

# Talking Back: Autoethnography and the Contact Zone

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What is the place of unsolicited oppositional discourse, parody, resistance, critique in the imagined classroom community? Are teachers supposed to feel that their teaching has been most successful when they have eliminated such things and unified the social world, probably in their own image? Who wins when we do that? Who loses? (Pratt, 1991, p. 39)

## **Discovering *Imperial Eyes***

The world may have shrunk, but ‘the international’ is still commonly associated with adventure, exploration, new horizons and romanticism about encountering the exotic other. The acceleration of globalization has brought new opportunities for the exploration of people and places, and new iterations of encounters with the Other through media, travel, trade and vast scale human mobility. The focus of my present inquiry is in the new forms of educational ventures intensified through globalization: the prolific increase in international education with its stated goals of getting to know and understand people and places outside of one’s geographic boundaries, and promoted in the name of acquiring intercultural and global literacies. International education is considered the means to attain desired competencies and skills to function in a competitive global market place, and internationalization a key strategy and process to prepare graduates of higher education to become exemplary global citizens.

The influence of globalization on education in general, and more specifically, on the practices of international education, continue to provide us with a rich ground for inquiry and it has been my primary area of research. I have examined a range of issues faced by educators caught up in the education of the International Other and have explored conceptual pathways to understanding curriculum in this context such as Bhabha’s (1990; 1994) notions of ‘third space’ and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) conceptualization of the rhizome. Third space has been well discussed by Aoki (2005), Wang (2004) and others in terms of the tensions, the unpredictability, the incommensurability of difference, the multiplicity and the *between* (Aoki’s analysis of ‘international’ as the ‘inter’). These have been invaluable contributions to understanding curriculum as international text and I have used these theories as frames of analyses for research on the internationalization of Canadian universities. As I am becoming more immersed in the data emerging from a



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current ethnographic study on internationalization at a Canadian university, I am struck by the need for further discussion on the often subtle, sometimes hidden, power relations in international learning and teaching in the globalizing university. How do faculty address the 'demand' and 'market-driven' discourse that becomes attached to their courses resulting in meeting, sometimes, incommensurable difference in their classroom? What ideas of 'international' are created by students journeying to distant places in order to gain intercultural skills and competencies? And how are the students 'from away' who are arriving in our Canadian universities and colleges in increasing numbers engaging with the curriculum of the internationalizing campus? I had to better understand the positioning of those engaged in the internationalization process (students, faculty, staff, administrators) within institutional structures, how they contribute towards the discourses of international education, and more importantly, what theories could advance the conversation on curriculum as international text.

It was at this juncture that I returned to a book by Mary Louise Pratt, which had by this time been updated in a second edition. Its theme of travel writing was very congruent with the materiality of the complex mobilities of international education. Grounded in an analysis of 'centre-periphery' relations, Pratt (1992/2008) in *Imperial Eyes: Travel writing and transculturation* examines how the genre of travel writing in the imperial era influenced the shaping and construction of 'the rest of the world' for Europe, how Europe constructed itself in relation to these constructions of 'people and places', and how the 'rest of the world' constructed Europe. While the book is an analysis of the travel writing genre in the domain of literary criticism, it is, more powerfully, a critique of the political and economic ideologies that drove colonialism.

In considering this text, Pratt's analysis and its application to international education in the context of the political and economic ideologies of globalization became more apparent to me. Furthermore, the particular usefulness of Pratt's conception of autoethnography will be the focus of this paper. As 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century travel writing is the text that Pratt examines, the contexts and practices of international education become the text that comes under my scrutiny.

Among the many inquiry questions Pratt poses, she asks: "With what codes has travel and exploration writing produced 'the rest of the world' for European readerships at particular points in Europe's expansionist process? How has it produced Europe's evolving conceptions of itself in relation to something it became possible to call 'the rest of the world'?"... (p. 4). It would be disingenuous to suggest an equivalency between colonial explorers who sought to acquire, possess, plunder, rule, and establish dominance for their nation, and internationally driven university programs and strategies. Following Pratt we can question, however, what role globalization plays in producing the 'rest of the world' for Europe and North America, and further, what role international education plays in producing 'the rest of the world' for (mostly) Western universities' market-driven 'expansionist processes'. In the increasing scholarship in this field, we can also see how today's higher education institutions are seeking, perhaps, a dominance of a different kind: prestige, revenue, branding and status. In the flourishing marketplace where educational products and services are bought and sold, where desires for a particular kind of education are at once created and manipulated for profit, international education is advancing the economic agenda of globalization (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011; Marginson, 2006; Unterhalter & Carpentier, 2010).



Pratt (1992/2008) continues by asking: “What did writers on the receiving end of European intervention do with those European codifications of their reality? How did they claim, revise, reject and transcend them? ... How have Europe’s subordinated others shaped Europe’s construction of them and the places they inhabit?” (p. 4). Thinking of the traditionally marginalized as being co-present with the dominant, shaping and influencing the representations of themselves through resistance, and participation in one’s self-production provides some measure of agency. Although there is resistance to acknowledging that in practice we have ‘subordinated others’ in our universities, I am interested in extending the question to ask whether international students in Western universities revise, reject and transcend Western codifications of their reality. Do they participate in western constructions of themselves, and the places they come from? More importantly, how do we include these realities in the notion of internationalized curriculum?

These are questions that generate more discussion than can be addressed in this paper. I will limit the present conceptual paper to examining how Pratt’s ideas can support the theorizing and framing of issues that are foundational to transnational curriculum, particularly in transcending current curricular discourses in international education. More specifically, I will argue how the notions of contact zone and related concepts can help to be a point of analysis as well as a critique of transnational curriculum that is driven by neocolonial ideologies. I am particularly interested in establishing how we can incorporate (and recognize) Pratt’s notion of autoethnography and transculturation as positive and essential elements in internationalized curriculum. Pratt’s scholarship offers the possibility to see how people and knowledges are variously positioned, perhaps thwarting the very goals and outcomes of, and hopes for, the internationalization of curriculum. This latter hope was expressed in the emergence of a worldwide field of curriculum studies engaged in cross-border and cross-disciplinary conversations, exploring “theoretical and practical possibilities for building new transnational and transcultural solidarities in postcolonial curriculum inquiry” (Gough, 2004, p. 1).

It is in the spirit of such transnational and transcultural solidarity that I offer this introductory exploration of one pathway in postcolonial curriculum inquiry in internationalization of curriculum. I will first make a case for why a postcolonial idea such as the contact zone, is still useful in a discussion of curriculum as international text by tracing the dominant discourses of curriculum in international education through a historical overview. A brief summary of Pratt’s conceptual basis in *Imperial Eyes* follows. I select key themes and concepts from Pratt’s notion of the contact zone for further discussion, concluding with implications for curriculum in transnational contexts.

### **An overview of curriculum discourses in international education**

The proliferation of international education in these past two decades conveys the idea that international academic mobility is a recent phenomenon. While the ‘edubusiness’ (Luke, 2010) of international education may be new, the idea is not. Historically, interest in and pursuit of international education appears to have emerged from the idea that a complete and well-rounded education includes transnational conversations, that is, going beyond one’s local and national borders to gain knowledge and intercultural understanding. Some of the earliest historical examples include European scholars Erasmus and Comenius, and Nalanda University in India. For both Renaissance educator Erasmus and 17<sup>th</sup> century Comenius, the value of international exchanges was the creation of conditions for peace



through inter-cultural understanding, an understanding of others through the study of specific disciplines and subjects such as philosophy, history, geography, the classics and so on, and the coming together of many cultures through dialogue (Gutek, 1993). Nalanda University, established in 427 in Bihar, India focused on Buddhist studies, and also offered education in fine arts, mathematics, astronomy and politics. Most importantly, Nalanda attracted scholars and students from many other countries in the region, such as Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, Indonesia, Persia and Turkey (Dutt, 1962), thus promoting the value of intercultural exchange of ideas in the overall education of the person and the community. In these historical examples of international education, becoming an educated person meant moving beyond the bounds of both geographical place and intellectual and disciplinary boundaries to encounter and engage with ideas and perspectives from those outside one's culture and place.

This focus on the *mutual* educational benefits of international exchange changed from around the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the exploration of people, ideas and places moved from being an educational to a political strategy with European expansionism. This imperial project used education to maintain power and control of colonized peoples along with the missionary project of civilizing and enlightening 'barbaric' and 'backward' peoples. 'International' study was part of this mission, in both the export of Western education to many other parts of the world, and in the sending of local elites to Western universities, both carried out to 'improve' colonized peoples rather than a mutual exercise in intercultural exchange (Willinsky, 1998) as evidenced in this classic example of the imperial curriculum: "... [w]e must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay, 1835, cited in Thirumalai, 2003). These ideas have a significant legacy on education both abroad and at home (Willinsky, 1998). It is in the dismantling of these colonial relations that the next phase of international education comes clearly into focus.

The beginnings of international education in its contemporary form have been traced to the initiatives of 'development' soon after World War II. Through the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe and various other projects, development aid was designed and implemented to 'help' the rest of the world to be restored, modernized and improved (Sachs, 1992; Esteva & Prakash, 1998; Waters, 1995). For example, educational assistance given to poorer nations in the form of technical assistance and expertise, including student and faculty exchange programs, are counted as being among the first international education activities in the post-secondary sector in Canada (Pengelly, 1989). The concept of internationalized curriculum in these international programs appears to be related to the goals of development: improving, helping, providing expertise and knowledge to people and institutions largely considered deficit and in need of improvement.

The present wide-spread proliferation of international education is considered to be a response to, and even a product of, intensified globalization (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Knight, 2008; Unterhalter and Carpentier, 2010) resulting in an intensification of the global/local flows of peoples, information, ideas, research, and capital in higher education institutions, particularly in more wealthy countries. The commercialism and neoliberal ideology that drives globalization has extended to education (Rizvi, 2011; Marginson, 2006) and although the university has been described as being inherently international, in the sense of knowledge and knowledge production transcending national borders, there



have been other ways in which the university is seeking to become explicitly global. For example, internationalization has become a key institutional strategy for Canadian universities (AUCC, 2007) seeking to brand and position themselves in a competitive market, and for becoming economically sustainable through the intensification of recruiting and retaining international students (e.g. Marginson, 2006; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011; Yonezawa and Akiba 2009).

These historical legacies implicate the international exchanges of ideas, curriculum, students and scholars, the very core of international education, in neo-colonial and economic frameworks that make the consideration of a contact zone framework both appropriate and essential in naming the points of inequity, crafting a response to them, and in understanding curriculum in the international context.

### *Imperial Eyes*

Pratt's book begins with an account of a little known and yet remarkable historical artefact discovered in 1908 in the Danish Royal Archive (GuamanPoma website)<sup>2</sup>. It was an illustrated letter written by a Peruvian aristocrat named Felipe GuamanPoma de Ayala, to King Phillip III of Spain, dated 1615. Titled *El primer nuevacorónica y buengobierno* or *The New Chronicle and Good Governance and Justice* the 1200 page letter with 800 pages of text and 398 illustrations is written in the Spanish literary form of the chronicle, and in a mix of Quechua (the indigenous language) and rough Spanish. It proposes, among other things, a 'new view of the world'.

As Pratt describes, the GuamanPoma letter is divided in two parts: the first a description of Inca culture, and the second a critique of Spanish rule followed by a proposed revisioning. It begins with a description of the Christian story of Adam and Eve, related through imagery and narrative that reflects cultural artefacts and symbols of the Inca. The letter then presents in detail an account of the Andean people and culture, and it is claimed to be one of the earliest and most thorough documentations of Andean life in those times. The next section is a very critical account of the Spanish conquest, including a scathing indictment of the exploitation carried out by the Spanish. GuamanPoma appeals to the King of Spain to stop the decimation and destruction of his people, and ends with a mock interview with the king, advising him of his responsibilities, and proposing a collaborative government including the elites of both the Andeans and the Spanish. This was his 'new view of the world'.

In analysing the material communication of the letter, Pratt theorizes several concepts as an analytical framework that she applies to samples of travel writing in the rest of her book. The chapters following are case studies that illustrate the complex nature of centre-periphery relations, how these writings shaped both European thought and colonial attitudes, and the influences of the colonies on Europe, even on scientific ideas. For example, two chapters trace the evolution of natural history and the classification and coding of the natural world, demonstrating how knowledge became Eurocentric. Other chapters take up close analysis of travel writing texts in the tradition of literary criticism, supporting Pratt's conceptual arguments on how European subjectivities became shaped by these writings from the field. It is not my intention here to review the book and its contribution, nor to discuss the case studies in depth (a fascinating project for another time). My purpose is to draw attention to the concepts that form the basis for this book, the contact zone, transculturation and autoethnography, and to discuss their relevance as analytical tools for the internationalization of curriculum.



## The Contact Zone

Pratt's notion of the contact zone explains the encounter and points of contact between colonizing and native cultures. A contact zone is 'the space of imperial encounters' (1992/2008, p.8),

social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination — like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today (p. 4). ...

the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict (p.8)

Pratt borrows the term 'contact' from linguistics where the notion of contact language is used to describe an improvised language used for communication between speakers of different language, and commonly considered "chaotic, barbarous and lacking in structure" (p.8). She continues: "The term 'contact' foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimension of imperial encounters so easily suppressed or ignored by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader's perspective" (p. 8). Consistent with common analyses of colonial relationships (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2007; Loomba, 1998), the contact zone serves to show how "subjects are constituted in and by their relation to each other" (Pratt, 1992/2008, p. 8) and further characterized in terms of "co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices" (p. 8).

The notion of the contact zone can be applied very easily to the classroom, as Pratt herself has done (Pratt, 1991; 1996). The globalizing campus can hardly be directly called a site of 'coercion', 'intractable conflict' in reference to the material and physical conditions of historical colonial violence. It can, however, be described as a symbolic contact zone or an educational contact zone created by globalization, where difference and radical inequality become more invisible forms, and where dominant cultural norms and ideas contain diversity and create power relations.

Connecting also with the work of Benedict Anderson (1991), Pratt asserts that the academic community is an imagined one that avoids difference, a community being constructed as homogenous (with assumptions of shared language, communication, culture, rules and so on), and homogeneity serving to silence, marginalize and 'other'. Norms are established by the host institution, classrooms predicated on a homogenous body of students, and the relations between the newcomers and the host community are often marked by racial and other tensions. Knowledge asymmetry is characteristic of the Western university contact zone with English established as the language of international education especially in fields such as business, commerce, and applied sciences (Rizvi, 2011).

The university as contact zone would recognize the specificity of each person in the classroom, recognizing multiplicities of individual and group identities. While similar to Bhabha's (1990) Third Space, the contact zone emphasizes difference in its particularity, and recognizes the diverse forms of negotiation that occur in the contact zone. This recognition begins from the standpoint that asymmetrical and inequitable relations already exist, and seek to counter or transcend these realities through naming them, and encouraging, even inviting the kinds of improvisation and appropriation so well displayed in GuamonPoma's letter. Pratt has used the contact zone in contrast to the notion of



community in academe, to “reconsider the models of community that many of us rely on in teaching and theorizing and that are under challenge today”(1991, p. 37), foregrounding practices of improvisation discussed later in this paper.

### **Anti-Conquest**

In discussing the contact zone, Pratt proposes several tropes to reflect the ways in which the unequal relations in the contact zone are constituted. One of these is anti-conquest, which refers to “ the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert their European hegemony”(p. 9). She expands on this through her detailed analysis of passages drawn from travel texts such as accounts of Africa by Richard Burton, John Speke, and Paul du Chaillu (Pratt, 1992/2008, pp 197 – 213), identifying themes in their writing. For example, the theme ‘monarch of all I survey’, is revealed in the texts that reflect “mastery between seer and the seen” (p. 200), aesthetization (of what is seen) (p. 200, & 205), and the territorial mastery or ownership of what is seen (p. 205). The meaning that emerges of anti-conquest is that travel writers and explorers claim neutrality from the imperialist motivations and ideologies (the innocence), while representing and expressing the very ideology they are distancing from (the hegemony).

Applying this analysis to international education, the promotion and the market driven nature of the ‘edubusiness’ of international education is rarely if ever acknowledged by institutions at the feeding trough. Innocence is maintained by distancing from any alignment with a market agenda, while participating in the very practices that reproduce them. The institutional ‘seer’ sees educational markets and sources for students, while at the same time, maintaining innocence through insisting that academic rationales are the basis for the pursuit of internationalization. This is made more complex by the fact that the desire for international education is driven by ‘the seen’, who in turn are trying to gain symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Aesthetization is accomplished by identifying the practices of internationalization as promoting cultural and international literacies, and, for example, in valourising the international student as the ‘exotic other’ carrying out the noble task of bringing diversity to the campus.

The idea of anti-conquest can be more frequently or visibly encountered in the area of study abroad, where domestic students of Western institutions enroll in educational programs such as field schools, a semester away, exchanges and so on. Without scrutiny, curriculum in the contact zone of study abroad can move in the direction of educational tourism, aesthetization of the experience, or promoting an unconscious ‘monarch of all I survey’ world view. Most study-abroad programs in the West are promoted on the promise of personal transformation, ‘life-changing’ opportunities, and intercultural skills and competencies. First of all, these promises themselves are based on assumptions that ‘other’ people and places are a personal curriculum available for discovery, and lies in the mastery between the seer and the seen. The world and its people are there ‘for me’ to experience. It is also possible that superficial assignments set for students heading out into their unknown, such as requests to notice precisely those external facts and impressions of the other may lead them into aesthetizing their experience, or, at the other extreme, becoming narcissistic and self absorbed.

It is from the anti-conquest stance that seemingly neutral, objective, or natural positions develop in the building of knowledge. Much as the 18<sup>th</sup> century naturalists developed planetary consciousness through their categorization of the natural world,



sojourners from Western universities today, ‘in the field’ for a semester or less, construct and create narratives and knowledge of those places. According to Stier (2004) one of the problems of international educationalism is what he refers to as ‘academicentrism’, a belief that our ways of learning, teaching and research are superior to others, or that we have the solutions for solving complex, structural and systemic global issues (p. 91).

Curriculum for the contact zone must recognize the many ways in which the anti-conquest strategies can move from self-absorption into that of vulnerability and the risk of the “interactive, improvisational dimension” (p. 8) that Pratt observes of the contact zone. This requires a shift from the certainty or promise of having ‘life changing’ or ‘transformational’ experiences for the individual engaging in an international experience, to an uncertainty or unpredictability for self and others in the act of being co-present.

### Autoethnography

In analysing interactions in the contact zone, Pratt identifies the practice of what she calls transculturation, the ways in which those engaged in the contact zone influence one another in representation and self-representation. For marginalized (in colonial times, the subordinated) groups, this process is one where they select and adapt from dominant cultural material. Pratt theorizes transculturation in self representation as “autoethnography” or “autoethnographic expression”. Autoethnography is commonly understood as a research method whose approach is to document and analyse one’s own experience and narrative as a way to understand culture (Ellis, Adams &Bochner, 2011), but as we can see, Pratt’s usage is goes further. Pratt considers the GuamonPoma letter to be an example of an autoethnographic text, that is “text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (Pratt, 1991, p. 35).

Thus if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), autoethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined others construct *in response to* or in dialogue with those texts (Pratt, 1991, p. 35)

Several significant features about the GuamonPoma letter have been identified by Pratt and others. Key among them is that GuamonPoma, whose people did not have a written language, fashioned a written text by appropriating the Spanish form of the chronicle, improvised with Quechua, and indigenized with Andean symbols and representations. He uses Andean styles and images in his improvised depiction of cultural stories of the Spanish colonizer, specifically, Christian narratives. Another notable feature is said to be his parody of Spanish life and history, his denigration of Spanish values (‘they brought nothing of value to the Andeans to share but armor and guns’ Pratt, 1991, p. 35), and his critique of the abusive administration of the Spanish. These elements, including the presumption of telling the Spanish King how he ought to govern, were gestures that were at once courageous, provocative and somehow changes the colonizer’s construction of him as the powerless subordinate. Furthermore, these texts, as Pratt analyses, are a marginalized group’s point of entry into a dominant group’s linguistic, cultural and social domains, although the text itself speaks to both the dominant group as well as their own community. They represent forms of collaboration between these groups: albeit on the terms of the dominant group, but with important insertions from the other group.

In applying these ideas to curriculum in the global campus, I consider the improvisation and “unsolicited oppositional discourse, parody, resistance, critique” (Pratt,



1991, p. 35) as significant strategies to both recognize and invite. Another point of consideration is the active seeking of moments of co-presence, whether they be speech acts or texts. If curriculum were to recognize and legitimize transculturation, we would try to understand the ways in which students may incorporate or resist their own perceptions of host culture attitudes towards them as, for example, racial or gendered or simply different 'others'.

While the act of transculturation, supreme resistance and 'talking back' makes the GuamonPoma text remarkable in the context of colonial relations, it is also the reality that the letter may not have reached the King, or if it did, had no impact on the invitation to dialogue extended to him, nor in the unfolding of the domination of Andean peoples. Further, the act of initiating autoethnographic text remains with those from the marginalized group, an *in* the case of GuamonPoma, a courageous, if naïve, gesture. Pratt (1999) expands on this matter of autoethnography in relation to indigenous people under colonial rule. She observes:

...being the other of a dominant culture involves living in a bifurcated universe of meaning. On the one hand, one must produce oneself as a self for oneself. That is survival. At the same time the system also requires that you produce yourself as an 'other' for the colonizer' (Pratt, 1999, p. 40)

This constant negotiation required of 'living in a bifurcated universe of meaning' and the labour of producing oneself in multiple ways lays the burden yet again on the 'other', and has implications for our design of curriculum as international text. In inviting the lived experience of the international student, for example, how do we recognize the multiple negotiations that are the result of living in a contact zone? For the most part, it is their 'international identity' that the student is required to produce, and which validates their presence on the campus. In taking into consideration students' lived experience, do we unwittingly project and even invite them to produce themselves in an expected 'international' identity, and what aspects of their lived identity do we encourage?

Appropriation and improvisation, after all, could also be read as evidence of being substandard, never measuring up, instead of it being recognized as a creative act of talking back. International students in the university contact zone are constantly expected to conform, express oneself in the dominant language and abide by the cultural norms and rules of the host culture. Failure to successfully integrate and assimilate into the host institution's educational literacies as well as the disciplinary literacies may result in the loss or failure to achieve the academic credential they seek.

Integrating the notion of autoethnography into curricular discourses in the academy poses a challenge to the traditional consideration of cultures, literatures, texts, and disciplines as bounded, discrete, monolingual and having purity of discipline. It would require us to recognize autoethnographic texts as heterogenous, rather than backwards or chaotic. This would require a significant effort in recognizing the value of what we might term as a supportive negotiation, and a welcoming of curricular talking back.

## **Learning to talk back**

Understanding the internationalizing university as an educational contact zone is not simply an academic exercise. It lays bare the invisible ways in which cultural texts are created, knowledge established, multiple ideologies 'clash' and intertwine in the university contact zone and beyond, in the field of international education. The latter is marked by simplistic



definitions of the processes and practices, including curriculum, that reflect more the influence of commodification than thoughtful educational principles.

This initial exploration has revealed the possibilities for both critiquing curriculum in the contact zone, and for transcending it through acts of transculturation. In this regard, new questions emerge in the conversation: Can one learn autoethnographic improvisation? Will the act of intentionally recognizing improvisation, kill the very act of talking back? While these questions remain key in understanding whether the notion of transculturation can further advance the internationalization of curriculum. Another question that emerged for me was the points of connection between autobiography and autoethnography. Although they appear to be different forms of self representation, the former as emanating from the writer/speaker, and the latter formed in response to dominant cultural expressions, there are sufficient points of convergence to merit further exploration.

Pinar's (2004) summary and discussion of alterity and autobiography reflects some of these ideas: for example, the problematics of a unified self that autobiography appears to promote; that of creating a self 'to preserve oneself' (p. 49) and 'the self as witness' (p. 49), and, citing Gusdorf (1980), that "the point of autobiography is to reveal the autobiographer's effort to 'give meaning of his own mythic tale' " (p. 49). This latter focus on the autobiographer's effort to give meaning, is very much what transculturation is about, in terms of the relational aspect of autobiography. Pinar reviews Friedman's (1988, cited in Pinar, 2004) on this matter. Friedman, according to Pinar, argues how the individualistic definitions of identity give rise to understandings of autobiography that ignore the "social and political configurations of oppression and colonization" (p. 54), differences in socialization, and "the role of collective and relational identities" (p. 54), hence leading to an individualistic view of autobiography. Likewise, Pratt's notions of autoethnography and transculturation are more grounded in a collective and relational rather than the traditional understanding autoethnography as an individualistic act, tracing a singular story. Furthermore, autoethnography as transculturation places an emphasis on the interdependent nature of the colonial/power relationship. Friedman (1988, cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 56) argues of this "interdependent existence ... [where] lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere." The value, for me, of moving to Pratt's ideas is the unexplored possibilities relating to the improvisational alongside positive benefits of appropriation in transcultural curriculum.

I look forward to following some of these theoretical conversations in the context of my research, and also in the classroom, in the former as an analytical lens, and in the latter, more importantly, as a way of understanding and incorporating a curriculum that acknowledges the need for a talking back. To conclude with Pratt,

Autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression: these are some of the literate arts of the contact zone. Miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning- these are some of the perils of writing in the contact zone (1991, p. 37)

There is much to be given up in GuamonPoma's call for 'a new view of the world', and as members of the Western academy participating in the mass-scale 'schooling' of the world, Pratt's arts of the contact zone are important ideas to consider.

## Notes



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<sup>2</sup>This account of GuamonPoma (Pratt, 1992/2008) is based on an earlier article, *The Arts of the Contact Zone* (Pratt, 1991) and also included in an edited volume (Pratt, 1996). I will be using both versions of the account in this article.

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