my sisters.

Even when we are not physically in the same space, I still feel this love, this constant protection and companionship. They provided me with a knowing that I was always surrounded, the way one might be surrounded by angels. We never really had a serious fight, not once in my entire life. We irked each other from

time to time, yet we never earnestly argued or said a heightened or mean word to each other. If one of us ever felt agitated by the other, someone would say, "Ok... I'm gonna go. I'll talk to you later. Bye!" Then, the shunned would wait and the shunner would call in the next few days. A few hours or days apart...that's all we ever needed, on a rare occasion, to loose ourselves a little from the weight of our enormous love and interconnectedness. I didn't mind the magnitude. In fact, I relished in it. The covering I was provided as "the baby" suited me very, very well. I could be a driving force in the world, then come home and be quiet, or silly, or funny, or lazy and be totally accepted. I always felt especially comfortable submitting myself to my eldest sister, Joy.



Author, #3



Lori, #2

A NOTE ABOUT OUR JOY

*Joy – A woman. A wife. A mother. A sister/the eldest. A daughter. A granddaughter.
A niece. A friend. A colleague. A warrior.*

My sister Joy occupied many roles in her lifetime. She was many things to many people. She was flawed, as we all are, in terms of other's perceptions of her. For example, I am aware that some people thought of her as too easy going; she was not overly opinionated or confrontational. To some, these characteristics could have been confused with ambivalence or detachment. However, to me, and those who knew her well, her affect was understood as unsuspecting and non-judgmental. And, by all accounts, her undisturbed, decent character was unusually consistent. She understood the relationships she participated in as vital and approached them soberly and with ease. In many ways, she represented the meaning of her name – a spiritual gift:

“joy” – A fruit of the Spirit; a persistent, constant state of fullness in God; demonstrated by contentment and peace in thoughts, words, and deeds; evident in the abiding presence of wisdom, satisfaction and stability, regardless of outward

circumstances; a state of being deeply and continually connected to the Divine. See: Isaiah 35:10; Isaiah 55:12; John 16:22; Galatians 5:22.

It is important to note that “joy” is more than “happiness”. Happiness is an incidental, circumstantial, and therefore, fleeting state of mind. It is attached to that which is material and variable. In contrast to happiness, “joy” is abiding, encompassing, and stable. My sister led by example. She did not lecture or employ condescending tones or play with posturing. She possessed herself, and in my opinion, her name, beautifully. I was, and am, grateful to her for her unwavering presence in and of herself. Understanding how the loss of such a personally influential individual changed my life and segued new spaces of consciousness and practices, particularly as a result of her departure, required an intensely intimate methodology.



Joy, #1

METHODOLOGY

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (Spry, 2001) and treats research as a political, socially just, and socially conscious act (Adams, 2005 & Holman Jones, 2005). A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010)

Ellis, Adams and Bochner’s (2010) discussion of autoethnography as process and product provides a comprehensive overview of the ways this methodology can assist scholars and theorists in their efforts to represent self and research participants vigorously and authentically, position research as purposeful action, locate particular epiphanies that clarify the significance and meaning of socio-cultural experiences, and redefine the boundaries of constructivist inquiry. They argue that, in order to do all these things, autoethnographers “must use personal expe-

periences to illustrate facets of cultural experiences, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders" (para. 9). In this way, autoethnography can function as a methodological bridge between various emic and etic perspectives, particularly as those perspectives attempt to make sense of personal experiences that can be considered altering in cultures and societies. Such experiences include the births and deaths of loved ones, moving across geospatial/politicized contexts like "home", "school" and "work", uncovering historical/hushed narratives to grapple with ancestry, heritage and lineage, and exploring the complexities of identities in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion and (dis)ability, etc. (Kara & Phillips, 2008; Pathak, 2010; Pearce, 2010; Poulos, 2009). Ellis, Adams and Bochner's (2010) argument centers the necessity of deep explorations of personal experience as a way of realizing sociocultural enlightenment through autoethnography. My most recent work as a new literacies theorist and practitioner contributes another dynamic to this argument. In addition to shedding light on sociocultural experiences by deeply regarding that which is personal, autoethnography can also reveal the breadth and depth of spiritual consciousness and literacies, as it pertains to such experiences.

Contributing new knowledge about the role of the spirit in navigating altering personal experiences can illuminate sociocultural awareness and understanding in even deeper ways because spiritual considerations shed light on how individuals and groups act, not only as sociocultural beings, but also as beings with the ability to transcend. To begin to understand this, one must first understand how autoethnography thrives as a methodological process and functions as a methodological product. Autoethnography as *process* means doing critical self-reflection through responsive, constructive practices. This reflection includes deep considerations of personal identity, positionality, desire, place and intentions; it also includes navigations of the intersections these phenomena create in relation to lived experiences. Autoethnography as *product* means harvesting the fruit of practices and reflecting them in the form of a signifying and situating effect. Effects often manifest as types of compositions. An effect might be a poem, song, novel, or digital video, for example. These products initiate a type of collective or individuated, yet always situated and contextualized visibility and presence that begs analysis and interpretation. They can function as markers in space, time and consciousness. The performances of these events are distinct. They can make the critical-creative ethnographic involvements with self meaningful, clear and (often) unique. In addition, the performances of these events (not only their existence, but also their animation and engagements that result in relation to them) can make what can be known apparent, for posterity's sake. The performances of literacy events also assist in memory and meaning-making before, during and/or after landmark lived experiences (Staples, 2011).

A PROBLEM THAT AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND LITERACY WORK CAN SOLVE

In 2010, I struggled desperately to understand and make meaning from a landmark lived experience. My eldest sister Joy died after a battle with late-stage breast cancer. She was very young, barely 40. She was one of my best friends and a great love in my life. My efforts to make sense of her death inspired me to embark on an autoethnographic self-study. Because I could not bear to hear about, nor consistently grasp how she felt (due to her occasional inability to speak and exhaustion), I chose to capture some semblance of this landmark lived experience by reflecting instead on my process of dealing with her illness and death. As a result, I also chose to examine the product (or, literacy event) I generated in light of this process (evolved in relation to socially situated, culturally informed and spiritually inspired literacy practices) – a digital composition. To guide my inquiry, I asked, “What sociocultural and spiritual practices were employed to help manage the grief imposed by this landmark lived experience? How did personal identity, positionality, desire, place and intentions align and assist in making sense of her? What sociocultural and spiritual revelations did this process yield and how are they made meaningful, clear, and unique in the product associated with this process? Documenting the process of autoethnography and introducing its subsequent product often calls for unique ways of writing up academic research. The prominence of personal and intimate articulations require a novel, accessible tone; Bochner and Ellis explain:

When researchers write *autoethnographies*, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience. They accomplish this by first discerning patterns of cultural experience evidenced by field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling (e.g., character and plot development), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice. Thus, the autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people (Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 1995) [in Ellis, Adams & Bochner, para. 14].

In this article, I seek to “make personal and social change possible for more people” by relaying artfully, through a merging of autobiographical expression and ethnographic description, my perspective on what happened before and after my sister’s death. I have integrated Biblical references throughout, as scripture played a central role in soliciting, and grasping the significance of, the spiritual aspects of this landmark lived experience. Conceptually, I examine the navigation of this experience through a New Literacies perspective, noting the ways the

sociocultural practices I employed to make sense of my experience function as socially situated literacy practices (Street, 1988, 1995, 2000; Staples, 2010, 2012). This perspective also considers how the product of my process functions as a new literacy event.

FRAMING A CRITICAL, INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY: OR, HOW IDENTITY, POSITIONALITY, DESIRE, PLACE AND INTENTIONS ALIGNED

This inquiry into my process for managing my grief and honoring my sister is framed both by my Black feminine self and my Christian consciousness. My Black feminine self is comprised of the physical and emotional aspects of my person. These individuated senses of my self (i.e. Blackness and femininity) qualify my race and gender consciousness as dark, autochthonous and attached (Staples, 2011, 2012). That is, I understand myself as one member of a rooted collective, having both inherited and cultivated understandings of deep-seated spiritual and emotive sensibilities. These sensibilities manifest organically; they are inventive practices that forge phenomena formation. They are critical, creative awarenesses of the ethereal and material worlds (Staples, 2011, 2012).

My Black, feminine self grounds my inquiry in otherworldliness and calls into place my faith. My Christian consciousness is the foundation of my faith. Specifically, I am a born again Christian. I believe in my heart and confess with my mouth that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God and the Savior of the world. My faith in Christ's preeminence encourages me to rely on Biblical scripture to make sense of all lived experiences. This includes every lived experience I take part in, from the mundane to the monumental. It also influences my understanding of every relationship I have, including those that are cursory and those that are profound. My consciousness inspires me to understand the spiritual nature of interactions and experiences and unite them with a grander schema of purpose. This consciousness compels me to seek and submit. I seek Godly wisdom for sense-making and submit to that wisdom, wholeheartedly, for the instantiation of peace beyond all understanding (Philippians 4:7¹).

My Black, feminine self merges with my Christian consciousness and yields various ways of *being* (i.e. intuiting, feeling, imagining and receiving) and *doing* (i.e. researching, teaching, writing and producing). For example, when I encounter very important tasks to be completed (and sometimes, even ones that could be perceived as trivial), I access my self and consciousness by contemplating how the task's significance is located within a broad scope of importance, even going

1 Scriptural references at the close of sentences within this article, as with any other in-text citation, indicate the preceding statement or question's correspondence to a Biblical commandment, proverb, declaration or inference.

so far as to situate it in relation to the crux of my purpose as a human being. This access can happen in prayer or meditation. It is often a quiet, solitary experience of stillness, seeking, asking, listening and accepting – a way of *being*. I also go about the business of understanding that task in relation to its classification as, for instance, a gift, lesson, blessing or discipline. This happens through reading, writing, research, teaching, and Biblical study. Spiritual principles that are Biblically based assist in this process of meaning making. These principles are heightened – becoming ways of *doing* – when they are sought out, declared and enacted.

This process of allowing the meeting of inner and outer worlds of self and consciousness came more strongly into effect when Joy grew weaker. About two months before she passed on, Joy called me to her and asked me to go to the LORD² and inquire about her health and destiny. This was, of course, a monumental task. I couldn't deny her anything. So, although I didn't want to ask the LORD about her, fearing what He might declare and feeling too emotionally weak and spiritually spent myself to assert her healing, I gathered my self and consciousness to do what she wanted me to do. As my mother taught me, and her mother before her, and her mother before her, I prepared myself to be quiet in prayer. I entered into my space with thanksgiving (Psalms 100:4). I fasted and consecrated myself (Nehemiah 1:4; Psalm 35:13). I went into my prayer closet and meditated on scripture that clarified my position in Christ (Ephesians 2:6) and access to God without fear (Hebrews 4:16). I freed my soul from distractions and questions. I waited. I was still. Time passed over me. I searched the scriptures and declared the Word of the LORD confidently³. Then, I asked God a question. I asked, "Father...will You spare my sister and allow her to remain in the earth with us?" I felt as if the stability of my whole world hinged on His answer.

These "ways" are, in effect, socially situated, culturally informed, interpretive, self-reflexive principles and practices through which I live, breathe, and have my very being (Acts 17:28). These principles and practices have been intergenerationally constructed my entire life. They have been woven into my understanding of the nature, utility and power of my Blackness, my femininity and my conscious soul. Their construction happens by invocation. That is, I seek these principles and do these practices (i.e. "calling them up") in times of trouble, gladness, or in-between-ness. Their construction also happens by embodiment. They are enmeshed with my tangible person. This happens physically through kneeling in prayer, lifting my hands in praise and bowing my head in worship. It happens as I handle my Bible and leaf through its pages. It happens as I read the living oracles quietly or aloud (Acts 7:38), write the scripture line by line and weave my questions and assertions before/within/between/and after each verse. The enmeshing

2 LORD refers to God, the Father. Lord refers to Jesus, the Son.

3 See Appendix.

happens spiritually, through the advance of my God-sense; my attuning to His voice (John 10:5); my posture in His presence and my faith in His commandments (2 Corinthians 4:13). It happens emotionally through the submission of my limited sentiments and appropriation of negative thoughts that suppress and hinder me or God's purpose for or in my life (Proverbs 28:26; Proverbs 14:12-13). Through these principles and sociocultural practices, invoked and embodied by my Black, feminine self and Christian consciousness, I constructed a literacy event (Hornberger, 2000) that bears multiple meanings and signifiers. The conscious contextualization of the verses referenced here rests in the fact that, as a born-again Christian, I understand and believe, "all scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work". That is, my Christian consciousness understands the context of the scriptures as, at once, universal, personal, utilitarian, ethereal, and applicable to all endeavors of inquiry and subsequent action.

DISORDERED COHERENCE: A CRITICAL, CREATIVE METHOD FOR GENERATING A LITERACY EVENT

Before my sister asked me to go to the LORD for her, I began to consider what might happen if she died. Since the physical pain and spiritual departure of my sister introduced a gross instability and acute anxiety in my life, I wanted a method of inquiry through which to capture and document her person and character as I remembered her in wholeness, apart from disease. I wanted this method to be a stabilizing force, one that could couch my intellectual inquiry, spiritual journey and emotional pain, while also staving off the mental panic that threatened me, when I imagined her departure. It needed to be a method through which I could demonstrate the productivity of my new literacies, noting that something useful and meaningful could be visibly formed as a result of them. I needed some "thing" to hold on to...something to see, hear and feel...something I could keep as a monument to Joy and share with others. These requirements meant that I had to access a responsive, reading/writing research pedagogy – i.e. a hybrid site for literacy inquiry, teaching, learning and research – to support the work of the inquiry described here. Disordered coherence is a research pedagogy that acts like a method for teaching and inquiry and, thus, serves this purpose (Staples, 2012).

Disordered coherence is an "in-process" method that I developed for another study – one in which I inquired into the literacy practices and literacy events generated by/with/among a group of African American women engaging with post 9/11 popular culture narratives (Staples, 2012). Through disordered coherence, the women and I "sought, located, sifted and extrapolated [from various sources] 'important', 'jarring', 'special', and 'altering' moments of voices rising" in

our data sets (Staples, 2012). We did this to discover knowledge generated within our literate community. Disordered coherence refers to the disorganized ways members cohered their literacy practices, understandings of selves, topics of interest and material artifacts in order to arrive at local epistemologies and generate literacy events (Staples, 2012). When I say “local epistemologies” I am referring to those complex ways of knowing that function at the site(s) of the individual and are shared with members of a similarly situated community (Staples, 2012). In the context of the inquiry presented here, I used disordered coherence on my own. I re-visited journal entries that cataloged my Bible studies, prayers and notes about my sister’s 3-year battle with cancer. Without order or strategic sequence, I cohered these notes with pictures of Joy, Lori, and me from childhood through adulthood. I included pictures of everyone that was important to Joy, and subsequently, to me. I proceeded to go back and forth between and among multiple texts (such as: journal entries, pictures, handwritten notes, favorite songs, Facebook® postings, emails) to find “voices rising.”

This method inspired many sociocultural and spiritual practices to help manage my grief. First, disordered coherence helped me to gather semblances of my sister’s voice as it occurred through her writings (handwritten notes and emails), my comments on her voice (as they emerged within my study notes and journal entries), and effects of her voice (that could be inferred through various pictures of our parents, grandparents, her husband, children and friends). I also brought my voice, comprised of my sentiments, convictions and dreams, alive within these materials documenting Joy, together into one space. I began the next phase of the method, which involves placing and juxtaposing these “voices” so that they form a new artifact and give rise to a new voice or set of voices – one(s) that can add meaning, knowledge, insight and orienting records for understanding processes, practices and products and their corresponding impacts. The coherence of this disorder inspired a small, emergent ease, the type of comfort I was looking for. I could see and hear my sister in the materials. She was vibrant and peaceful there. I could trace aspects of her journey and resonate with a semblance of her self that I knew best. This process enabled a small, yet important, disconnect from her fading away. It gave me hope and, for a short time, quelled my terrifying fears of losing her. The scripture found in the book of Nehemiah was integral to my process in three ways. It spoke to key aspects of the sisterhood I shared with Joy, the signifying effects of scripture itself, and the construction of death in Christianity.

On sisterhood

8 So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

— *The Holy Bible*, the Book of Nehemiah, Chapter 8, verse 8.

It was when I performed disordered coherence that I came upon Nehemiah's words. I found a journal entry dated three months prior to my sister's passing. In the entry, I wrote all of chapter eight, along with notes on the meaning I understood from the passage. Joy was inclined to the book of Nehemiah. She once told me that she felt strongly about his life as a prophet. I remembered finding the passage when I searched the Word for examples of faith, because I believe that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). I wanted to find an illustration of the reception of faith by the hearing of the Word. In this passage, the prophet Nehemiah provides an account of Ezra, the scribe. The passage describes Ezra preparing to declare the Word of the LORD to all of Israel:

⁵And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people) and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. *The Holy Bible*, the Book of Nehemiah, Chapter 8, verses 5-6.

Since I was raised a practicing Christian and participated in praise, prayer, and worship my entire life, this illustration was not new to me. However, it resounded with new significance in light of the disease that attacked my sister. As I sought the LORD about Joy's fate, I came again and again to this passage. In verse 8, Nehemiah notes that several people "gave the sense...caus[ing] [all the people] to understand the reading". This statement reminded me of Joy. The sisterhood I shared with her was the fruit of a unique socio-spiritual and cyclical relationship. Much of my sister's life, her way of being and doing, her sense of self and consciousness, caused me to understand multiple readings. She literally helped me to learn to read print and eventually helped me to discern scripture. She prompted me to read darkly (Staples, 2008a, 2008b, 2012a, 2012b). Reading darkly means, "to read closely, with particular attention to the shadows and undercurrents of what is said and written. It is not always about literal inferences. Reading darkly is tantamount to a highly sensitized search, one that relies on a spiritual awareness" (Staples, 2012a, p. 479). My encounter with Nehemiah's account of the people's posturing in worship and readiness to receive the Word accounted to them helped me to anchor myself and get ready for the Word of the LORD to me.

On scripture

9 And Nehemiah...Ezra....and the Levites taught the people; said unto all the people, "This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep". For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

—*The Holy Bible*, the Book of Nehemiah, Chapter 8, verse 9.

Biblical scripture functions, for me, as a comprehensive set of living oracles that invoke order, assurance, and resolve. When Nehemiah, Ezra and the levitical priests taught the people, they were given a commandment. They were told that the day the people heard the Word of the LORD was “holy” and that they were not to “mourn or weep”. My Christian consciousness nurtures faith in the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God such that I know, when I read scripture under the urging of His presence, the Word is used to speak to me and guide me into all truth (John 16:13). When I aligned this scripture with other material artifacts I had gathered, I was affected by the fact that “all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law” (Nehemiah, Ch. 8, v. 9). I perceived the voice of the Holy Spirit urging me to attend to this verse closely, as it would be used to prepare me for a pending season of loss. I felt nervous and saddened when I perceived this. I did not want to face my sister’s passing. However, I knew that when the Word comes forth, in a personal, intimate sense, and is quickened with resonance within one’s heart by the Holy Spirit, certainty is signified. This is true because scripture states once the LORD speaks, His Word cannot return unto Him void; it will accomplish whatsoever He desires (Isaiah 55:11). When I clipped this verse from my journal, and placed it on the pile of other texts so that it might vibrate with other voices rising, my heart broke.

On death

10 Then he said unto them, “Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our LORD: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength”.

—*The Holy Bible*, the Book of Nehemiah, Chapter 8, verse 10.

I was always taught that death must be understood as a meaningful, purposeful, and glorious transition (2 Corinthians 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:55). When a person dies in the favor of God and under the saving grace of Jesus Christ, s/he is taken into glory and covered with rest and wholeness and enabled to worship God in peace, forever. I abide by this truth. Yet, when faced with my sister, her body wracked with pain and weeping, the truth was difficult to profess. It got stuck in my throat for weeks. I did not utter it with resolve. I remembered a vision of her wasting away when I found this verse. In it, Nehemiah writes that he, Ezra, and the Levites said to the people, in the face of their pain, “go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet...neither be ye sorry”. This verse struck me because it is a commandment to rejoice in the face of despair. Upon reading it, I returned to notes on my sister’s name:

“joy” – A fruit of the Spirit; a persistent, constant state of fullness in God; demonstrated by contentment and peace in thoughts, words, and deeds; evident in

the abiding presence of wisdom, satisfaction and stability, regardless of outward circumstances; a state of being deeply and continually connected to the Divine. See: Isaiah 35:10; Isaiah 55:12; John 16:22; Galatians 5:22

I noted that Nehemiah says emphatically, “the joy of the LORD is your strength”. I was struck by the clarity of this scripture. As I thought about what it might mean to let go of my Joy, I was faced with the wisdom of God on what the spiritual fruit of joy means. It means strength. The joy of the LORD *is* my strength. This strength presides over sickness, disease, death and hopelessness. I clung to this truth relentlessly in the final hours of Joy’s life. It helped me to appropriate her death.

GENERATING A NEW LITERACY EVENT IN MEMORIAM, OR, HOW THIS WORK HELPS PEOPLE

11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, “Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved”. 12 And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

—*The Holy Bible*, the Book of Nehemiah, Chapter 8, verses 11-12.

As I invoked and embodied my literacies, through disordered coherence and as a result of my Black, feminine self and Christian consciousness, I was struck by this last verse of the excerpt from Nehemiah. The Levites urged the hearers of the Word of the LORD to “hold [their] peace...and be not grieved”, knowing that “the day is holy”. I heard from the LORD what would be my sister’s destiny and, in that instance, I mourned the declaration. As I gathered materials and lamented a future I perceived to be littered with despair, I did not feel that the day of Joy’s departure could be understood as holy. It was difficult for me to hold my peace – to keep it close to my heart and take refuge in it. However, my self and consciousness compelled me to submit to the Word and find this state of being, and in so doing, recognize joy in the situation at hand. As I sat and looked at the materials I gathered through disordered coherence, I began to see the possibility of a literacy event – an artifact that could coalesce Joy’s voice rising and merge hers with my own. After sifting through the materials, I began to write the story of her testimony. It was an account of her request that I seek God’s will for her life, on her behalf, and communicate His voice to her.

I read her testimony⁴ at her home going service⁵, in the presence of more than 400 people who knew and loved her. It was read in the church in which

4 See Appendix.

5 African-American Christian reference for funeral service

she was raised, where she was married, and where she presented her children for baptism. The literacy event I developed (available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWHUSRyrvMU>) converged *Joy's voice*, through my recollections of her words, *my voice*, through the testimony I wrote, *scriptures* that assisted me in focusing my energy and engaging with the LORD in the Spirit, and *pictures* of my sisters, me and our family. Since my reading was audiotaped in this public, other sounds can be heard framing and adorning the event. For instance, the sounds of a piano playing from the choir bed can be heard. Also, members' calls and responses can be heard intermittently from the congregation (Richardson, 2003). The event is a digital representation of this convergence, orchestrated by my new literacies. It is an audiovisual artifact that performs a tangible representation of Joy's faithfulness, her wisdom, her grace and strength in the face of death.

Each component of this literacy event came into effect and was built through the principles and practices described here. This work is positioned to be helpful because it demonstrates the ways new literacies intersect the relational and spiritual aspects of lived experiences. As such, it supports entre of the relational and spiritual turn in New Literacy Studies. This turn is documented throughout my current body of work (Staples, 2012a, 2012b). Further, this work also illuminates another way literacies can be used to usher in hope, emotional healing and faith in God. It clarifies how literacies can show processes and illustrate the nature of connections. Finally, this literacy event exists as a record for posterity's sake, one that is not only dynamic and personal but also shareable and portable. These attributes bolster the viability and accessibility of the event. Although it is very difficult for me to engage with this literacy event, whenever I hear reference to it and take notice of how Joy's testimony blessed someone or inspired someone to call their sibling, parent, or other loved one to build a stronger relationship, I feel warmed and encouraged. I feel like rejoicing. And, again, I am reminded of the words in the book of Nehemiah, by the power of the Holy Spirit. I feel inspired "to make great mirth, because [I understand] the words that were declared" to me (the Book of Nehemiah, Chapter 8, verses 11-12).

NEW LITERACY STUDIES RESEARCH AND QUALITATIVE INQUIRY: ON THE RISINGS OF SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL REVELATIONS

Hemmingson (2008) presents a call to action for what he terms the Eighth Moment in qualitative research and notes that we "must find (or create) methods that best suit each lived experience" and "rebel against the colonists of social science" (p. 1). I find this call particularly crucial to the work of understanding dynamically the literate lives of marginalized individuals and groups as they occur in multiple teaching/learning contexts. The process presented in this article, for example,

points to the ways literacies can become creative, spiritual, relational, intimate and personally (r)evolutionary—that is, pointedly resistant, concessional, evolving and transgressive—over time (Staples, 2012b). Contemporary New Literacies Studies must attend closely to the socially situated ways individuals and groups incorporate and use selves, consciousness, situatedness and identities. These phenomena are accessed to build and share knowledge and ways of being. This acknowledgment is important because such inventive, thoughtful work exposes innovative points of entry for literacy teaching and learning and scholarship. Since teaching/learning contexts are shifting and evolving to include web 2.0 spaces and new technologies with global influence, literacies are now framed with issues of identities, location, transference and agency. These factors pave the way for that which is critical and creative in New Literacies Studies, revealing to us new facets of literate lives that intersect entirety – one’s spirit, soul and body – as they bump up against and traverse “others”.

The inquiry into my own new literacies and literacy event reveal to me the ways I generate knowledge and come to know my own being, in addition to the ways I attempt to form connections with others (in this case, my Joy). My literacies summoned and disclosed a deep epistemology, one that is endarkened (Dillard, 2000) and sister-Spirit-breathed. I learned that it is also interactive and relational, intensely interdependent with the voices and practices of others. I see now that my epistemology is also entangled; it is intertwined with awarenesses that range from sociocultural to Biblical promptings and are infused with physical and emotional interplays that are rooted in familial and historical stances. Similarly, my ontological perspectives on the management of my grief, reflections on my most intimate relationships and methods for remembering and memorializing have to do with negotiating presences that are spiritual, emotional, intellectual and material. My ways of knowing/doing (teaching, researching, finding out, understanding and making meaning) and my ways of being (imagining, breathing, experiencing feeling and intuiting) are bound. The enactment of my literacies, Black feminine self and Christian consciousness gave rise to these phenomena.

Reflecting on the bond of sisterhood I experienced with Joy, the ways scriptures helped to ease my soul during her transition, and my revelations about the mutable, conquerable bonds of death, helped to calm me after she died. These principles and practices provided me with an even deeper sensitivity to my Black, feminine self and Christian consciousness. I define literacy practices as the socially situated, culturally informed, and politically loaded modes of operandi by which people move beyond recognition or usage of words on printed pages to “observable and ideological patterns of behavior across literacy events” (i.e. texts that manifest as talk, writings and/or audio-visual productions) (Hornberger, 2000, p. 344). In the context of my remembrance of Joy, these principles and practices

take on new meaning, provide me with new knowledge and heighten my being, always.

APPENDIX: A SCRIPT OF THE LITERACY EVENT

“Hallelujah Anyhow”

Transcript of literacy event below; montage memorial available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWHUSRyrvMU>

Search YouTube®: [Joy Alliston]

Praise the Lord everybody. I’m Jeanine. I’m #3. This is Lori. She’s #2. And our sister was #1.

As my Aunt B. told you, my sister was an only child for several years. I believe she made it clear to my parents that she wanted siblings. Then, Lori and I came, back to back. And Joy was happy. She was happy for us to be with her. And she always made us feel that she wanted us. So from as far back as I can remember, one of my chief objectives in life was to be like Joy. I wanted to look like her and talk like her and walk like her and go where she went. She was so easy to love. She was pleasant and mild mannered. She was very intelligent and very perceptive but never judgmental or condescending. She took care of me and Lori our whole lives. She was always very careful to include us. And she demanded that we include her.

She really was our other mother. And anyone [who] knows us knows that we were raised to be a team. We were taught that we were each other’s keepers. And when we became adults this alignment was up to us. And we all made the same choice. We all made the decision to keep loving each other, deeply and consistently. And, miraculously, we became sister friends. I didn’t know, until I became grown, that that was not an automatic occasion. So, I feel doubly blessed. In the last few weeks of her life my sister called me to her and asked me to pray with her. She said, “Neen, go unto the LORD and inquire about me. Then, come back to me and tell me what He says.”

So I went before the LORD and I said, “Father, You know all things. Your daughter is afflicted in her body and her soul is weary. But you said Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by His stripes, we were healed (Isaiah, 53:5). You said You forgiveth all our iniquities and healeth all our diseases. You said You

redeemeth life from destruction and crowneth Your beloved with loving kindness (Psalms 103:3-4); I know You are able. Will You spare my sister and allow her to remain in the earth with us?"

And the LORD said, "No. I will not. Tell her that she will come to Me."

And I cried bitter tears. I said, "LORD, take back Your Word unto Your bosom for I know that whatsoever You speak is established in heaven and earth. Your word returns not unto You void but it accomplishes whatsoever You please and prospers in the thing whereto You sent it (Isaiah 55:11)."

And the LORD was quiet before me.

Then I went again unto my sister and I was quiet before her.

She said, "Neen, I know what He told you. The LORD showed me my funeral."

And I said, "Hush, sister. Your words have power. And for the first time in my whole life, I did not submit to her. I said, only speak life. Wait, I will search the Word and go back to Him."

And she was quiet before me.

And I searched the Word and I found hope. I went in to my room to be alone. I lay prostrate on the floor and I called unto the Father. I went boldly to the throne of grace and I cried, "Abba, Your Word is true (Isaiah 38:5)! Remember King Hezekiah and how he beseeched You for mercy? Remember when he was sick unto death? And with a heavy heart and contrite spirit he turned his face to the wall and cried out to You? And You added to him fifteen years (Malachi 3:6)?" I said, "You are the same yesterday, today and forever. And You are no respecter of persons (Hebrews 13:8). Will You give my sister fifteen years?"

And the LORD said, "No. Joy will come unto Me. And I have given you another Comforter. You know Him. He resides with you and He will stay with you and teach you all things (John 14:16-26). And you will do what is commanded of you on this day because I have given you a Spirit of power, and love, and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7)."

I said, "Amen, LORD."

Then I went again unto my sister and I knew that she knew. I climbed into bed with her and we wept together. And after awhile, she looked at me with her spectacular eyes and whispered, “Neen, hallelujah anyhow.” And we praised the One, True, Living God for all His benefits toward us (Psalms 116:12).

The three of us, we established prayer together, until she departed. And her legacy is in her family and friends. Her legacy is in the promise and sanctity of her marriage. Her legacy is in the beauty and love of her children. Her legacy is in our mother and our father and in Lori and me.

And her legacy is...hallelujah anyhow.

The LORD our God is faithful and very great (1 Corinthians 1:9). His ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). We can take refuge in Him and be saved. So, on this day, I submit to my Father in heaven. And, I submit to the example of my dear sister, as I have always done. And, I say, hallelujah anyhow.

Hallelujah anyhow.

Hallelujah anyhow.

Hallelujah.

And, sister, kiss daddy and we'll be seeing you...by and by.

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PERFORMING GENDER AS "THIRD-WORLD-OTHER" IN HIGHER EDUCATION

DE/COLONIZING TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST POSSIBILITIES

KAKALI BHATTACHARYA

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author theorizes the performance of gender enacted by those in the position of "Third-World-Other" within the context of higher education in the U.S. Such theorization situates discourses of race, class, and gender in higher education within the context of transnational feminist and de/colonizing epistemologies. Grounded in an ethnographic case study of two international students' experience in higher education in the U.S., the author discusses the role of formal and informal structures of higher education in theorizing gendered performances and identifies transnational feminist possibilities.

I start this paper with a short play to demonstrate the multiple ways in which the Third World Other gender subject positions are created and performed in higher education in the U.S. In the play, I attempt to show how colonizing discourses can be shared and proliferated by anyone, thereby blurring the boundaries between the West and the East, or North and the South, or between the oppressor and the oppressed. Colonizing discourses are borderless and are accessed by the colonized as well as the colonizers. Echoing with Mohanty's (2004, p. 36) call for antiracist feminist framework grounded in decolonization, in this paper I present

the ways in which I theorize transnational feminist possibilities and gendered performances based out of the negotiations of my experiences and experiences of two female Indian graduate students’ experiences in their first year of education in the U.S. Being in similar subject positions as the participants at times, I present my own negotiations of authoring myself and performing to/against/with discourses of Third World Other in order to blur the boundaries between the researcher and the researched and situate myself under the disciplinary gazes within which the participants and I collectively perform. The play is written out of a vignette that I initially created from a composite of the participants’ and my experiences of being in Third World Other subject positions.

FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR PEOPLE

INT. -- UNIVERSITY HALLWAY-- DAY

A university hallway with beige cinder blocked walls. People are walking up and down the hallway (stage left and right). Some of them are waving or smiling at each other. Kakali walks in (stage right). She is a female, of Indian heritage, an assistant professor at the university. She has a book, some papers, and her iPod Touch in her arms close to her chest as she walks down the hallway.

While Kakali is in the middle of the stage, Allison enters (stage right) behind Kakali. Allison is female of White European heritage, a tenured full professor at the university. Allison is carrying some papers and a phone in her hands.

ALLISON

Hey! Kakali! Hang on a minute!

Kakali pauses, turns around, faces Allison, smiles.

KAKALI

Hi Allison

ALLISON

I was thinking of you last night after I finished watching Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Namesake*.

Reminded me of your work. I read the book too.

KAKALI

(looking at the audience)

Oh no not again

ALLISON

(moving in closer)

There's a lot of parallels between *Namesake* and your work, don't you think?

Kakali pauses for three seconds and then smiles uncomfortably.

ALLISON

By the way, I LOVED the movie. I felt like I was watching some Indian family's home movies. It was so well done.

(Nods her head up and down expecting agreement.)

Kakali takes a breath, faces the audience, and stands in the foreground in front of Allison.

KAKALI

She isn't the first person to ask me this question. I work with female graduate students from India in their first year of being in the U.S. pursuing their education. They are NOTHING like the characters in *Namesake* and they don't identify with any kind of easy stereotyping about their experiences no matter who is reinforcing or buying into the stereotypes. Well-intentioned colleagues at conferences have engaged me about my work and compared it to the characters of the novel as their entry points to understanding my work.

I just don't like being in this position of (pauses), you know (whispers) *Third World Broker*. But I am, aren't I? Even as I resist it, I just am.

Kakali walks over to Allison and faces her.

KAKALI

Actually, Allison, I’m not sure that I identify much with the characters in the novel or in the movie. Neither do the participants with whom I work, or members of my family.

ALLISON

(In disbelief)

Really? Huh!

KAKALI

(Nodding head)

The book and the movie tried to demonstrate the experiences of first and second generations of a Bengali family who migrated from India to the U.S. just like my family as they are from Bengal too (pauses).

But you know, Bengali people in India and in the U.S. criticized the movie for being too simple.

ALLISON

(widens eyes, raises eyebrows, raises voice in disbelief)

But it was so rich! The colors, the rituals, the costumes, they were so glamorous, those costumes of your people! And the jewellery! Oh my God! Gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous!

(emphasizes)

KAKALI

(takes a breath, tries to interrupt, looks at the audience)

But, yeah...well..

ALLISON

(continues)

And I loved the henna tattoos. (Pauses, takes a moment to reflect) For us, Westerners, it was very insightful. I thought you'd be excited, having a movie like that in mainstream movie theaters with people appreciating your culture and the experiences of transnational migrants.

KAKALI

What if someone from another country watched Hollywood movies to understand the American culture? Say for example, if they watched Rocky, Rambo, or the Terminator? Do you think they would get a good sense of America?

ALLISON

(Laughs, pushes gently on Kakali's shoulder.)

Kakali, come on now. No sane person would ever think those movies are really about the American culture. They are just fun action movies. But *Namesake*, now that was different.

KAKALI

(Walks up to the audience in the foreground.)

I guess I won't tell her about the many times I had to talk to recently arrived Indian students and dispel some cultural misunderstandings. (Pause) Like all Americans don't live in mansions. There are indeed some poor people here, (pause) and all cities don't look like New York. All first dates don't lead to having sex even though in many movies they do and prostitutes are not always saved by Richard Gear just because they are pretty women.

Kakali walks over to Allison and faces her.

KAKALI

Maybe we can continue this conversation over coffee sometime? I have a meeting to run to.

(looks at iPod Touch).

ALLISON

Sounds good. It's good to catch up with you.

KAKALI

Yeah, you too.

Allison and Kakali hug. Allison exits stage right. Kakali exits stage left.

THE END

SITUATING TERMS

I use a transnational feminist framework to demonstrate the complexities of being at the intersections of sexism, racism, misogyny, and the regressive politics of ethnic nationalism while performing gender within the formal and informal structures of higher education. Before elaborating on the roles of colonized discourses in creating, maintaining, and proliferating various subject positions of the Third World Other women in educational spaces, I situate how I use the terms transnational, transnational feminism, and *de/colonizing* and postcolonial.

Transnational discourses have evolved from recognizing globalization as the flow of people, trades, and economies across nations to investigating the volume, intensity, characteristics, focus, and direction of such exchanges (Jameson & Miyoshi, 1998; Wilson & Dissanayake, 1996). Frederic Jameson (1998) describes globalization as an untotizable reality because on one hand it comes with the promise of crossing multiple national borders, but on the other hand, these border crossings produce binary relations between nations, their people, and cultures. For example, when women in India come to the U.S., they feel certain racial and national borders drawn around them, which they did not experience while they were in India. Therefore, even though the migration of an Indian woman to higher education in the U.S. might indicate a globalization of education, the borders drawn around her due to her race and nationality indicate a certain kind

of ordering of the world and its people through/with/against which the woman would have to author herself.

Transnational feminist theory becomes a helpful framework within which the experiences of women who are first and second generation migrants from India in the U.S. can be situated. According to Stone-Mediatore (2003), transnational feminist theory “offers a particularly useful analytical framework to investigate the role of stories in struggles of resistance against exploitative and oppressive relations. In addition, transnational feminist theory allows us to identify experiencing subjects in terms of specific social, political, and cultural hierarchies without naturalizing identities” (p. 127). Stone-Mediatore argues that transnational feminism creates a space for stories that can reveal the multiple ways women’s experiences are produced and demonstrates how such experiences can be mapped onto localized, nationalized, and globalized systems of oppression. Grewal and Kaplan (1994b, p. 13), use transnational feminism to “problematize a purely locational politics of global-local or center-periphery in favor of...lines cutting across them” (p. 13). Transnational feminism, then, focuses on issues of cultural exchange of people, trades, technology, knowledge, wealth through local and global spaces and the subsequent material conditions generated by such movements. Grewal and Kaplan (1994, p. 17) warn that transnational feminists need to organize themselves to analyze how “scattered hegemonies ... reveal themselves in gender relations” to avoid isolated feminist movements that are “prone to reproducing universalizing gestures of dominant Western cultures” (p. 17). Thus, transnational feminism advocates for coalition-based politics that privileges multiplicity without essentializing any categories of identity.

For me, all of the above terms are situated broadly and loosely situated within postcolonialism. Postcolonialism, according to Loomba (1998/2002, p. 18-19), is a term that needs to be “used with caution and qualifications (p. 2).” Defining postcolonialism is difficult for two reasons. First, to consider postcolonialism temporally as that which happens after colonialism is to miss the current and evolving effects of colonialism on once colonized countries and their subjects. Second, defining postcolonialism as a socio-political condition that affects once-colonized countries is inadequate due to the divergent material conditions and consequences of colonialism. For example, Canadian postcolonialism has different material consequences for its residents than Indian or Kenyan postcolonialism.

Hence, the term ‘postcolonial’ can be used to “refer to a process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome which takes many forms and is probably inescapable for all those whose worlds have been marked by that set of phenomena: ‘postcolonial’ is (or should be) a descriptive not an evaluative term” (Hulme cited in Loomba, 1998/2002, p. 19). However, there is no ‘pure’ (Gedalo, 1999)

space that can disengage colonialism¹ in its entirety. Accordingly, I situate post-colonialism as the political, economic, and socio-cultural practices which arise in response and in resistance to colonialism. The concept of postcolonialism is constantly evolving amidst the current global culture, so postcolonial “can serve as a term that positions cultural production in the fields of transnational economic relations and diasporic identity constructions” (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994a, p. 13).

However, any discussion of postcolonialism and transnational feminism needs to be coupled with the interrogation of the colonizing and de/colonizing contexts within which they are produced, maintained, proliferated, and imagined. De/colonizing epistemologies, in rudimentary terms, resist production of imperialistic knowledge. De/colonizing epistemologies represent collective and varied ways of knowing the hegemonic effects of colonizing discourses and their foundational assumptions. Colonizing discourses are those that emerged from the post-Enlightenment European discourses (Smith, 1999) and currently represent imperialistic discourses forcing polarized relations between people, their locations, their categories of identification, and their ways of knowing and understanding the world. These imperialistic discourses continue to create grand narratives that exoticize non-White narratives or push them to the periphery. Since de/colonizing epistemologies function in spaces invaded by colonizing and decolonizing discourses, I represent the word “de/colonizing” as such to indicate the exchanges and interactions between existing colonizing discourses and utopian decolonizing imaginations. Additionally, I use de/colonizing in its present continuous tense because I de/colonizing is a way of becoming, a continuous, evolving process, that needs to be interrogated, re/assembled, re/imagined, and re/produced.

IMAGINING A DE/COLONIZING TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST PROJECT

The inevitability of being a Third World Broker in higher education despite my resistance to it does not escape me. Simply by identifying a space in which I am performing, deconstructing, and reconstructing possibilities, I have situated myself in some sort of Third World Other subject position. Yet, like the participants in my study, I negotiate my role in this subject position within the formal and informal structures of higher education every instance someone asks me to identify with characters in movies, songs, and/or novels associated with India or South Asia. My resistance to *Namesake*, and the discourses produced as a consequence,

¹ See Partha Chatterjee’s *The Nation and its Fragments* where colonialism is discussed as a way of maintaining unequal international relations of economic and political power employing social, cultural, and religious means of control, as well as economic and political ones, using both institutional and repressive state apparatus. In colonialism, the ruling group represents the colonized as the “other” those that are inferior and radically different, and hence incorrigibly inferior.

is primarily a resistance to the creation of an essentialized Third World Other who is consumed as an exotic commodity for entertainment, cultural reduction and identification, and a point of reference to an un/known culture and its people. Grewal (2005/2006) reminds:

Since identities are always “strategic” we need to examine how the “strategic essentialism” addresses either the problem of essentialism or the operations of power upon subjects; furthermore it is not clear what levels of self-consciousness are needed to make essentialism strategic or not and whether assuming a “strategic” consciousness about identity is the only ways in which power can be negotiated. Which subject-positions can be invested to produce an identity is a question of power that has to be understood within a force field of regulated subject positions and institutions. Although all identities are formed through strategic essentialism, they are neither stable, nor ahistorical. They exist to enact specific kinds of agency through the exercise of power. If subjects are formed through the work of institutions and discourses, then these subjects become identities only through identification with newly perceptible identities and in response to technologies of regulatory power (p. 14)

In other words, the ways in which the strategic essentialization of the Third World Other subject positions play a role in creating identities and identification in higher education need to be interrogated within the context of production of agency, exercise of power, and responses to such technologies of regulatory power. Thus, the emergent contradiction in playing the role of a Third World Broker, a subject position with which I don't identify but rather have been positioned, and have positioned myself, needs to be situated within the agentic role of being able to write myself in existence and the resistance to reductive discourses disseminated by the existing technologies of regulatory power. Let me note now that my use of the Third World, or Third World Other, or Third World Woman is not essentialized, monolithic, or untroubled. Indeed, I do not see these subject positions as stable, or fixed in meanings. I use these terms to explore how the subject positions represented through such labeling are discursively created. Indeed there should be no binaried division or ranking of the world and it's people. There should not be a monolithic First World colonizer and the Third World colonized. These labels are suspect and colonization is not just about occupying space, trades, or knowledge by a dominant group. Often the colonized discipline each other in the colonizer's ways and in that case colonization is also an erasure of indigenous sensibilities.

With a global connectivity, the transnational Brown female body is gendered in multiple colonizing ways in higher education in the U.S. Through easy access, entry points to the Third World Other are created in movies like *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Namesake*, and *Monsoon Wedding* which then creates discursive bodies and subjects for Third World Women. Since women's bodies are the site of cultural discipline and markers of tradition and identification, the appearance of being

in "costumes" further exoticizes that which is un/familiar. While these discourses are not unique to higher education in the U.S., but since the formal and informal structures of higher education represents the broader social structures within which it is situated, the influence of such discursive forces in creating disciplined and exocitized subject positions cannot be ignored. Additionally, higher education is also the site of entry of many international students in the U.S. Thus after their entrance, the international students are at once subjected to the mobile and fixed transnational subject positions that have material consequences on their lives.

This social body of discourses around Brown along with post 9-11 discourses create a connectivity amongst people about the Brown archetype that can be used to regulate, maintain, discipline, monitor, colonize, and de/colonize. The possibilities of connectivity during this technology-rich era are at once critical and troubling. Connectivity allows one to access information globally, whether it is a person, groups of people, or their indigenous idiosyncrasies, and holds the possibility of creating commodified subjects. On the other hand, this broad-based technological connectivity can also create multiple sites of agentic solidarity and praxis amongst like-minded people. Indeed the world has become one giant technologically driven library with multiple tentacles of access. These tentacles can form strong and weak networks (Grewal, 2005/2006) through which discourse travels, proliferates, and gets translated and coded in various ways creating or maintaining subject positions like the Third World Other woman.

For example, after a cultural outsider sees the movie *Namesake*, s/he can go to a movie review site and discuss the movie with like-minded people who can further reinforce the legitimacy of the subject positions archetyped by the movie. If another person creates a hyperlink to the movie review site, then the network of this discourse is proliferated. Suppose someone posts the reviews on her Facebook page or posts the link on Twitter, encouraging friends to watch the movie or read the book. Now, there is a strong discursive network about the ways in which the movie and the subject positions produced within it can function for those individuals who are connected to the network. How such discursively networked society play a role in the formation of South Asian Indian and feminist subjects is of particular interest to me.

Subject positions of difference between the West and the Rest created in books, novels, or within connected discursive spaces aren't inherently negative but such subject positions when thrust upon people in order to author their existence through a kind of social documentary that denies their lived realities can create dangerous machines of discipline, inequalities, and missed understandings. The ethics of producing characters who occupy certain subject position in novels that are aimed for commercial purpose and re-presenting narratives and negotiations of participants in research projects are entirely different. Unlike Lahiri, the obligations I have to the participants of my study, through member checks,

establishing rapport, gaining entry and trust into their lives, and re-presenting findings with which the participant can identify and agree, lead me to tell tales where characters don't resolve issues at the end of the research. The negotiations of the participants are continuously evolving with their interactions with people, events, circumstances, expectations.

Therefore, even in re-presenting narratives of the participants' negotiations, I am painfully aware of the fleeting nature of the narratives, frozen only in that moment of time, where we constructed a shared understanding. These narratives stand in contradiction to the essentialized characterization of the South Asian women within the tentacled discursive spaces where participants demonstrate a continuous shuttling between multiple subject positions as part of their being and becoming. The shuttled travels produce contradictory ways of negotiating experiences, slippages in understanding the limits and possibilities of occupying certain subject positions, and never really settling into an easy resolution of tensions of identifying with multiple cultural norms and expectations.

For example, the essentialized archetype of being a Brown female in the U.S. often narrates the lack of belongingness and identification with dominant White cultural discourses. However, given that the world is technologically connected, one doesn't have to reside in the U.S. to have access to dominant discourses. Transnational identity and identification can arise in India, for example, without ever setting foot out of one's own hometown. Therefore, monolithic understanding of oppression and privileging of the Rest versus the West misses the complexities of collaboration across cultures, friendships, mutual appreciation and respect, and coming together in shared humanity. My point here is not to criticize the movie *Namesake* per se, but to demonstrate that the coded translation of the subject positions within which South Asian Indian women are thrust to as a result of commodification of the exotic is often incommensurable with the ways in which participants of this study and I negotiate our experiences, tensions, and messiness of being transnational females in a bordered, borderless, and connected world.

Specifically, in a de/colonizing transnational feminist project, there should be no need for creating binaried opposition between Western liberatory discourses and de/colonizing transnational feminist discourses, thereby constructing countercultures with their own forms of hegemony and alienation. The utopian imagination that informs de/colonizing projects should be interrogated especially where there is the need to seek the approval of the colonizers. I am inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa's confession as she imagines a day of affirmation for her people:²

On that day I say, "Yes all you people wound us when you reject us. Rejection strips us of self-worth; our vulnerability exposes us to shame. It is our innate

2 By "her people," I refer to Anzaldúa's description of people with Chicana, Mexican, Indian, and Anglo heritages creating a *mestiza*.

identity you find wanting. We are ashamed that we need your good opinion, that we need your acceptance. We can no longer camouflage our needs, can no longer let defenses and fences sprout around us. We can no longer withdraw. To rage and look upon you with contempt is to rage and be contemptuous of ourselves. We can no longer blame you, nor disown the white parts, the male parts, the pathological parts, the queer parts, these vulnerable parts. Here we are weaponless with open arms, with only our magic. Let's try it our way, the *mestiza* way, the Chicana way, the woman way." (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999, p.110)

Thus, in this de/colonizing transnational feminist project, I not only envision solidarities amongst sisters but also a shared humanity where our struggles and dreams are more similar than different regardless of our cultural backgrounds. In order to identify the role of colonization on the psyche of humanity, I, too, accept my "white parts, male parts, queer parts, pathological parts, and vulnerable parts" and welcome the borderless, multi-pronged, globalized coalitions amongst people whose shared visions promote for new ways of challenging social systems of inequalities. I being to imagine a de/colonizing transnational feminist project. What would it look like? What multi-pronged approaches need to be considered? How could such a project be theorized in order to create antiracist, anticolonial, and transnational feminist possibilities? How would a de/colonizing transnational feminist project inform itself? What would writing look like if I envision my primary audience to be what is usually labeled as Third World Other? How would I shift my voice? What tales would I tell? What arguments would I make if I imagine people who look like me, live lives like me would read my work?

Mohanty (2004) imagines a feminist politics that would "require a clear understanding that being a woman has political consequences in the world we live in, that there can be unjust and unfair effects on women depending on our economic and social marginality and/or privilege. It would require recognizing that sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism underlie and fuel social and political institutions" (p. 3). Often the influence of these connected discourses is subtle and cumulative and not overtly measurable with some research instrument. The attitudes, behaviors, institutional and relational politics situated within colonizing discourses need a consciousness shift so that visions of equality and agency are realized and manifested.

I am reminded of a Hyderabadi Indian restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia called *Zyka*, which means "The taste" when translated loosely in English. Unlike other Indian restaurants, the Chef at this restaurant serves dishes that are familiar to the transnational Indian palate instead of catering to the perceived palate of the larger White population in Atlanta. In other words, the food is not a watered-down disappointment of a bland mixture of sauces and meat and vegetables like the other Indian restaurants that I had visited in Atlanta and elsewhere in the U.S. I was shocked when I first visited *Zyka* by seeing the number of White customers

in the restaurant who were enjoying a version of the Indian cuisine that seemed authentic to me and other Indian patrons based on my conversations with them about the reasons why they come to the restaurant often. It is then that I realized that there is something unsettling about the assumption that in order to be accepted within the dominant cultural discourses, de/colonizing or deconstructive transnational feminist work need to be commodified and catered for an audience who can be considered cultural outsiders. I believe that in our shared humanity, well-intentioned people will always create their own entry points into un/familiar discourses, experiences, or even create new forms of understandings on their own without being prompted by reductive archetypes.

REPORTING FROM THE PERIPHERY OF THE FIELD

Since this paper is about theorizing the performance of gender from a “Third-World-Other” perspective in higher education, I won’t be reporting much on findings or methods of the study. However, interested readers can find such work elsewhere (Bhattacharya, 2007a, 2007b, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). Nevertheless, the following paragraphs offer some contextual details about the design of the study grounded within the current theorization made in this paper.

The findings from this study is from a year and a half long ethnographic project where I explored the negotiations two female graduate students from India and their negotiations of their experiences in their first year of pursuing graduate studies in a southern University in the U.S. The data collection method included in-depth interviews, conversations, participant observations, photo- and object-elicitations and document data. To gather photo-elicited data, I gave the participants a cheap \$5.00 disposable camera to take pictures of whatever they think is meaningful and represents their experience of being an international student on campus. The participants, both of them being from upper middle class in India, laughed at my cheap camera and immediately informed me that they have their digital cameras and I may use digital copies of the pictures that they already took and the ones they will take in the future. Additionally, to gather object-elicited data, I gave the participants a memorabilia box and asked them to store anything that they considered was memorable about their experiences of being an international student on campus. When we met, participants narrated stories about the pictures they took and objects they saved. These conversations often jumped around from the story behind the tangible picture and the object to a tapestry of other issues that were connected to the stories.

Of particular interest to me was that which looked odd, weird, uncommon to the participants as those would be the indicators of how the influence of formal and informal social structures inside and outside academia play out in their daily

lives. In the process of conducting the study, I came to understand the struggles of the participants when they learned that they were a minority for the first time in their lives and the allowances and limitations of the subject positions. Both of the participants enjoyed upper middle class status, social visibility, religious and caste privileges in India, which were instantly erased when they arrived in the U.S. The learning of how to be a minority became a focal point through which the participants learned to author and unlearned themselves their previous privileges lost when they crossed oceans to come to the U.S.

The participants did not have any schema about race-based Othering from their prior experiences of being in India. However, they learned quickly that they had to resist against certain dominant stereotypes about being from India or being Indian female mostly driven by binaried discourses of Us versus Them (read: civilized versus backwards). The participants engaged in several discussions where they assured their dominant cultural counterparts that they were adequately exposed to Western discourses and aren't experiencing the "culture shock" that they were expected to experience. In fact, given both the participants came from a large cosmopolitan city to a small southern University, the "culture shock" that they indeed experienced was the how small the town was in which they were living in the U.S. compared to Mumbai, India. They were surprised by stores closing between 6-9 pm when they lived in a city that had a reputation of never sleeping and businesses remained open at all hours of the night. In fact, the participants found the university town in which they were living to be backwards compared to their hometown in India based on religious and political ideologies and lack of being as urbanized and cosmopolitan as Mumbai is.

Since I am conscious of the production and re-production of the Third-World Other, I have chosen to avoid traditional forms of data re-presentation to discuss findings. Instead, I have decided to report from the periphery of the findings with a synthesis of data from photo- and object-elicitations, conversations, and observations. Since I have produced realist re-presentations of my data elsewhere, my intent here is not to simply re-produce the tales that were told to me or events that I have seen or can verify with tangible evidence such as pictures, videotapes, etc. Through interrogating the various ways in which the participants authored their roles as female international students in the U.S., I have chosen to interrogate spaces of resistances and accommodations through analyzing voice and silence in the data. Through this interrogation I want to theorize a de/colonizing project about Third World Women in relation to notions of home the way in which the transnational participants in this study imagined, re-membered, fantasized, and desired.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS: MEMORIES OF HOME

Throughout the study and long after the formal collection of data was over, the participants and I discussed what home meant to us. This discussion was initiated by our collective surprise at how fast we were returned to a space that is supposed to be not-here in the U.S. in various conversations with our colleagues and staff in higher education. For example, within the first week of the participants' entry into the U.S. they were asked what they would do with their careers when they go back home. Both of the participants had not given much thought to a career trajectory that extended beyond getting through the first month and sorting out being in a new country and in a new school system.

Additionally, the continuous engaging of the participants to act in the role of what they termed "Indian Ambassadors" to explain India to colleagues, professors, and staff in higher education made the participant re-examine how they understood India and what it meant to be Indian. For example, Yamini stated, "At home I didn't think I wasn't being Indian because I had pizza for lunch. Over here I am asked if we got pizza at where we lived in India. I never thought that eating pizza was a big deal or meant that I was now being more like the Americans." Because the transnational subject positions within which Yamini situated herself in India seemed to intersect with multiple indigenous sensibilities of the upper middle class Indian population, that Yamini never analyzed her role as a "Westernized" Indian woman based on the way she lived her everyday life. However, after a few months of being in the U.S. she was learning that home has to be a marked spatial territory with characteristics that need to be different from the U.S. even though she was never able to reconcile with this expectation.

On the other hand, Neerada identified religion being a cultural marker to create a separate space for home when she was continuously asked to author her subject positions in terms of what made her "Indian" even though she saw herself as a transnational global subject prior to coming to the U.S. Neerada, who was not religious, in India, began to practice regular religious rituals, prayers, downloaded religious music from the Internet, and created a shrine in her apartment. She remembered her father being religious and tried to create something similar for herself. Neerada identified the familiarity with religious practices and having a shrine in the home as a marker for what felt like home and what felt like carrying a little bit of home with her where she stayed while in the U.S.

However, while the participants tried to author themselves in relation to resistance and accommodation of subject positions that were related to returning home, defining home, remembering home, desiring home, it became clear that home was no longer a physical space or a space whose details are grounded in tangible form. Instead, home was simply a state of mind or perhaps a state of being. Informed by the multiple cultural expectations grounded in the U.S. and

in India, both participants began to feel at home with their constant shuttling between contradictory subject positions. Though they were never able to resolve contradictions in their own ways of being, neither did they try. The acceptance of competing expectations became a state of being from where the participants chose how they negotiated their lived experiences. Therefore, a de/colonizing project of returning home, claiming and naming as proposed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) is an impossibility. To what space will the participants return as home? What will they claim as home or subject positions indigenous to home when such subject positions and the participants' relationship to them are protean, mobile, and shifting?

Thus, I propose that for a de/colonizing transnational feminist project, notions of home and how people negotiate their relationships with home need to be a central focus. Within these negotiations the binaried structures of nation states will be revealed. Moreover, the discursive forces that inform subject positions around home should be traced and analyzed for the inherent regulatory and disciplinary influences. The assumed primary audience of transnational feminist projects ought to be people who occupy or identify with some aspect of transnationalism or transnational feminism. In other words, the goal should not be to make the Master understand. On the other hand, fearing that the subaltern cannot be heard is unproductive even though the voices in research are always mitigated through various disciplinary filters. Even Gayatri Spivak states:

For me, the question 'Who should speak' is less crucial than 'Who will listen?' 'I will speak for myself as a Third World person' is an important position for political mobilization today. But the real demand is that, when I speak from that position, I should be listened to seriously, not with that kind of benevolent imperialism. (Spivak, 1990, p. 59)

Spivak's argument illustrates that listening, understanding, and interacting to/with Third World, or Other positions come with various colonizing expectations. One such expectation is to make transparent Third World or Other subjectivities for the colonizers. In other words, the responsibility to educate the colonizers rests on the colonized. Audre Lorde, in 1984, challenged this responsibility from a feminist perspective:

Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance, and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of the all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that is the task of the black and third world women to educate white women, in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought. (Lorde, 1984, p. 100)

Lorde's argument identifies how expectations placed on women and women of color to educate men and colonizers respectively are inherently oppressive acts that contradict the goals and intentions of "understanding" the position of the "Other." Understanding the differences between people is not just the Other's responsibility but a shared responsibility which requires genuine effort, curiosity, care, concern, and ethics on everyone's part, and not just on the part of the 'Others' to bring their own writing in existence in transparent terms so that "everyone" can get what s/he is saying. De/colonizing epistemologies informing feminism, transnationalism, and postcolonialism continue to promote discourses that call for the colonizers to abandon such expectations which engage the colonized's energies to meet the Master's³ needs.

Therefore, in discussing notions of home as experienced by people who are shuttling in multiple subject positions in higher education, one can identify the ways in which formal and informal structures and discourses in higher education informs the construction of home. Through such construction, one can begin to trace the migratory identification of home, the race, class, gendered ways in which home is understood by the participants and also by those they come into contact with. Such tracings can have the potential to highlight various forms of inequalities through which people of color negotiate their daily experiences in higher education. Perhaps a new set of discourses could emerge to address these inequalities, missed understandings, and create solidarity amongst well-intentioned individuals dissolving binaried discourses and blurring boundaries of race, class, and gender.

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3 It is difficult to define what the term 'master' means. Instead I highlight what the term 'master' does in multiple contexts. Master can be any individual, groups, or social systems whose sciences, epistemologies, knowledges, and practices are normalized, idealized, and discursively proliferated to create hegemonic social relations amongst people.

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NEPAL—THREE CUPS OF TEA

RUMINATING ON THE WRITING IN THE LEAVES

TRICIA ONG

ABSTRACT

In my life, I have always had a penchant for ‘threes’ - and when things have happened in threes they have always been symbolic. In the last two and a half years, I have been to Nepal three times - for art therapy and reproductive health work with Nepalese women, Hindu festivals and a Hindu wedding. Unexpectedly, the experiences have become interconnected and provided forthcoming inspiration. In this paper, I trace my three journeys to Nepal and provide insights into the pathway that led to the emergent inspiration to consider undertaking a doctoral research project in the women’s reproductive health field, in particular, in adolescent reproductive health, in Nepal.

Key words: Nepal, Art Therapy, Hinduism, Women’s Reproductive Health, Adolescent Reproductive Health.



Image courtesy of: <http://nepalitimes.com/news.php?id=18396/>

Introducing the tea journeys

In my life, I have always had a penchant for ‘threes’ - and when things have happened in threes they have always been symbolic. In the last two and a half years, I have been to Nepal three times - for art therapy and reproductive health work with Nepalese women, Hindu festivals and a Hindu wedding. Unexpectedly, the experiences have become interconnected and provided forthcoming inspiration. My triad of journeys has been named “three cups of tea” because this metaphor best describes a process that occurred while drinking cups of tea with Nepalese women: I shifted from being a stranger in the culture to becoming a friend to being accepted as “family”.¹ Over tea, the women and I have shared stories of our lives that enabled us to become intimately connected. Suffice to say, tea-drinking created the space for personal reflection and warm interaction. Providing a brief insight into Nepal, I will now trace my three journeys – and the emergent inspiration for potential doctoral research that came from ruminating on the experiences.

LAND OF THE TEA LEAVES

Located in South Asia, Nepal is a small landlocked country located bordered by Tibet to the north and India to the south. Topographically, it is a land of contrasts. It holds 8 of the 10 highest mountains in the world, including the tallest

¹ This metaphor was inspired by a quote by Haji Ali in Mortenson and Relin’s (2006) novel, *Three Cups of Tea: One Man’s Mission to Promote Peace One School at a Time*. This quote is: “The first time you share tea with a Balti (ethnic group of Tibetan-descent from Pakistan, you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honoured guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family, and for our family, we are prepared to do anything, even die.”

peak, Mt. Everest (8848m), and flat plains of less than 100 metres in the tropical Terai region.

Nepal is rich in ethnic diversity. It has over 125 different ethnic groups. In the main, they are Chetri, Brahmin-Hill, Magar, Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Kami, Musalman, Yadav and Rai. As a result of ethnic diversity, approximately 123 languages are spoken, including the official language of Nepali, followed by Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Bajjika, Magar, Dotel and Urdu. As English is used in many government agencies and businesses, this language is also spoken (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013).

In terms of land area, Nepal is small. It is 800 kilometres long and 150 to 250 kilometres wide. However, the country is densely populated. At present, the population is estimated at over 29 million. Within this estimate, there are believed to be approximately *12 927 431 men and 13 693 378 women* (Central Bureau of Statistics, no date). *While most people live in the capital city, Kathmandu, a significant proportion also resides in rural villages in remote mountainous regions.*

Although Buddhism, Islam, Kirat, Christianity, Prakriti and, to a lesser extent, Bon, Jainism, Bahai and Sikhism are practiced, Nepal is predominantly a Hindu country. Based on ancient Hindu traditions, Nepal follows a traditional lunar calendar - the "Bikram Sambat" - for civic and religious celebrations. (It is 56.7 years ahead of the western Gregorian calendar.) In addition, Nepal's patriarchal legal system and society is derived from Hindu customs and traditions. This system has a significant impact on women. According to Paudel (2011), "Prevailing from the pastoral or nomadic period, the patriarchal system sets up controls over women's body, labour, income, mobility, sexuality, ideology and even identity" (no page).

"FIRST CUP OF TEA"

In November 2011, I was invited by a creative arts therapy colleague to co-facilitate art therapy and women's reproductive health training for (women) survivors of human trafficking – and health professional helping to repatriate them - in Kathmandu, Nepal. At first I resisted the urge to go because Nepal had touched my life in 1987-1988 and I did not want to retrace the memories of a treasured life journey. However, at the time, I was specialising as a creative arts therapist in women's reproductive health in Melbourne, Australia. Therefore, the opportunity was too valuable to resist because I knew it would be professionally enriching. So after much deliberation, I decided to go.

As a result of a fortuitous reconnection with a Nepalese friend, I had an opportunity to immerse myself in the culture before my departure. Therefore, when I arrived in Kathmandu in March 2011, I felt ready to begin the work. Although returning to Nepal was an emotional experience for me, I embraced every aspect

of the experience - from staying in a guesthouse at a Tibetan Buddhist Monastery to embracing the culture to working with the women. Over the course of three and a half weeks, I had the opportunity to co-facilitate a series of workshops - using visual art (painting, drawing and collage), drama, clay and music – with aged 13 years to the mid-30s.² Although demanding, the experience was inspiring.

Due to the fact that many of the women did not speak English, an interpreter was required for the work. In addition, I had to learn various cultural body cues, which differed to those of western women, but I felt it was important to model the women's actions to adapt to the 'norms' and values of the culture. Although some of these experience were challenging, such as having to simplify verbal language for translation, I relished them because they brought many of the basic tenets of art therapy 'to life' – the need to communicate with body language and, often, without words.

In addition to learning some of the cultural norms and values, I also grew in my knowledge of 'cultural' women reproductive health issues, such as, a 'taboo' to educate women about their bodies, the preference for male offspring linked to female infanticide, child marriage and early childbearing and violence towards women who choose to keep female babies – to name a few. In addition, I also learned about the Hindu tradition of 'chaupadi pratha'. In this practice, women and girls are forced to spend days in isolation in mud huts, cowsheds and caves during menstruation, and sometimes childbirth, because secretions associated with them are considered to be "religiously impure". Although it is outlawed, the practice still occurs in the west and far west (isolated) regions of Nepal.

Learning about these issues caused me to reflect on my role as a mother and my relationship with my (then adolescent) daughter. I began to appreciate how lucky she was to have the freedom she has in her life in Australia – and the strength of the quality of adolescent reproductive health education in our country. I also began to think about ways of returning to Nepal to help with women's reproductive health education because of the level of trust gained with the women - and because it appeared the women were 'thirsting' for new knowledge about reproductive health issues.

"SECOND CUP OF TEA"

In April 2011, I returned home to Australia completely unsettled by my experience in Nepal. However, my unsettledness was not related to working with the women: I had unanswered questions about the culture and the cultural context for women. This imbued an urgent interest in returning to Nepal as soon as was

² Age-specific groups were run.

practically possible to set my questions to rest. So, with the blessing of my family, I returned to Nepal six months later.

I arrived in Kathmandu at most auspicious time of the year on Nepal's annual calendar: the Dashain Festival. At this time, families gather for 15 days of festivities and celebrations. Although the festival has roots in Hinduism³, Dashain is celebrated by Nepalese people - regardless of their ethnicity or religion - across the country. As I was invited to stay with Hindu and Buddhist Families, I was able to have a 'two-fold experience' of the various 'pujas'⁴ undertaken on, in particular, the 10th Day - or "blessing day" - of the festival. (This day is considered the most important day because family elders give 'tikka'⁵ and 'jamara'⁶ to younger family members in hierarchical order from eldest to youngest). In addition, I was able to participate in a celebration featuring traditional food (served only during the festival), dancing and singing.

Soon after the Dashain Festival, the Tihar Festival - or "Festival of Lights" - took place. Again, this festival is Hindu and celebrated by all Nepalese people. In Kathmandu, the city buildings were lit with fairy lights. In addition, kites were flown from rooftops, footpaths were decorated with coloured kolam (rice) powder, and fireworks blasted round the city. For days on end, dogs with tikkas roamed the streets and other animals (crows, cows and ox) were worshipped (on designated days) with the Hindu Goddess of Fortune, Laxmi. On the last day of the festival, "Bhai Tikka Day" ('bhai' means brother in Nepali), I was at a family home when girls came "carolling" to the doors and were given money by the elders in exchange for singing traditional songs and dancing. (This ritual is customarily for sisters to wish long life to their brothers.)

As a result of staying with families over the festival time, I was able to observe women and men in their traditional roles in Nepalese society, which enabled me also to see many inequalities for women. At times, this challenged my western way of 'thinking' as a woman - and caused me to reflect upon my ways of being in this culture. In addition to my family experiences, I also visited some of the women I had worked with six months earlier. This gave me opportunity to help run an adolescent reproductive health workshop for young girls in a shelter. Although I gained further insights into women's reproductive health issues in Nepal, I found myself focussing on the needs of adolescent girls.

3 The Dashain Festival honours the Hindu Goddess Durga's victory of good over evil. As such, she is worshipped (in her various manifestations) with innumerable pujas, offerings and animal sacrifices.

4 A 'puja' is a religious ritual performed by Hindus (and Buddhist) as an offering to various deities, distinguished persons or special guests.

5 A 'tika' is a red spot of vermilion paste mixed with rice that is placed on the forehead between the eyebrows.

6 'Jamara' is barley shoots sown on the first day of the Dashain Festival and picked 10 days later for the 'tika' ceremony on the blessing day,

“THIRD CUP OF TEA”

After my second journey to Nepal, I was captivated by my experiences in the culture. However, I had not intended to make another journey for some years. Then a wedding invitation arrived – to a Newari Hindu wedding. (The Newari people are the original inhabitants of Kathmandu, so their culture is steeped in ritual and tradition.) As I had not attended a Hindu Wedding before, I did not want to turn down a most incredible opportunity. From research, I knew that the experience would be a rich tapestry of colour - and would last for about ten days – and I would likely get to wear a sari.

In November 2012, I arrived in Kathmandu in the Hindu month of “Mangsir”. In Nepalese astrological terms, this is an auspicious time to get married in Nepal. Suffice to say, the city that was alive with ‘wedding fever’. As I had anticipated, there were many wedding events and multiple ‘sari-wearing’ opportunities. As red is a symbolic bridal colour, it is worn by the bride and women family members. As I was positioned as a “family member”, I was also invited to wear red. On the days I wore a sari, I was “pleated” into it by women in various families. As such, I was also able to share in some very intimate moments with (three generations) of women in one of the saddest moments in a Nepalese woman’s life. Weddings are considered to be sad affairs because as bride is ‘given away’ to her husband’s family. Traditionally, she is expected to stop work (outside the family home) to perform, solely, domestic duties. In addition, she must always wear ‘kurtas’⁷ in the family home and ‘bindis’⁸ in public to signify their marital status. To add, in Newari Hindu culture, these traditions are quite strict.

By the end of my stay, I had attended seven Hindu weddings (across various ethnic groups) in family homes and at temples, which gave me rich insights into the roles of women in Nepalese society. In addition, I learned about the various perceptions of love and marriage, in a culture where arranged marriage still occurs. In addition to the weddings, I also visited my women colleagues - out of which came an invitation to help develop, and run, an adolescent reproductive health program being developed by Nepalese women in Nepal in June 2013. Unfortunately, I was unable to go, but close contact with the women has been maintained.

A NEW POT OF TEA

On my return home, I began to explore professional literature, the internet and popular press for articles on issues for women and girls in Nepal. During this time,

7 A loose, collarless shirt worn with trousers or leggings.

8 A bright dot of red colour worn between the eyebrows (like tikka).

I also became aware that I had undergone a personal process of “enculturation” as a result of my experiences in Nepal. (It was drawn to my attention by a colleague.) According to *Enculturation, A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing and Culture*, “Enculturation as a concept is the process of teaching an individual the norms and values of a culture through unconscious repetition” (“About Enculturation”, 2013, no page). This process had been ‘enabled’ by my three journeys to Nepal and maintaining relationships with Nepalese people in between times through email, social media and phone contact. In addition, in 2011, I had been introduced to the Nepalese Community in Melbourne through a fundraising event. In 2013, after attending several community events, I then began writing regular feature articles for the ‘new’ Nepalese Community newspaper, “Pipalbot”. Collectively, these experiences also meant that I had been constantly engaged with (and learning about) Nepalese culture for nearly three years.

On writing for “Pipalbot”, I had also made a conscious decision – in consultation with the Nepalese Community – to write solely on women’s issues. Thus, I had positioned myself to be constantly researching and writing about women’s issues in Nepal. This research had led me to exploring the work of the United Nations (2013), where I stumbled upon the 8 Millennium Development Goals, which are aimed at improving issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS and primary education in developing countries by 2015. Under a subheading of “Goal 5: Improving Maternal Health”, attention was being drawn to the needs of teenagers and reproductive health in developing countries.

On perusing Nepal-specific data, I discovered that reproductive health problems were considered to be the main cause ill health and death of Nepalese women of childbearing age and, in fact, the country’s maternal mortality rate was one of the highest in South Asia (United Nations Population Fund Nepal, 2013). Devastatingly, this maternal mortality rate was highest in adolescents. Some factors contributing to the issue included the practice of early marriage and, therefore, early childbearing in the culture. The United Nations Population Fund Nepal (2013) had also estimated that 20% of adolescent girls were pregnant or are mothers of at least one child.

During this time, I also became of some developments in adolescent reproductive health education in Nepal through the school curriculum, the United Nations Population Fund Nepal and other. However, the United Nations Population Fund Nepal (2013) had put a “call out” for more research. In addition, I have discovered a number of gaps in academic research. This has inspired my interest in undertaking a doctoral research project in the women’s reproductive health field – in adolescent reproductive health - in Nepal. To add, I am particularly interested in working with the women and young girls I worked with in the shelter

9 See <http://www.pipalbot.com.au/>.

in 2011- because relationship development has been growing. Although I have yet to consolidate a research topic and question, I have a sense as to how a study could be situated.

That said, I believe I have already discovered a research methodology for a potential study because of the complexity of the culture in Nepal: ethnography. According to de Laine (1997), “Ethnography, one of the most important and well established approaches to qualitative research, is particularly well suited to the study of a people’s religious beliefs and perceptions of health and illness because of its focus on culture” (p. 1). (I am not of the ‘particular’ ethnographic approach just yet, but I am certain it will become clear.) In addition, I believe art therapy will play a role in my research process because I can see the potential to use arts-based tools for data-gathering with the young women. This is informed by having worked with adolescent girls in Nepal; there is likely to be an interest in working with (culturally-driven) arts based methods; there is likely to be (body) trauma, which may involve the need to work with non-verbal methods; and non-verbal methods may be valuable communication tools when verbal language is not shared (though I do understand and can now speak basic Nepali).

PARTING WORDS

As I write this final paragraph, I am currently drafting my doctoral research proposal. I am hoping to undertake an ethnographic study, working with young Nepalese women, which will – hopefully - enable me to make a small contribution to improving adolescent reproductive health education in Nepal. My three journeys to Nepal, my ongoing relationship with Nepalese people in Nepal, and my shared with Nepalese Community in Australia, have prepared me for a new journey into the culture. I am excited about the road I am about to embark upon because of its potential for Nepal, but also because I know that it part of a greater initiative to improve reproductive health education for women and girls in developing countries across the globe.

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LOOKING BACK/PAINTING FUTURES WITH YOUTH IN CHANGING TIMES AND PLACES

REFLECTIONS ON A MULTI-MEDIA METHOD

M. TANYA BRANN-BARRETT

ABSTRACT

Many educators and community advocates recognize the value of youth civic engagement in communities undergoing significant social and economic change. The nature of such involvement is not always as evident. Local historical practices and expectations still influence ways young people experience and perceive civic engagement. By exploring their regional past youth can consider the value of traditional notions of participation, ways some practices may need to be adapted and innovative models of engagement that can address present day needs of young people and the transitioning communities where they live. In this article I discuss a multi-media research method that incorporates historical photos and self-produced art to facilitate with young people the first steps towards such discussions. I present theories, research, and practice that informed the design and use of this method. I overview the broader study from which the method emerged and share participants' responses to the photos and the use of paint as a tool of expression. I describe ways young people gave meaning to their art and their views on the process. Finally, I critically reflect on their responses and my observations to consider implications of this kind of research including challenges, limitations, and potentials for educational research that encourages civic engagement that has meaning for youth and their regions.

In the wake of economical decline communities can benefit from citizens' engagement—including that of youth. However, the kinds of involvement that best serve people and communities in the midst of socio-economic transitions are not always obvious. As regions change so too do some of their needs. Accordingly, historical forms of civic engagement—while still valuable—may need to be adapted to better reflect present-day issues. In some cases, entirely new ways of being involved may be required. As a university professor, parent, and community advocate living in such a region I work with young people in myriad ways. I embarked on a multi-method critical ethnographic research study to explore how youth living in disadvantaged regions learn about, experience and perceive civic engagement. A long term goal was to inform classroom and community-based educational practices that help facilitate civic engagement that is meaningful to both youth and their region. The central site of my work was an Atlantic Canadian municipality that is comprised of a former city, towns, villages and rural communities. It has endured the closure of coal mining and steel-making industries and the significant decline of the fisheries—hence its label as a disadvantaged place. Citizens here seek to restructure their social and economic base and address the ramifications of the downturn including the rapid outmigration of youth.

One objective of this work was to uncover ways the past plays a part in present-day ideas youth have about civic engagement. Pierre Bourdieu (1990b) teaches that remnants of collective histories take root in our attitudes, feelings, and behaviours. Accordingly, youth inherit ways of engagement and citizenship that are to an extent community-bound. Still, they may have little or no personal recollection of the historical circumstances upon which some of their ideas of citizenship formed; especially when conditions that influenced community traditions, attitudes, and practices have drastically changed.

When influenced by historical notions of civic engagement that are difficult to fulfil and in some cases less relevant today youth often feel frustrated, inadequate and uncertain if they want to be involved (Brann-Barrett, 2013). Reflecting on their relationships with local history may help young people understand how the past influences their ideas about civic engagement. From there they can consider what aspects of traditional engagement are still appropriate. They can also contemplate new ways they are and can be involved that reflect the circumstances of their lives today.

How, then, might youth explore their past? Throughout many regions, visual traces are gone (see figure 1) threatening the memory of localized working class histories (Mac Donald, 2006). Consequently, markers that offer insights and trigger discussions among youth about the impact of community heritage are scarce.



Figure 1: Former Industrial Site.

Multi-media tools can help young people explore the past. In this paper I reflect on a research method through which focus groups of youth examined historical photos and created their own visual artwork as they contemplated their civic relationship with their region's past, present and future. First, I present theories, research, and practice that informed the design and use of this method. Second, I overview the broader study from which the method emerged and describe how the historical photos and art-making activity was carried out. Next, I share participants' responses to the photos and the use of paint as a tool of expression. I describe ways young people gave meaning to their art and their views on the process. Finally, I critically reflect on their responses and my observations to consider implications of this kind of research including challenges, limitations, and potentials for educational research.

TIME, PHOTOGRAPHS, ART-MAKING, AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH: INFORMATIVE THEORIES, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Participants in this research were asked to think about their relationship to their region's past and any connection they felt with 'what used to be'. To follow, they considered how their relationships with this history may have an impact on how they perceive civic engagement now. Making a connection to a forgotten or never known past is a daunting task. Merleau-Ponty (2004) suggests that "Time exists for me only because I am situated in it..." (p. 492). Hence, it was necessary to figure out ways for participants to situate themselves in 'another time'.

For the purpose of this research *time* is conceived as relational. Merleau-Ponty (2004) explains: "[Time] arises from my relation to things" (p.478). Accordingly, historical photos and their own artwork became the 'things' participants engaged

with as they connected with the past. As their regional landscape offers few visual signs of the local past the photos served as tangible links between the young people and the histories they inherited. Their self-produced artwork became a way for them to illustrate that relationship and contemplate their futures. As Merleau-Ponty (2004) writes: “A past and a future spring forth when I reach out towards them” (p. 489).

Dillabough & Kennelly (2010) address the past in ethnographies with youth. Informed by Paul Ricouer, they write: “[A]ny ethnography which posed questions only about the present threatened to degrade the “art of seeing” (Dillabough & Kennelly, 2010, p. 61). Their work with low-income youth living in Canadian cities acknowledged that the urban past is embodied in young people occupying the same spaces today. One visual method adopted by Dillabough and Kennelly involved historical photos. Their participants reflected through activities and dialogue on images of low-income young people from the same cities but different time periods. The photos along with the other historical and present day symbols they used were “both pragmatic elicitation devices and the means by which to connect the problematics of the past with the concerns of the present...” (Dillabough & Kennelly, 2010, p. 69). An appreciation of photo elicitation (Harper, 2002) —the use of photographs to trigger discussion on a research topic—coupled with Dillabough’s & Kennelly’s (2010) thinking and work helped inform my use of historical photos in conjunction with other visual research tools.

Photos I shared with participants were not presented as a reflection of history. Grosvenor et al. (2004) hold that photos “do not offer a transparent window into the past... photography constitutes a site of production and representation...” (p. 318). Pink (2011) explains further that photographs “are not static, and do not stand for static surfaces but always represent environments they were part of...” (p. 9). As such, participants were told that the photos represented aspects of the past. The pictures were sites from which they could contemplate their history in relation to their present and future.

Participants also created pieces of art. Similar to Bagnoli’s (2009) intentions, art and visual methods were used to “enhance participants’ reflexivity and to gather a holistic picture of the topics under investigation that could take into account also their different needs and expressive styles” (p. 549). Another goal was to create artistic spaces where youth could think about their community and their place therein. Youth and community arts workers with the organization, Valleys Kids, in the South Wales Valleys also recognize the value of the arts when developing community understandings.¹ In a region with a similar industrial history to the Canadian research site, Valleys Kids works with disadvantaged children, youth and their families. Many of their programs involve visual and performing arts

¹ For information about Valleys Kids, visit <http://www.valleyskids.org/>

and some encourage youth to learn about their local history. They then use that knowledge in their artistic creations while increasing their understandings about their communities and how they fit in. In line with this perspective art-making along with spoken and written words were envisioned as ways for participants to construct, explore and express their civic relationships with their community and its history.

As noted, an aim of this research was to explore ways education can support young people's involvement in their communities. Other education researchers have tapped the potential of visual and arts methods with participants across the life span and in a variety of learning contexts. Caine (2010) employed visual narrative inquiry with grade two and three students to explore their knowledge about their community using artistic means. She concluded that visual methods allowed the children to engage in meaningful reflection and expression and she saw potential for the approach to promote collaboration of ideas among children, schools, and communities. Zenkov, Harmon, and van Lier invited urban student participants from diverse and low income backgrounds to use photographs to illustrate student perspectives of school's purpose (Marquez-Zenkov, 2007; Zenkov, Harmon, & van Lier, 2008). They also examined ways they use photography in their English course curriculum to promote literacy (Zenkov & Harmon, 2009). They found that visual methods allowed for participant expression that was not possible with words alone. Woodley-Baker (2009) used photography to explore young women's lived experiences in relation to their post-compulsory secondary schooling. She states that photonarratives that included auto-photography and photo elicitation were excellent tools to allow researchers and participants to engage. Clover and Stalker (2008) critically reflected on the social justice learning experienced by women through activist fabric art-making suggesting the process provided a place for reflection and learning on both individual and social plains. Clover (2011) also shared a critical look at a feminist arts-based participatory project in which homeless and street-involved women used artistic means to examine their personal and political experiences and then shared their artwork with the public. She noted the work helped foster a sense of community among participants while also contributing to the construction of an artistic identity. The research presented in this paper draws from this body of educational literature. It also contributes to it by reflecting on ways photos and art-making help youth consider influences on their experiences and perceptions of civic engagement.

THE STUDY AND METHOD

The Overarching Study

As mentioned, the multi-media method discussed here was part of a broader study that examined ways young people learn about, experience and perceive civic

engagement in their disadvantaged region. Participants were between the ages of 15 and 27—an age range that reflects the diversity in young people’s transitions to adulthood (see Shanahan, 2000; Wyn and White, 1997). They were recruited through on-line and hard copy information flyers, information shared by research assistants (who were also within the age range of the study participants), community workers and youth organizations, and the snowball technique. Participants came from working class and middle class backgrounds. Some were in school between grades nine and twelve and their degree of attachment to school varied. Some completed high school. Some were university students. Others had university credits or degrees. One participant was a graduate student. All participants appeared white although only three identified with that signifier. There was an almost even mix of males and females. Based on their interest and availability participants could take part in 1) photo-musical narratives (in focus groups youth share and discuss with each other their own photographs and self-selected lyrical music to convey their experiences and perceptions of civic engagement); 2) arts-based focus groups (participants discuss civic engagement and use art supplies to create individual and group artistic renderings that illustrate their ideas of engagement and issues that are important to them; 3) individual interviews and informal discussions, and 4) the historical photos and art-making focus groups discussed in this article. To help contextualize the study I also examined historical and present-day public documents regarding the social and economic health of the region as well artistic representations of the community. In addition, I conducted interviews, meetings and participant observation with community and youth workers, researchers, public policy informants, youth and artists in Canada and regions of the United Kingdom with similar socio-economic histories.

The Method

In preparation for the historical photos and art-making focus groups, I solicited the help of archive staff at the local university to acquire photos of various communities in the region. The photos of structures, geographic landscapes, people and events dated back to the early and mid-1900s. It was necessary to ensure copyright clearance for use of the photos not only for viewing but for inclusion in the creative art-making and eventually in various formats during dissemination. Sixteen photographs were selected—a manageable number for young people to examine and still have time to make art in the allotted time.² The majority of the photos in the collection were taken by unknown photographers. Photos were printed and also displayed on a laptop computer and a large screen desktop computer.

2 All photos used can be viewed by visiting <http://www.flickr.com/photos/beatoninstitute/sets/72157630192241686>

The ideas and views shared by participants were influenced by the specific photos selected for the study. To help address this potential limitation participants were invited to bring any photos from their own collections that they considered historical. Only one participant opted to do so and she still focused primarily on the collection provided.



Figure 2



Figure 3

Twenty-two participants took part in the historical photos and art-making focus groups. Sessions were held outdoors and indoors depending on weather (see Figures 2 and 3). They began with an overview of the study and slideshows of photos and artwork previously produced by participants. Young people then

used the historical photos to reflect on their community in the past. They were asked to note what they thought was going on in the photos, their responses, and anything that surprised them and seemed familiar or unfamiliar. They could also describe things they expected to see but did not and any other factors that came to mind. Individually, participants looked at the photos and then discussed them informally with each other. They then produced artwork that reflected their ideas; such as their relationships with the past, ways the photos may or may not have influenced how they see themselves and civic engagement in the present, and how the photos figure in how they perceive their role in their community's future. Art supplies provided included canvasses, paint, letter stencils, glue, writing utensils, a digital camera, hard copies of the photos, and access to computers for printing. After the art-making was finished, participants were asked to explain to the group some of the messages they were conveying through their work. With participants' signed permission, the three to four hour sessions were audio recorded and photos and videos were taken.

PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES

Responses to the Photos

Youth participants were intrigued by the historical photos. They particularly liked to touch and hold printed copies. There were extended silences as participants stared at the photos and moved them close to their faces to observe details (see figure 4).



Figure 4

As participants studied the photos they expressed multiple emotions both verbally and nonverbally through words, vocal tones, facial expressions and body

movements. They sometimes spoke directly to the people in the photos, and smiled, laughed, or expressed shock, frustration, and sadness. Their visual, vocal and tactile reactions supported the assertion that people respond to photos through multiple senses (Pink, 2011).

When asked, participants discussed the emotions they had conveyed when they looked at the photos. For example, a common initial response to the photos was surprise. Participants recognized that photographs of large department stores on busy downtown streets bore little resemblance to the same streets today (see figure 5). In many instances the buildings and the people are gone. One man remarked, “I don’t even believe that it’s [here] when I look through these pictures”. They then expressed sadness and anger because from their perspectives, the images symbolized a time of socio-economic well-being that they did not have the opportunity to experience. Visual media can be valuable stimuli for critical discussion on topics (Long, 2008) as they were in this case. Participants’ initial emotional responses to the photos triggered questions and talk regarding the implications of industrialism, de-industrialization, outmigration, consumerism, and globalization for youth and their community.



Figure 5: 86-36-16133 Vooght Brothers Department Store, North Sydney, ca. 1910. Photographer unknown. Permission granted by the Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University.

Looking at the photos also sparked discussions about changing photographic practices. A participant queried:

I wonder how much prep time people had for photos back then? You know how we can just flip through our digital camera, delete, ok, take another one, [we get]

automatic results. They didn't. Even in our lifetime [we used to have to wait] to see pictures. You'd take pictures and you wouldn't know what they looked like until you got them back [from development].

Many noted the expressions displayed by the people in the photos. They compared ways youth today pose for pictures to the poses of the generations in the historical photos. Their comments included: “[T]here’s no huge smiles. They’re very solemn and it’s like that in a lot of old pictures even in wedding pictures” and “They’re probably not used to taking pictures the way we are anyway”. Bourdieu (1990a) contends that amateur photography conveys and reproduces regulated conventions and practices of specific times, classes and groups. True to his argument, conversations among participants often expanded to discuss changes in broader social conventions particularly as they related to gender relations and community activities. For example, the discussions about photographic practices led to questions regarding how women and men dress and act in public today as compared to in the past and appropriate work and leisure activities for women and men historically as compared today.



Figure 6

Many participants chose to include historical photos in their artwork (see Figure 6). They always worked with the prints in ways that were respectful. For example, some were unsure about putting glue and water on the photos, not wanting to damage them. Others asked permission before they would cut edges or put paint on the surface of prints. Perception is a bodily experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). As such, participants’ physical handling of the photos became a starting point for discussions regarding their perceptions of the past and the people in the pictures. For example, when asked why they showed such care one participant said that photos are to be treated with care. He remembers being told to hold

them by the edges and not to touch the surface. Another participant said there is usually only one print of something and if it is damaged, it is lost. Upon deeper contemplation, other participants said the desire to express care came out of a respect for the people in the photos.

MAKING ART WITH PAINT

Most participants were excited about the chance to paint. Still, when it came time to actually do so they were hesitant. Some stared at blank canvasses for many minutes before they would start. In some cases participants waited for assurance that their ideas were ‘acceptable’. When asked how they felt when they put the first bit of paint on the canvass, one young man replied: “I was nervous. I don’t know (*pause*) you (*pause*) don’t want to ruin it”. Their apprehension is somewhat to be expected (McNiff, 2008). Even if participants have experience, painting in what feels like a relatively formal setting can be intimidating.

Accordingly, it was interesting when participants took it upon themselves to encourage each other. One young man offered suggestions to a young woman who was unsure what to paint. He started by describing what others have done. “One other person took the picture with all the horses in it and painted it. It was inspirational. I’m just writing community. It’s just whatever you think. What represents the past [for you]?”

Some had difficulty deciding if their artwork was finished. One young woman worried that her painting (see Figure 7) needed more added to it even though she did not really want to change it.



Figure 7

Participant: I should write ‘reach for the past’ or something like that. But (*pause*) I don’t know.

Tanya: You could write it or leave it for people to interpret.

Participant: Is it too boring to leave it?

Tanya: I don’t think. I think it’s beautiful like that. You could let it dry then decide if you want to write something.

Participant: I want to just leave it like that.

Throughout the focus groups and upon reflection, participants responded positively to the painting process. They noted the pleasure attached to capturing an idea or thought in paint.

Participant 1: I haven’t painted in years outside of this. It would be neat if they did this at school.

Participant 2: I know!

Tanya: What is it about the paint [as a medium] that you like?

Participant 1: Because it’s your idea and you put it down and it *stays* there.

Participant 3: It leaves your mark.

Participants claimed that expressing themselves with paint enabled them to think about the issues of engagement from different angles. One participant explained: “[Painting] helps me see everything from a new perspective and reflect on it in a different way”. Her comment echoes Sullivan’s (2008) sentiment: “Whether seen as process or product, the practice of painting can be argued to be a robust form of human engagement that has the potential to reveal new insights and understandings” (p. 241).

GIVING MEANING TO ARTWORK

Participants were pleased with their artistic creations noting the benefit of having multiple ways to express their thoughts. One young woman stated: “You can’t always express yourself with words” and another observed: “Some people aren’t that

good at just talking”. For many the process of giving meaning to their artwork evolved over the course of the session. One woman explains:

My picture (see Figure 8) when I started it was different than when I finished it. The words were added in the last five minutes. I thought, let’s put these in. I had no intentions of doing that so it sort of gets your brain rolling.

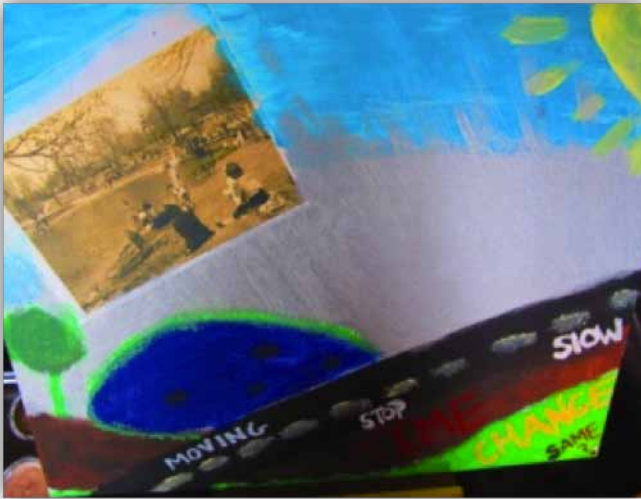


Figure 8

Another participant verbalized the evolution of the meaning for his artwork over a couple of hours as captured in this dialogue.

Participant: I’m just writing ‘community’ (see figure 9).



Figure 9

Participant (*later*): I thought of something (*pointing to the yellow heart at the bottom of his painting*). This is the community heart (see figure 10). Because the community is like one big person. The feelings of the community are one big—



Figure 10

Participant (*later*): I was thinking. This is the community and the community (*pause*) it's hard to explain (*pause*) it's like one big family (*pause*) [the heart is] beating.

Tanya: So everything is interconnected somehow?

Participant: Yeah!!

Tanya: That's how you see it or that's how you would like it to be?

Participant: That's how I see it now.

Tanya: What made you think of that? Anything that you looked at from the past or is that where your head is?

Participant: I don't know. Just when something (*pause*) the community just kind of works as one big (*pause*) when something happens—

Participant (*later*): I was thinking. When something bad happens in the community, because it's so tight-knit, everybody acts (*pause*) like the emotions of everyone are the same. It's as if they are one person.

Tanya: Sort of like what we've seen the past weeks? (*Reference to a car accident that claimed the lives of two local teenagers*).

Participant: Yeah!

Participant (*later to all of the other participants*): [My painting] says 'community' and it is colourful because of diversity in the community but at the same time there is a little heart down at the bottom (see figure 11). It's the community heart. Everyone acts as one person when something happens.



Figure 11

The meaning participants attached to their art sometimes developed through collaboration with each other. For example, one participant wanted to paint her foot (see figure 12) but initially she was not sure what message that would convey.



Figure 12

Participant 1: I really want to [paint my foot] really bad.

Participant 2: (*about the foot painting*): That's a good idea. Like a footprint in the past.

Participant 1: Yeah! 'One step at a time' or something like that.

Some participants were eager to share their interpretations of each other's art. The following dialogue ensued when I asked one participant to explain his painting (see figure 13).



Figure 13

Participant 1: Well (*pointing to the left side of the painting*) the past, it's dark. But now we're moving forward (*referring to the bright green paint on the right side of the painting*).

Researcher: Why green?

Participant 2 (*jumping into the conversation*): [It means] green is all around us!

Participant 1: Well, green could mean we are moving forward environmentally.

Participant 2: (*Nods in agreement*)

Another conversation between two participants further illustrates the collaborative approach to attaching meaning to each other's artwork (see figure 14).



Figure 14

Participant 1: What is that? (*Pointing to the black paint on participant 2's painting*)

Participant 2: That's for the coalmines—

Participant 1: That looks like the overpass to the pier.

Participant 2: Does it actually?

Participant 1: You know where you have all the black. It's like the steel plant's coke ovens. And then the yellow is like the overpass.

Participant 2: Yeah!

Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2008) hold that “arts-based visual research reminds us that data is not found; it is constructed” (p. 101). The process through which the participants negotiated meaning for their art highlighted the collaborative nature of data construction.

RESPONSES TO THE PROCESS

Similar to participants in other research that utilized various art forms (Bagnoli, 2009; Lashua & Fox, 2007) the young people enjoyed the historical photos and art-making research activity. Many described the experience as relaxing. They said they liked the silence. One participant reflected: “I was just listening [to the sound of everyone’s paint brushes swishing across the canvasses]. I was [thinking] this is kind of therapeutic”.

When asked how they felt about this process in comparison to a focus group interview without multi-media methods some comments included, “Using [the photos and artwork] is so much more fun” and “[This process] makes you think”, followed by another group member who added, “Yeah it allows you to, like, reflect on it”. Another participant explained, “You have to use part of your brain, like the whole other side of your brain because it’s artistic”. One woman suggested: “[Looking at the photos and painting] helps us put our ideas into perspective I think”.

One man noted that before the focus group he was a little uncertain of the potential outcome. He recalls,

To be honest when the idea of attending the group was first presented I [wasn’t sure about it]... now I’ve done it and it’s like, ‘Yeah!’ It does help to put a focus into something and makes it... I don’t know... solidify [ideas].

REFLECTIONS ON THE METHOD

A critical look at the historical photos and art-making method offers insights into the strengths, challenges and potentials of this multi-media research exercise. Informed by participants’ responses, my own experiences and interpretations of the process and other researchers and educators, I noted three key areas of observations that educational researchers using multi-media methods might consider. The observations relate to: 1) the use of historical photos, 2) the painting process, and 3) the collaborative engagement among the groups.

Historical Photos

The historical photographs served as starting places for participants to envision their community’s past. Weber’s (2008) sentiment that images “‘burn themselves into our brain’, forming internal memories that may be hard to erase” (p. 45) was exemplified through one young woman’s painting (see figure 15). The left side of the painting represents the back of her mind. The photos represent her community’s history. She feels the ‘past is present’ in the back of her mind and helps

shape her identity. She was always aware that the past had an impact on her. The photos helped her visualize and articulate that influence.



Figure 15

Participants' engagement with photographs in physical ways called attention to the photographic format. They liked the printed photos. One participant suggested this may have to do with novelty. "We never see actual pictures anymore. Here we got to physically hold them". Another person stated that printed pictures seem more authentic: "It makes them feel more real... On the internet you can look at pictures too but to actually have them in your hand...I'd spend an afternoon looking at pictures like this rather than on the internet". Some participants did look at the computer images of the photos. Hence, the intention is not to privilege one format over another. Instead, researchers might explore ways format influences how individuals respond to visuals used to elicit critical reflection.

Participants' interest in ways people prepared for and posed in the historical photos compared to their generation evoked discussion about evolving practices embedded in photography and in society at large. The individual photographer's meaning and reasoning should not be ignored. Still, participants' responses to what they perceived as 'common' photographic practices can spur as, Bourdieu (1990a) claims, closer examination of social and cultural conventions to which those practices may be connected.

Another observation was the participants' strong emotional reaction to the photos and subsequent conversations about social and economic issues in their community. Their responses suggest that the following argument holds for researchers and research participants:

[W]hen rich visual media from a significant period in history are continually introduced and evaluated (by the students as well as their teacher), student inquiry becomes more profound and thinking more critical as students begin to feel the historic consequences of what can happen when dominant cultural discourses are interrupted in the safety of a classroom (Long 2008, p. 500).

Weber (2008) states that “[images’] capacity to help us empathize or see another’s point of view and to provoke new ways of looking at things critically, makes them powerful tools for researchers to use in different ways during various phases of research” (p. 47). Such thinking makes sense. As participants examined, studied, and worked with the photos some verbalized their respect for the people in the photos. This prompted discussions regarding their relationships with older people and their desire to engage with them. It is worth looking more closely to see if exposure to historical photos can help youth connect with other generations.

While the benefits of using photos were apparent, limitations existed. For example, participants’ responses were framed by the photos they studied and numerous factors determined what was used. While I attempted to select a variety of pictures, the final decision was based in part on what existed and could be cleared for use and the amount of time available to search the archive. Moreover, my socio-cultural positioning including my status as a local citizen influenced the final selection. These circumstances call for acknowledgement of what was not in the photographs and the temptation to privilege *what we see* (Pink, 2011). While participants were invited to consider what was not present in the photos few took up that query. Future focus groups could include more directed discussions with participants regarding what and who are not in photos. This may encourage critical examination of the ways underlying values, privileges, and exclusions can be reproduced in images (Pink, 2011).

Painting

In addition to working with photographs, youth enjoyed the painting process. It gave them time to think about issues being discussed and to develop ideas as they reflected on their relationships with their communities’ past, present and future. It may have also allowed them to be silent. When attention is disproportionately placed on research participants’ voices we sometimes miss opportunities to listen to the silences and understand what they may mean (Hyams, 2004). However, silence can feel awkward for researchers and participants. Having something to do as they think and tools such as paint and canvass to help them articulate their thoughts may help youth and researchers feel comfortable with silences.

Youth spoke of the permanency of paint as a form of expression. As members of a demographic who often feel unheard, it makes sense that a visual mark may offer youth a *lasting voice* so to speak. The enthusiasm with which participants responded to painting suggests more research is needed to study ways young people

use paint and other creative literacy tools to express themselves, to explore concepts and issues important to them, and to make sense of their place in society.

Still some people feel trepidation when they are asked to paint. In fact, there were most likely youth deterred from taking part in this research despite attempts to ensure them that they did not have to consider themselves artists to participate. While painting does seem to be a practice enjoyed by many youth, all may not feel the same. Some may be reluctant to paint in a research setting (McNiff, 2008). In addition, young people may feel the traditional hierarchies—be they adult-youth, researcher-research participant, and teacher-student—that are ever-present in research even when we attempt to break such relational assumptions (Brann-Barrett, 2009). I found it helpful to address participants' concerns explicitly at the recruitment stage of research and again throughout the process. I assured potential participants that artistic experience was not a requirement and they would not be graded or judged on their artistry. I provided tools such as stencils and craft supplies that could be incorporated into their art so they had options beyond free-hand drawing. I showed participants artwork created by others as examples of what can be done. I did not rush participants and chatted with them individually to help them work through their ideas. It was particularly useful to have research assistants who were in the same age group as the participants. They made art while still offering encouragement and positive feedback to others. These steps may not address all the uncertainties people experience when they consider engaging in research that involves the arts. Still, they may help diminish some concerns and reassure reluctant young people who are considering joining a research project.

Collaboration

Conducting this visual research method in focus groups highlighted the collaborative ways meaning is negotiated. With each other, youth sorted through their ideas, the meaning of their artwork, and their relationships with the world around them. As one participant explained: "It's like you never think about it until someone else says something and then it sparks something". Their interactions demonstrate that meaning-making is relational and evolves through our encounters with others (Hall, 1996; 1997). Still, when collaboration among participants is encouraged, researchers must be attentive to the interaction process. "We need to assist participants in learning new ways of speaking but also of listening, to expand the repertoire of skills that individuals and communities have for speaking with and listening to others" (Butterwick & Selman, 2003, p.19).

Moreover, researchers must be aware that not everyone is at ease in collaborative settings. Power relations are never entirely eliminated in research and educational spaces (Fink, 2012). Some youth may feel apprehensive painting in a group environment. They may be reluctant to voice their ideas or the need to agree with dominant views expressed in the collaborative circle. In an effort to accommodate

all participants, I included the option for individual follow-up interviews in the research program design. Researchers may also add written reflection exercises at the end of focus groups. Participants then have the option to submit in confidence ideas and thoughts they have about the research topic. Such efforts may reduce inherent limitations with research that takes place in group settings.

CONCLUSION

This reflection is based on the responses of a small group of young people. I do not suggest that their experiences are universal. Social, economic, cultural, and political factors are at work along with age when young people engage in research. Another group of youth may yield different responses. Furthermore, this multi-media method did not include visual representation of all aspects of the region's history. Hence, photos taken from another perspective or time period may spur other reactions, questions and dialogue. Similarly, access to different art-making materials could lead to new creative expressions.

Many educators and community advocates recognize the value of youth civic engagement in communities undergoing significant social and economic change. Such involvement however must address and reflect present-day circumstances and needs. That means some traditional form of civic engagement may have to be adapted and innovative models considered. The multi-media method described here opens the door for such discussions. While limitations and challenges exist, photography and art-making are research tools worth consideration by those working with youth as they make sense of history's impact on their civic lives. As suggested by participants in this study, perhaps there are times we think, reflect and express ourselves a little easier with pictures and paint brushes.

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