

Curriculum studies and transnational flows and mobilities: feminist autobiographical perspectives

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Abstract

I here consider possible effects of global flows, transnational connections, and transcultural interactions on attempts to construct a worldwide curriculum studies field. These flows and mobilities loosen local populations from geographically constrained communities, connecting people and places around the globe in new and complex ways. Thus, they dramatically alter not only processes of curriculum construction and theorizing but also ways in which a worldwide curriculum studies field might be conceptualized and enacted. I argue that these flows and mobilities point to a necessary conceptualization of a worldwide curriculum studies field as always in the making.

I briefly review perspectives on global flows and mobilities that currently circulate among a variety of academic disciplines. I then examine various feminists' transnational, poststructural, postcolonial, and queer theorizing and practices in order to articulate tensions and possibilities for a worldwide curriculum studies field affected by transnational flows and mobilities. Particular feminist work especially draws attention to political, social, economic, and environmental biases and injustices that flows and mobilities have shaped and sustained. I argue that these feminists' interrogations could contribute to curriculum scholars' negotiations of cultural, geographical, linguistic, and theoretical differences across a worldwide curriculum studies field.

In particular, I autobiographically explore feminist examinations of transnational flows and mobilities as one possible means to hold varying perspectives on these phenomena in simultaneous yet often tension-filled relation to one another. Conceptions of transnational flows and mobilities become visceral through embodied autobiographical inquiries that take into account shifting and rapidly changing discursive and material effects of globalization. These effects include knowledges and identities produced at everyday educational sites as well as within the potentials of a worldwide curriculum studies field.

Introduction

When we ask another for recognition for ourselves, we are not asking for that other to see us as we are, as we have always been, as we were prior to the encounter. Rather, in the asking, we are already becoming something new, since we are avowing a connection with the other, a need and desire for acknowledgment by the other, without which we could not be. This means that recognition does not freeze us in our place, our position, our various locations, but rather compels us to move beyond what we have been and to encounter a new possibility for collective exchange.

Judith Butler, "Transformative Encounters"



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I grapple here with what I view as some dilemmas as well as possibilities in working toward a worldwide – but not uniform -- field of curriculum studies as well as in “building new transnational and transcultural solidarities in postcolonial curriculum inquiry” (Gough, 2004). I do so in light of the heterogeneity and rapid flux that characterize global flows of people, commodities, ideas, technology, culture, and capital through and across constantly changing borders, discourses, and identities. These flows and mobilities loosen local populations from geographically constrained communities, connecting people and places around the globe in new and complex ways. They thus dramatically alter not only the processes of curriculum construction and theorizing but also the ways in which curriculum studies as a field might be conceptualized and enacted.

Given these transnational flows and mobilities, what kinds of differing knowledges do divergent members of a worldwide curriculum studies field now need to construct in order to contribute to the intellectual advancement of a worldwide field?

I here consider possible effects of global flows, transnational connections, and transcultural interactions on attempts to construct a worldwide curriculum studies field. I do so by first briefly reviewing a variety of perspectives on global flows and mobilities that currently circulate among a variety of academic disciplines. I then examine some various transnational, poststructural, queer, and postcolonial feminist perspectives that consider new and promising forms of diasporic, transnational, global and national cultures and identities spawned by flows and mobilities. Concurrently, these feminist viewpoints draw attention to political, social, economic, and environmental biases and injustices that those flows and mobilities have shaped and sustained.

In particular, I believe that such various feminist interrogations could contribute to ways in which curriculum scholars and workers negotiate cultural, geographical, linguistic, and theoretical differences across the curriculum studies field, writ large. Such differences appear to intensify with/in ever increasing and changing circumstances and contexts that have resulted from and through transnational flows and mobilities. Given that I support feminist assertions that social and cultural worlds are always expressed through relationships, I believe that such negotiations are crucial in order that a worldwide curriculum studies field might work toward “producing intercultural understanding and actively valuing cultural diversity” so that it “does not merely assimilate national (local) curriculum discourses-practices into an imperial (global) archive” (Gough, 2004).

To address these issues, I in part *work autobiographically* here, greatly influenced by my work with doctoral students labeled “international” as well as “national” at Teachers College, Columbia University. I autobiographically explore, in particular, feminist interrogations of transnational flows and mobilities as one possible means to hold vary perspectives on these phenomena in simultaneous yet often tension-filled relation to one another. Given my own multiple positionings as well as those of my students with/in such flows and mobilities, I in turn am persuaded to argue that such tensions will not necessarily be resolved. Rather, our direct encounters with those tensions, including discussions about transnational flows and mobilities, their influences on a potential worldwide field of curriculum studies, and their always changing effects on who and what gets constituted as “different” or “other,” for example, might lead us to generate a worldwide field with new versions of and possibilities for “collective exchange.”

Indeed, I believe that visions for that worldwide field of curriculum studies must avow “a connection with the other, a need and desire for acknowledgment by the other, without which we could not be.” At the same time, we need to remember that in our asking one another for recognition, “we enter the conversation as one kind of person but emerge as another kind” (Butler, 2001. p. 82). Working autobiographically enables me to examine how I might be constantly changed by collective exchange among members of a worldwide curriculum



studies field, how I might act responsibly within the limits of my self – and other - knowing, and how to take seriously my opacity to myself in ethical deliberations (Butler, 2005) that should characterize the field's collective exchange.

Here, I also engage in *working autobiography* as both genre and mode of inquiry. By *working autobiography*, I mean conceptualizing autobiographical practices as spaces of negotiation where I constantly am kneading categories and separations, “engaging with and responding to the fluidity and malleability of identities and difference, ... refusing fixed and static categories of sameness or permanent otherness” (Ellsworth & Miller, 2005, p. 181). In particular, in *working autobiography*, I am disrupting autobiography's humanist assumptions of rigid categorizations and binaries, such as insider/outsider, so as to disrupt any notion of a “self” (and by extension, a “worldwide field”) already known and made. *Working autobiography* enables me to engage with versions of feminism that yield a unitary self in favor of a provisional, mobile, and critically (albeit often partially) aware subject in process. *Working autobiography* thus opens possibilities for “syncretic, ‘immigrant,’ cross-cultural, and plural subjectivities, which can enable a politics through positions that are coalitions, intransigent, in process, contradictory” (Grewal, 1994, p. 234).

Already becoming something new

I fumble for my Metro card. Clutching both card and handrail, I join the swirl of people scrambling down the steps at the Grand Army Plaza subway stop in Brooklyn. I swipe my card, take note of its dwindling amount. Squinting against the updraft of air from the train that I just missed, I sidestep a clump of uniformed elementary school children. I'm stopped for a few seconds by a trio of young men belting out a Spanish rendition of Frank Sinatra's "I Did It My Way."

I drop some loose change from my pocket into the troubadours' guitar case and march to my routine waiting area, at the far front end of the platform. I plant myself -- third in line for the first car. Most of the front-liners engage in the commuter wave – leaning over the tracks to see if the next train is coming and then swaying back into line, leaning over, swaying back.... Never makes it arrive any quicker. A #2 express train lumbers into the station. Our momentary order dissolves as we crowd into the subway car, avoiding one another's eyes while the doors snap open and shut three times, accompanied by that incessant dingling bell.

During my sixteen years of living in New York City, I've become somewhat attuned to the choreography in which I now have to engage in order to secure a seat for my hour-long subway trek from Brooklyn to the 116th Street/Columbia University stop in Manhattan. This journey includes a change to the local at 96th Street. Today, I need to sit so that I can read a student's dissertation chapter before our meeting this afternoon. Some people can juggle all kinds of paper and jot notes while they stand, lurching to one side and then the other as the subway car screeches around bends – I can't.

This morning, I'm lucky. I slip into a space on the shiny worn train bench, wrestle the bulky chapter from my backpack, try to sink into an academic reading reverie. But in each of the moments that I disengage from the dissertation pages, I hear conversations conducted in languages I can't identify. I watch the person next to me thumbing his Blackberry while ear-phoned I-Pod heads bob up and down all around us. I glance at a kid battling with his Game Boy, clutch my backpack closer to my body so that a gaggle of tourists can grab the seats next to me. As the subway hurtles beneath the streets of Manhattan, I'm streaming with/in a vortex of languages and transnational circulations and flows of people, goods and information. I am riding and working difference every day on that train as well as in the classrooms where I teach and research.

Unities elude us in these flows and circulations, even as we require acknowledgement from one another in order to become and to encounter possibilities for collective exchange.



As the recent immigration rights protests around the United States have made vivid, the U. S. is infused, like many nations world-wide, with new, volatile, dynamic, and mobile transnational forms of citizenship, place, selves, and modes of communication.

Thus, I believe that the problems of and concurrent hopes for a “worldwide” but not “uniform” field of curriculum studies might be further theorized and enacted by considering differing points of view on transnational flows and mobilities of people, ideas, and communication and their effects on our abilities to engage in collective exchange. I argue that those now-unavoidable flows and mobilities point to a necessary conceptualization of a worldwide curriculum studies field as always in the making. As such, that potential worldwide field must refuse any version of difference as a static category, as undifferentiated. Rather, as participants in a field always in the making, those of us working toward and with/in that worldwide field must argue for difference along all relevant and relational axes of engagement, including various orientations to curriculum theorizing, arrays of perspectives toward relations among scholarship, theory and practice, as well as multiplicities and complexities of ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, class, gender, and geographic locations and identities. By focusing on transnational flows and mobilities that raise, interrupt, stall, enable, detour, multiply or reroute difference and the ways that constructions of difference influence curriculum conceptualizations and work, we might in fact be able to consider what it might take to move beyond where we have been so as to encounter a new possibility for collective exchange.

At the same time, tensions abound, especially in education, in general, and in curriculum studies, in particular, in trying to address what it might mean to “be global and local at once” (Butler, 2001, p. 96). I believe a worldwide curriculum field must attend to transnational “processes” that directly affect education, such as the globalizing of the economy, the rise of new rights, the diminishing power of the nation state and national borders, the emergence and expansion of new communication and media technologies and representations. As well, a concurrent imperative is to understand the intersections, the stasis, *and* the flows and mobilities of these processes in non-static conceptualizations and enactments of entangled local and global educational cultures -- and their embodied persons -- who have their own complex histories.

Here, then, I draw, in particular, from feminists’ transnational as well as poststructural, postcolonial, and queer theorizing and practices in order to articulate tensions as well as possibilities that overspill a notion of curriculum studies inflected by transnational flows and mobilities. I will argue *for* attempts to conceive of a worldwide field that does *not* rest on a universal notion of a curriculum studies field within which all national fields much comply, for example. Such attempts, I posit, might help us to recognize transnational flows and mobilities as one incentive for imagining new configurations of people, knowledges and potentials for collective exchange. At the same time, engaging with such configurations also marks an active refusal to construct a universal notion of “selves” or of curriculum studies through which one global field and its participants could emerge. Thus, I autobiographically utilize feminist poststructural troupings of any essentialized notion of uniform, stable, always coherent “selves” in order to highlight local/global tensions that permeate persons’ diversely embodied realities. As Hongyu Wang (2006) notes, “working at the intersections between the autobiographical and the global [and local] is an essentially educational task.”

Disciplinary versions of transnational “flows and mobilities”

Currently, scholars from a variety of disciplines are grappling with limiting effects as well as potentials for collective exchange with/in the concept and the lived realities of transnational flows and mobilities.



For example, Manuel Castells (1996-1998; 2000), social and communications theorist and leading analyst of the information age, has proposed the idea that there is a new spatial form characteristic of social practices that dominate and shape the network society: the space of flows. Castells argues that growing numbers of people increasingly live in a world that is characterized as a space of flows rather than a space of places. People still cluster in specific locales, but these clusterings take their shape from their involvement in global networks and in globalized information flows. According to Castells, "place" no longer can be defined as a locale, the form and meaning of which are contained within its boundaries.

Castells (2004) further asserts that flows of capital, information, technology, organizational interactions, images, sounds and symbols are the expression of processes dominating economic, political, and symbolic life, and that these flows are facilitated by innovative technologies. These technologies reduce the friction of distance, and link people, money and places in ever-expanding patterns of impermanent connections.

Geographer Doreen Massey (1994; 2004) describes places as actually constituted by their variegated links to other near and distant locales, and contextualizes spatiality as a product of intersecting social relations. Thus, there are no formal spatial rules; it all depends, says Massey, on the power relations embedded in the spatial situation. As globalization has proceeded, what Massey calls the "power geometry of time-space compression" – the differential positioning of social groups vis-à-vis global flows – has become more transparent. The increasing density of transnational connections gives us a global sense of the local, she claims, and allows for greater flows and mobilities of communication and association across diverse terrains and social locations. In Massey's politics of mobility, place becomes an event, marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence. At the same time, Massey draws attention to regional inequities as part of the politics of place.

Anthropologist Thomas Eriksen (2003) draws attention to ways in which some current ethnographic studies indicate that a single site in a complex society may be conceptualized as a multiple one. Since 'spaces' require agency and human interpretation in order to become 'places', it is clear that each 'space' may exist as various 'places' in so far as many agents invest it with different meanings. Even further, cultural geographer Tim Cresswell (2002, p. 25), in challenging the humanistic formulation of place as rooted and "authentic" – a location for identity -- argues that

Place is constituted through reiterative social practice – place is made and remade on a daily basis. Place provides a template for practice – an unstable stage for performance. Thinking of place as performed and practiced can help us think of place in radically open and non-essentialized ways where place is constantly struggled over and reimagined in practical ways. Place is the raw material for the creative production of identity rather than as a-priori label of identity. Place provides the conditions of possibility for creative social practice.

From another angle, sociologists Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2003) emphasize "global fluids" that enable dynamic, multiple mobilities of people, objects, information and images, especially as these move in powerfully fused or hybridized forms, each constantly shifting and being performed in rapid flashes within less anchored spaces. Global fluids, according to Sheller and Urry,

result from people acting upon the basis of local information but where these local actions are, through countless iterations, captured, moved, represented, marketed, and generalized within multiple global waves often impacting upon distant places and peoples. Global



fluids travel along various route-ways but, where they escape through the ‘wall’ into surrounding matter, they effect unpredictable consequences upon that matter. (p. 117)

Global fluids, they argue, transform any notion of a “national” public, highlight everyday forms of dwelling in mobility, and point to a proliferation of multiple ‘mobile’ sites for potential democratization.

Directly examining pedagogical and curricular concerns in relation to transnational flows and mobilities, language theorist Karen Risager (2006) argues that purist and nationalistic approaches to culture typically reign supreme in the foreign language classroom, and she attempts to counter such limiting perspectives by theorizing how “discourses and languages flow across each other” (p. 140). Risager aims to challenge the purism and nationalism that she claims characteristically frames the teaching of language and culture by developing a notion of “language-culture nexus” that theorizes language flows, discourse flows, and culture flows as intersecting in the communicative event. She argues that the target for the teaching of culture “is not ‘the language area’ in a geographic sense but the worldwide network of the target language,” (p. 197). Her main argument derives from her conviction that “linguistic and cultural practices change and spread through social networks along partially different routes, principally on the basis of transnational patterns of migration and markets” (p. 2).

As a final abbreviated example, I note that a number of scholars, including James Clifford (1997), have conceptualized “travel” as metaphor working through transnational flows and mobilities as means of making connections and transgressing disciplinary boundaries, where “a location ... is an itinerary rather than a bounded site – a series of encounters and translations” (Clifford, 1997, p. 11). Thus, “identities based on place are transformed through real and virtual travel and migration into hybridized, nomadic versions of traveling subjects” (McDowell, 2003, p. 11). Further, feminist literary theorist Susan Stanford Friedman (1999), using the terms “mapping,” “position,” “location,” and “axis” to create a spatial discourse to complement temporal models of narrative, conceptualizes “mappings” in particular as a gerund, a verbal noun that is plural, in process, and continually open. She thus argues for conceptualizing identity as hybrid, or syncretic rather than as stable; she also argues for understanding cultural “roots” in terms of their routes or points on a travel itinerary.

What implications for a worldwide curriculum studies field might these varying disciplinary conceptions of transnational flows and mobilities pose? How might the resultant reconceiving of such concepts as “space” and “place” affect the ways in which a worldwide curriculum studies field might be envisioned? How might we consider implications of differing trajectories and global flows of ideas, people, and knowledge constructions? And how might those differing trajectories and flows enable or not enable us to create and to occupy – for and in the moment – spaces together, where we might “ask for recognition”?

In other words, what might it take to engage in “collective exchange,” knowing that engagement with one another will require us to acknowledge that “recognition does not freeze us in our place, our position, our various locations, but rather compels us to move beyond what we have been.” That collective exchange also will require us, amidst rapidly changing circumstances effected by transnational flows and mobilities, to stay “...open to the tensions that beset the most fundamental categories we require, to know unknowingness at the core of what we know...” (Butler, 2001, p. 27). In considering possibilities of transnational and transcultural collective exchange within the contexts of a worldwide curriculum studies field inflected by flows and mobilities, such “unknowingness” might enable those of us attempting to create a worldwide field to avoid a scenario wherein the non-Western “other” is positioned to desire recognition only through assimilation or nativism, for example.

To examine these issues further, I now turn to some cautions as well as incentives raised by various feminists as they consider, from differing perspectives, both deleterious and beneficial possibilities generated by transnational flows and mobilities.

Varying feminist perspectives on transnational flows and mobilities

A number of feminists who are committed to analyzing current effects of globalization, writ large, are considering issues of nation, globalization, postmodernity and postcoloniality while simultaneously rearticulating feminist theories in new forms. In so doing, those who identify as committed to transnational feminisms actively refuse to involve feminist discourse in the construction of a universal notion of patriarchy against which a global sisterhood could emerge. These transnational feminists also refuse to speak for or to offer solutions for women, especially “Third World,” subaltern women. I posit that those feminists who are struggling with effects of transnational flows and mobilities on current forms of feminist thought and action, while at the same time refusing essentialized or universalized categories of identity, thought and action, might further inform the work of all who are attempting to conceive and enact a worldwide curriculum studies field.

Feminists take up the concept of “transnational” from differing philosophical and political commitments. In attempting to imagine and practice an ethics of feminist transnational encounter that is neither simply assimilationist nor conflictual, Shu-Mei Shih (2002) points to the fluidity and complexity of the transnational moment, where migration, diaspora, and travel can no longer be clearly distinguished by duration or intention, nor by national citizenship and belonging. For M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, transnational feminism crucially involves “a way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in different geographical spaces, rather than as all women across the world” (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997, p. xix). Alena Heitlinger (1999) argues that transnational feminism builds on insights of postmodernism and postcoloniality as well as acknowledges ways in which “global economic restructuring and transnational cultural influences shape and link the material and cultural lives of women around the world” (p. 7). And Caren Kaplan (1992) argues that the term “transnational” expresses “possibilities for links and affiliations, as well as differences, among women who inhabit different locations” (p. 116).

Building on these conceptualizations, Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (1999) have conceptualized a transnational cultural studies perspective, which recognizes that “practices are always negotiated in both a connected and specific field of conflict and contradiction and that feminist agendas must be viewed as a formulation and reformulation that is contingent on historically specific conditions” (p. 358). Within that conceptualization, Kaplan and Grewal have analyzed how inequalities of class, gender, nationality, sexuality and ethnicity are created through movement over time and space in particular ways. They use the term *transnational* instead of international in order to destabilize rather than maintain boundaries of nation, race and gender, for example. Kaplan and Grewal note how race, gender, and class, among other categories, must now be conceived of as concepts that “travel” – that is, circulate and work in different and fluid ways in different places and times. Thus, “transnational” is a term that signals, for Kaplan and Grewal, attention to uneven and dissimilar circuits and flows of culture and capital, where mobility, for example, may at times signal reluctant or mandatory participation. By critically analyzing such circuits, flows, and mobilities, they argue, links between patriarchies, colonialisms, racisms and other forms of domination may become more apparent and available for critique.

Also choosing the term *transnational*, postcolonial cultural theorist and philosopher Gayatri Spivak has developed the idea of “transnational literacy” (1992; 1999; 2003), which in its broadest sense refers to a reshaping of colonial systems of education and institutional



knowledge away from (European) nation-based formations. Spivak (1993) warns against universalizing postcoloniality by noting “others are many.” She argues that “transnational literacy” thus would involve a study of the multiplicity of languages and cultures in the world, and describes how reading can serve as one way of thinking with and through concepts of the nation that currently are being troubled by the cultural and economic effects of globalization. Here, reading refers not just to reading-based literacy, but literacy more generally, as an interpretive act. By paying attention to intersections of knowledge and power in pedagogical practices and curriculum constructions, for example, transnational literacy can be instrumental in linking literature and culture to global capital and other forces and flows that impinge on personal and collective autonomies.

Spivak (1996; 2000) also has challenged the idea that the new speed and flexibility of technology, in particular, enables the effective transnational circulation of people, money, and information. She claims that this dominant idea ignores the fact that the circulation of money and information is profitably regulated by rich, industrial “First World” nations, while the vast majority of the world’s population is living in a state of poverty and oppression. By highlighting monetary and political interests that are served by the economic text of globalization, Spivak exposes how the world is represented from the dominant perspective and geopolitical location of the “First World” to the exclusion of other disenfranchised groups. In particular, Spivak’s criticism of economic development policies that target women has highlighted the urgent need for a transnational perspective in feminist thought. Spivak’s critical endeavor is to situate women’s social locations in a transnational framework of political, economic and social relationships.

Feminist theorist Cindi Katz (2001) argues that such political, economic and social relationships might best be investigated by defining the local as a “critical topography,” thus making it possible to excavate the layers of process that produce particular places and to see their intersections with material social practices. Katz conceptualizes the local not as a well-bordered space defined either by exclusion from or inclusion in global practices, but rather as a “cross-roads” where the post-national, the post-colonial and the emergence of a need for a new kind of community often meet under or even against the pressures of global flows and imperatives.

Even as some of these various notions of *transnational* gesture toward generative possibilities, Grewal and Kaplan (2000) also point out that it is impossible to advocate a transnational feminism as an improved or better or cleaned up kind of international or global feminism – transnational feminism is *not* to be celebrated as free of oppressive conditions. Rather, they argue, transnational feminist practices refer to the interdisciplinary study of the relationships among diverse women in diverse parts of the world. These relationships are uneven, often unequal, and complex. They emerge from women’s varied needs and agendas in many cultures and societies, and involve forms of alliance, subversion, and complicity within which asymmetries and inequalities can be critiqued.

Given these varying feminist perspectives on transnational flows and mobilities and their worldwide effects, possibilities, and complexities, how would a worldwide field of curriculum studies grapple with the implications and complications of such views? Given a very heterogeneous, multi-faceted, nation-based and yet mobile educational world, how might we understand curriculum studies as a worldwide field? How might perspectives offered by feminists who identify their work and goals as “transnational” in one way or another inform the “...emergence of a worldwide – transnational – curriculum studies field with a vocabulary and intellectual agenda that expresses and addresses both national and international curriculum questions” (Pinar, 2006)?

For example, how might Kaplan and Grewel’s (1999) focus on the travels of feminist discourses, as they are produced and disseminated through cultural divides that mark global



inequities, inform our studies of curriculum discourses and their production and dissemination? How might we attend to their simultaneous caution that a notion of travel oftentimes marks asymmetries of power rather than a global cosmopolitanism (p. 358)? For, the metaphoric spaces of movement, linkages, crossings, explorations, travel, “so important in [many feminists’] construction[s] of different concepts of the self, of community, of [becoming], [are] set against the material reality that pleasurable mobility is only for the affluent; the poor are immobile or subject to enforced movement and migration” (Eagleton, 2003, pp. 2-3). It’s the contradiction to which the politics of mobility points, to which Rosi Braidotti (1994) refers to when she questions the “paradox of proximity, indifference, and cultural differences between the nomadic intellectual and the migrant women” (p. 255).

Further, Linzi Manicom (1999), following Spivak, notes that “blind travel that does not check its baggage – or have its baggage checked -- can only serve to reproduce those transnational relations of feminist hierarchy in which Third World women and national feminisms are subsumed to Western interpretive schema” (p. 56). Grewal and Kaplan (1994), for example, consider the tracings and mappings of debates around production and reception of feminist cultural and intellectual production to be crucial aspects of transnational feminist practices. Manicom argues that such tracings and mappings should help to “translate concepts across cultural venues, to mediate between discordant discourses, and usefully recast issues and debates that have become conventionalized, both locally and globally” (p. 56).

In addition, M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) argues that the metaphors of travel, links, maps, charts, journeys, bridges and borders

are neither idle nor incidental ... as we come to terms with the different cartographies of feminist struggle in different parts of world; our different histories; where they change course and how they diverge. It seems crucial that we come to terms with, and engage, that confluence of the local and the global in order not to view the transnational as merely a theoretical option. (p. 264)

In fact, many curriculum scholars already have begun to study effects of various iterations of transnational flows and mobilities, knowing at the same time that “the local now transacts directly with the global – the global installs itself in locals, and the global itself is constituted through a multiplicity of locals” (Sassen, 2000, p.259). At the same time, a worldwide curriculum studies field needs to wrestle with the dilemma that “*local* can connote the supposed particularism, provincialism, and primordialism of the Third World while *global* may connote the breadth and universality that is often associated with Western feminism” (Basu, 2003, pp. 68-69).

Thus, I think one reason for grappling with tensions involved in conceiving of a world-wide field of curriculum studies in relation to transnational flows and mobilities is that we might address what Judith Butler (2001, p. 96) describes as

...the concrete dilemmas of what it is to be local and global at once, to be caught in the necessity of constant translation Such an inquiry neither moves us too quickly to assert our commonality, thus effacing our difference, nor seeks to return us to our parochial locations, our ethnic singularities, without showing how the most local struggles are implicated in the processes of globalization. What this also means is that the usual binary oppositions do not hold, and that we must learn to work with one another in our irreducible complexity, bound to one another in many ways, implicated in a process of globalization which works differentially and relentlessly, at the same time that we are irreducible to a collective condition.



How then might we work together, in our irreducible complexity, with and in a worldwide curriculum field? I agree with Butler that those of us who work toward a worldwide field would be unable to be simplified to a collective condition. And yet, I believe that many of us are hoping to move beyond what we have been, both as separate nationally based fields and as a fledging world-wide field, in order to encounter new possibilities for collective exchange. Those exchanges, however, will always be predicated on acknowledging one another as in the making, always caught up *differently* in flows and mobilities of becoming in the instantaneous mutualities of the local and the global.

Recognition does not freeze us in our place

I join in the clump of students, teachers, child-care workers hoisting strollers as we all jostle for position in order to ascend the steps of the 116th Street station. We spill out onto Broadway, identifiable to walkers nearby as the most recent group disgorged from the #1 local uptown line. But our momentary unity as subway riders headed in the same direction immediately splays and disperses. I hurry down Broadway, cross 120th Street and turn right. I flash my faculty ID card to the Teachers College security person posted inside a kiosk at the intersection of Thompson and Main Halls – this one knows me, waves me on. And as I settle into my office chair and click on my Mac, possibilities for constructions of curriculum and its field as well as potentials for teaching and research implied by current everyday forms of dwelling in mobility, in the temporaries and flows of plurality -- in difference -- begin to get codified and regulated into static, circumscribed, U.S.-centric versions of academic identities and knowledges.

Sitting at my office desk in front of my computer, I enter my password, wince at the emails that stream down the screen. Immediately, I am connected to multiple worlds of students, colleagues, family, friends, and yes, to the world of curriculum studies, to the flows and mobilities that hold out possibilities for new kinds of identities and collective exchanges. Those possibilities posit that I can ask for recognition from the other without being frozen in my place, my subject positions. For, in the asking, Butler argues, I already am becoming something new. But at the same time, sitting at that desk -- responding in various email lengths and modes of address to students, faculty members, administrators -- possibilities for my multiply and always newly becoming selves drain from my consciousness, and I most often get reified and reify myself as a white, U. S.-born, middle class female professor. I do so through my particularly and habitually positioned participation in local/global academic events of teaching, researching and writing. Although I live and work with and in sexual orientation difference, and with and in what some especially would still gesture toward as the oxymoronic gendered status of “woman academic” in the U. S., I worry that most often I still am seen, and most often habitually view my “professional selves,” as situated within normalized versions of what it “means” to be a “woman” working in a gendered U. S. institution of higher learning, a U. S. field of curriculum studies, and in and with U. S.-centric versions of curricular and pedagogical theories, policies and practices.

A number of the doctoral students with whom I work at Teachers College, Columbia University, are classified as “international” – students from Nigeria, Taiwan, the Caribbean, Japan, South Korea, Italy, Colombia, Lebanon -- who have come to the U.S. to study – some, to stay, others to leave when they complete their doctoral work. Some of my international students “become variously decentered from their cultural bearings and, in the United States, seek different forms of identity as a politics rather than as an inheritance” (Ong, 1995, p. 351) of familial and cultural connections or of particular ethnic, class, or gender groups or geographic locations. A clip of writing from one of my doctoral students illustrates this decentering shift:



My autobiographical inquiry is being done without resting on a fixed identity. But a shifting identity is not really a place where I want to repose. I want to do and write research with differences that have so many names, but at the same time, no names. I am a woman, but I am not that name. I am a Japanese but I am not that name. I am a daughter but I am not that name. And so on. I am a nomadic inquirer. I want to ride and work differences and move in the thought that, unsure of where I am going, I am moving somewhere different from where I am now.

Naoko Akai (2006)

But by the very classification of “international student” on her official records at Teachers College, my student’s desire to destabilize any fixed versions of her identities get caught up in “the discourses of ‘international’ or ‘global’ [that] rely on political and economic as well as cultural concepts of discrete nations who can be placed into comparative or relational status, always maintaining the West [in our case here, the U. S.] as the center” (Alarcon, Kaplan, & Moallem, 1999, p. 12).

One part of my discussion about potentials and difficulties of conceiving of a worldwide field of curriculum studies in relation to transnational flows and mobilities thus calls into question curricular and institutional discourses that result in a naturalization, essentialization, or compartmentalization of identities. As well, I question any version of a worldwide field of curriculum studies that renders ordinary, natural, and even compulsory the relationship between reified conceptions of national and international. Further, my particular and situated work with those students classified as “international” in the U. S. has compelled me to challenge any discourse that “recuperates the originary narrative of diversity without questioning the ‘very processes by which ‘othering’ is fabricated in American society” (Alarcon, Kaplan, & Moallem, 1999, p. 14).

Some of my “international” students talk about feeling “international” when they return to their home countries after extended stays of study in the U.S. “You don’t speak real Taiwanese anymore – you speak it with an American accent,” En-Shu’s grandmother tells her. In relaying her grandmother’s remarks to me, En-Shu throws up her hands: “So now I speak my mother tongue with an American accent and English with a Taiwanese accent. Where and who am I in all this?” I have no answer, nor do I think that there is one answer to be had here. But I worry about my obligations to my students in light of the stances that I take – those of a faculty person who teaches, researches, writes, and promotes study about and with/in “difference,” and who argues for a politics that is responsive to rather than repressive of difference. Should I have an answer?

En-Shu confides in me that she is worried about her visa situation that may force her to return to Taiwan; she would rather stay in the U. S. to pursue an academic career. But even if she doesn’t go “home” to work following the completion of her doctoral degree, she says that she feels she is still considered “other” in the U.S., although she has lived and worked in the U. S. for over ten years now. And now, based on her grandmother’s reactions to her during her recent visit “home,” she thinks that she would be considered “other” in Taiwan as well.

Such paradoxical and embodied global/local tensions convince me that examination of multiple sites and configurations of “othering” processes could be yet another focus of any version of a worldwide curriculum studies field. Given that any “other” is a particularity as well as situated within broader social/cultural/historical contexts (Ahmed, 1998), what varying investigative practices might we differently need to employ in order to address issues and relations of power related to constructions of “other,” both in our individual educational contexts as well as in relation to a worldwide curriculum studies field?

Of course, I have learned from poststructural, transnational, and postcolonial feminist projects, in particular, that there is no “pure” space from which to speak and challenge



ordinary narratives of diversity, no spaces outside of language and configurations of power. According to Kaplan & Grewal, there are only links, flows, and mobilities among thoroughly unequal social forces (1999, p. 356). Those very flows and mobilities certainly can point to transnationally inflected versions of identities and knowledge in the making, capable of new possibilities for collective exchange – an exchange not based on sameness. But those flows and mobilities, moving through unequal social forces, also can contribute, simultaneously, to “the very processes by which othering is fabricated.”

For example, although my descriptions of my doctoral students’ administratively categorized “international identities” are intended as critique, in fact my very interpretations may maintain static configurations of those students’ subject positions as Other, still subject to my interpretation and implementation of university regulations that reinforce imperialistic U.S. inscription of who and what counts – and how -- in U. S. educational contexts and knowledge production. And, of course, the often “othering” binary of professor/student potentially is working in tandem with other “othering” processes here.

These are troubling scenarios for me. For example, in my poststructural feminist work over the years, I’ve attempted to trouble the category of “woman” and especially of “woman academic” in order to examine ways in which those very identity categories have been historically, socially and culturally constituted as “Other,” especially in the U. S. academy and particularly in the field of U.S. curriculum studies (Miller, 1981; 1983; 1992; 1993). As one born and educated in the United States, and as one who has participated for nearly thirty years in the field of curriculum studies, during and post- reconceptualization (Miller, 1978; 1996a; 1996b; 1999), I am interested in how current social, cultural, and economic global flows and mobilities might influence not only constructions of the category “woman” but also any other assigned identity category, including those attached to my international doctoral students or to any one working toward a world-wide field of curriculum studies. I support Butler’s claim that any identity category need be viewed as “an undesignatable field of differences” and as “site[s] of permanent openness and resignifiability” (Butler, 1992, p. 160).

Thus, to unintentionally reinscribe my students’ “international” identities as fixed and static versions of “other” would be the antithesis of what I believe in and have worked for as a major emphasis of curriculum theorizing in the U. S. field. I agree that difference cannot be conceived as a static concept in and of itself, cannot be detached from its embeddedness in social, epistemological, and power relations. But there is always the danger that I have positioned myself, in relation to my international students, as normative and unmarked and as such, have concealed the mark of privilege (Ahmed, 1998). Thus, as part of a network of relationality, a notion of difference to which I am committed requires me to acknowledge that I am living in simultaneous and contradictory subject positions/locations that are always in flux, always becoming. Such acknowledgement thus implies framing difference

as the continuous potential for the world’s and people’s movements and connections to be made otherwise. . . . When difference is thought through [flows and mobilities] and emergence and becoming otherwise, negative social situations are seen to arise not out of difference itself, but rather when the potential for difference to emerge and come into play is captured and narrowly directed. Social change and cultural variation becomes the problem of how to imagine else, move else, experience else, and experiment with how else we might associate with each other and enter into exchanges with each other. Here, political action entails practices that multiply and augment the variety of thinkable and doable responses we might perform to what is already and always emerging as the potential to become else. (Ellsworth, 2006)



I argue, then, that we all are living in and through contradictory subject positions and locations, intensified by volatile worldly events, technological change and structural and material inequities that often are based on fixed notions of ethnicity, race, gender, national and religious identities in an age of globalization. Clearly, we are in the midst of a momentous shift in how we might think about social and cultural difference in relation to transnational flows and mobilities that influence constructions of identities, subjectivities, and conceptions of a worldwide field of curriculum studies. I am arguing here that such a shift moves us from speaking about fixed binaries or even multiple social/cultural positions to notions of *trans* – flows of bodies, cultures, and identities as assemblages of relationalities, including economic, institutional, governmental, immigration forces -- that may create new choices, new possibilities for becoming else through impermanent convergences and irreducible differences among families, coalitions, subjectivities, and histories across uneven playing fields.

I watch and I feel too the embodied tensions, the struggles with displacement, with translation of both identities and languages, with assigned homogeneous identity constructions and knowledge productions that some of my international students encounter as they attempt to re-work their “selves” across the flows and mobilities of new relationalities in their graduate student lives:

My research develops from my personal and professional experiences, both as a high school English teacher and student in Los Angeles and as an immigrant woman from Colombia. As a teacher, my literature anthologies and set curricula, designed by the state, the district and the school, established and maintained the literature canon. U. S. Latino authors seemed to be sprinkled in the literature selections to represent THE Latino experience. . . . This created a limited and often erroneous account of what it means to be Latino not only for non-Latino students but also for those who identified as Latino themselves.

Mary Alexandra Rojas (2006)

My doctoral student’s challenging of homogeneous labels that in turn constitute a portion of the literary canon in the U. S. makes me think that engaging in the constant translation of irreducible differences could be another point of our work as a world-wide but not unitary field of curriculum studies. It’s certainly the labor that I see Mary and others – some who consider themselves immigrants to the U.S., others who call themselves “temporary” exiles or emigrants who intend to return to their countries of origin at the completion of their doctoral studies, and still others of us who were born in the U.S but who battle the reified versions of “otherness” of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability -- engaged in every day.

For, clearly, it is no longer possible to claim any static notion of either knowledge or identity – everyone and everything in a certain sense now is unlocatable, in flux. If the circumstances of knowledge and identity constructions and exchanges are flows and mobilities – then what can and will we make of a world-wide field of curriculum studies, in the moment and in-the-making and especially across dualistic boundaries of “national” and “international?” Or within persistent unitary constructions of national and ethnic identities? What potentials might we tap into when people’s movements and actions, including their constructions of identities and curriculum, take place in spaces *between* categories and boundaries and knowledges and identities already made (Ellsworth, 2006)?

I obviously believe that “transnational flows and mobilities” more readily describes the relational and dynamic character of a worldwide field rather than a notion of individual fields participating in a world-wide field as “representatives” of various regions of the world. At the same time, tensions arise if we contemplate the effects of the denationalization of curriculum studies and the formation of new claims for the field centered in transnational



actors, for this in turn might raise the question, “whose field is it and where is it?” Or perhaps I assume the raising of such questions, given my experiences with current circumstances within the U. S. curriculum field, where assorted contingencies appear to stake claim to “the state of the field” in ways that ignore a variety of perspectives on the field’s work. Or perhaps I am anticipating conflict, given the variety of curricularists’ responses to governmental mandates contained with No Child Left Behind, with its press for curriculum standardization, high-stakes testing and student and teacher accountability. Or perhaps I am reacting defensively to these and other current factors and conditions, including a re-emphasis on faculty being lodged in specific and often traditional disciplinary fields of study, that are threatening U.S. curriculum studies from standing alone as a primary field of vital scholarly study and inquiry.

The U.S. drive to “identify and own”

In fact, one of the current responses of the U. S. curriculum studies field to mounting pressures to substantiate its existence in schools and colleges of education around the country appears to be a drive to constantly assess and to ironically “fix” the “state” -- the identity, the ownership, and the condition, if you will -- of that field. Although echoing earlier concerns about the field in terms of its “moribund” condition (Huebner, 1976; Schwab, 1969), current questions about the state of U. S. curriculum studies also are impelled by conditions of intellectual peril for U. S. schools of education, public school teachers, and curriculum scholars (Pinar, 2004) as well as by material conditions of peril, both in and outside the United States.

But that drive to sum up and to stabilize what the field “is” often reduces and reifies such assessments to static and isolated versions, separated not only from other educational fields of study but also from issues and concerns of global/ local versions of curriculum studies and projects. I have participated in at least three of the now five or six recent “state of the U. S. field” sessions at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies (AAACS)¹ I have argued that, especially in the wake of current national and international world-altering events, those of us in the U. S. can no longer afford to maintain that our curriculum work should focus on our various narrow and sometimes even separatist stances about the purposes, forms or states of our field. Nor can we ignore the ways that such stances often posit ourselves as well as our curriculum studies field as existing apart from the regulatory norms that much of the field’s work supposedly opposes.

For, to “move beyond what we have been and to encounter a new possibility for collective exchange” requires that we acknowledge our “... fundamental dependency on the other, the fact that we cannot exist without addressing the other, without in some ways being addressed by the other, and that there is no wishing away our fundamental sociality” (Butler, 2001, p. 93). At the same time, “no matter how much we each desire recognition and require it, we are not therefore precisely the same as the other – there is an irreducibility to our being, one which becomes clear in the distinct stories we have to tell, which means that we are never fully identified with any collective ‘we.’ (Butler, 2001, p. 93)

Trust me, there is no collective “we” in the U. S. field of curriculum studies. In fact, I’ve been asking for a while now if still recurring static and divisive debates about purposes and forms of the U. S. academic curriculum field might shift in productive ways, were we to consider our field as always in-the-making, as always needing to respond in the moment to multiple and differing local/global events and contexts (Miller, 1999; 2000; 2005a; 2005b). To be always in the making requires that what some call the bifurcated, Balkanized, and insulated American curriculum field create fresh ways to engage in collective exchange.



Those of us in the U. S. certainly need to re-make the field every day, in relation to particular transnational as well as situated local events, issues, people and in tension with our desires for recognition and our simultaneous irreducibility to a collective local *and/or* global “we.” And yet, some in the US field do not appear to “accept the array of sometimes incommensurable epistemological and political beliefs and modes and means of agency that bring us into activism” (Butler, 2004, p. 48). And so some members of the US field continue to stake out their versions of the field – versions that often emphasize the field as situated only in relation to static and pre-determined versions of curriculum design, development, and evaluation in K-12 educational settings in the United States, for example, or accounts that totally reject all aspects and implications of the U. S. field reconceptualized, or forms that resist any recognition of transnational flows and mobilities that now unavoidably influence constructions, not only of a U. S., but also of a worldwide field.

To move beyond what we have been

I here briefly have utilized feminist poststructural and postcolonial perspectives on autobiographical work in order to interrogate various notions and effects of transnational flows and mobilities as well as to theorize and to situate a notion of a worldwide curriculum studies field as always in the making. I obviously do so in response to my particular shifting and partial understandings and experiences of the U. S. field and of my “selves” working within that field. By extension, I am compelled to envision not only a U. S. but also a worldwide field as response-able to the multiple influences of and transmutations that can result from transnational flows and mobilities.

The autobiographical work to which I am committed theorizes memory, identity, embodiment, experience and agency as the constitutive processes of autobiographical subjectivity, and that attempts to attend to the fluidity of identities “in movement through time and across political and geographic spaces” (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 37). In particular, poststructural feminist versions of autobiographical inquiry claim no coherent “self” that predates stories about identities, about “who” one is; nor do they claim any possibility of a unified, stable immutable self who can remember everything that has happened in the past. Thus, feminist poststructural autobiographical curriculum theorizing wrestles with any version of autobiography that simply attempts to include or re-include unitary versions of subjects or “voices” in local/global social/cultural curriculum narratives or constructs from which they previously have been excluded.

I thus attempt to *work* tensions of feminist poststructural autobiographical practices in U. S. education, which as a field, writ large, is still caught up in humanist discourses, by conceiving of “selves” as mobile and negotiable spaces where complexities can be explored in and through *confrontations* with memory and social/culturally inflected identity constructions, constructions already made and fixed in place and time. In such spaces, autobiographical inquiry involves acts “of interpretation by subjects inescapably in historical time, and in their relation to their own ever-moving pasts” (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 24). What is remembered and what is forgotten, and *why*, change over time and across contexts and flows of time, geography, generation.

From these perspectives, autobiographical inquiry thus can be used to activate, situate, and/or interrogate conceptions, memories, fantasies, idealizations, or normalizations, for example, of how subjects know themselves as subjects of particular kinds of experiences attached to and interpreted through their social/cultural statuses, locations and identities, constructed in and through the discourses available to them. It can draw attention to Butler’s (1999) notion of how gendered identities, for example, get produced as we repeat regulatory regimes and how our repetitions also make categories vulnerable to change.



Autobiographical inquiry can highlight what Butler conceptualizes as the iterative processes of taking up, repeating, or subverting certain subject positions. Thus, I believe that feminist poststructural autobiographical work especially can contribute to processes of coming to grips with conceptions of curriculum studies in relation to transnational flows and mobilities. For such work suggests, in constructing narratives of self *and* of curriculum fields, both the mobility *and* the potential agency of the subject as always in the making.

Conceptions of transnational flows and mobilities become visceral through embodied autobiographical inquiries that take into account shifting and rapidly changing discourses and material effects of globalization, including knowledges and identities produced at everyday educational sites as well as within a worldwide field of curriculum studies. Such autobiographical inquiries might highlight how participants in that world-wide field now must move across, between, and with/in spatial and temporal as well as historical, social and cultural difference so as to “encounter a new possibility for collective exchange” – but exchange *not* contingent on sameness. Instead, such a collective transnational exchange, sprung amidst a stream of flows and mobilities, dislocates all of us from our positions, denies any version of an essentialized “self” or place, rejects possibilities of identifying with any collective “we.” Yet, there *can* be exchange, where asymmetries and inequalities in constructions of knowledge and identities might be acknowledged, or simply sustained, or called into question, or even subverted. And therein lies hope for a worldwide field constructed in and through difference – a field and its participants always in the making.

I slip into the stream of staff and colleagues leaving my building. I don't teach tonight, so I'm headed home during the height of New York City's rush hours. I trudge up Broadway, jostle for position on the subway stairs. I merge with a commuter cluster, and together we shuffle onto the #1 local. I don't join the rush for seats. I have to change in three stops to the #2 express, where I'll be more assertive in claiming sitting space. I grab onto the metal pole stabbing the center of the subway car as the train rides a curve in the tracks.

In that southbound train, I am re-tracing the lines of my early morning journey, but I am not the same as I was during that commute. As the subway lurches toward Brooklyn, I am transporting new versions of my self as well as of those with whom I've engaged in collective exchange. Tomorrow will bring different fluxes and encounters and identities and provisional spaces that most likely will get claimed and coded almost in the moment that they are imagined. I will have to begin again.

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Notes

¹ The three AERA “state of the field” sessions, all sponsored by Division B (Curriculum Studies), in which I participated include:

- the 2006 Annual Meeting, April 7-11, San Francisco, where I was a participant in an Invited Plenary Colloquium entitled “Projects of Influence, Architects of the Arena: The Status of Curriculum Studies”;
- the 2005 Annual Meeting, April 11-15, Montreal, where I was a participant in a symposium entitled “Whatever Happened to the Curriculum Field?”;
- and the 2003 Annual Meeting, April 21-25, Chicago, where I was a participant in a symposium entitled “Whither Curriculum: Thinking Through the Present of Curriculum Studies.”

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