The Bodies We Teach By: (En)Gendering Mission for Global Christianities

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On October 22, 2010, a fire broke out and destroyed the 129-year old Immanuel Chapel at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia. Among the terrible losses were the chapel’s beloved stained glass windows illumined by the iconic words, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel.” In her book, Rethinking Mission in the Postcolony (2011), constructive theologian Marion Grau of Oslo recounts the incident and a “postcolonial” quip that proves postmoderns’ occasional affinity for supernatural signs: “There are not a few who have wondered whether this ‘Great Commission’ did not go up in flames some time ago, and what might be left in the smoldering embers of its claims.”

As a 4th-generation Vietnamese by-product of missionary-driven Christian nurture forged in early-20th-C Vietnam, I am delighted to be invited to face your field of Christian mission studies (or “world Christianity”) at a moment of profound reflexivity and flux. One can see why this necessary introspection, done in correspondence with an intensifying inversion of an academic field of study, could result in no less than what some have called a “conversion of the missionary self”—an epistemological reckoning with historically polydoxic and embattled “techniques and technologies” of missiology, now that the “mission field” is closing in, Christianity has permutated explosively in the “Majority World,” and formerly “receiving” churches are talking back to their dominant centers of origin in Europe and North America.

As the Call for Papers for this annual meeting suggests, your field has had to retrace its disciplinary itineraries (to borrow Grau’s language) to rediscover the ways in which the study (and the teaching) of “mission” has been done with what Grau calls “Great Omissions.” Among them are two thematic strands explored by you this weekend—and also the focus of this plenary:

1) “[the] absence and erasure of the theological and linguistic contributions of local interlocutors in the consideration of mission history, interfaith and intercultural encounter”; and

3 Grau, 17.
2) “the absence in dominant accounts of mission history of the contribution of women, as missionaries and as local interlocutors and the implied limitations of what is considered “mission.”

It is a terrible yet exciting hermeneutic quagmire for contemporary scholars of any theological discipline to reconcile: the “great omissions” of our long-standing study of the “Great Commission.” It is exciting because now, the field of “Christian mission studies” must also mean critical inquiry into what many have described as porous, polydoxic, and polycentric engendering of “good news” in so-called “zones of symbiotic, translational interaction” between peoples and cultures (that’s a nod to postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha), across times and spaces, and buttressed by the infrastructures of “empire and divinity.”

Our excitement veils a more embarrassing aspect of internal field examination, because we know by now that our great omissions are no mere accidental academic “oops.” As has been argued in theology writ large, we are looking at the enduring struggles of “canon wars” and the enduring politics of production and erasure of presence and contribution. Here, the piercing laments of second-wave feminists of various discursive communities are helpful in re-orienting what is at stake for us all. These boundary transgressors were not just asking the question, “why am I excluded?”— knowing from experience that the response may very well be strategies of paternalistic, tokenistic, supplemental addition. Rather, they queried the concerted intellectual effort it takes to sustain an exclusionary canon as it is. Literary giant Toni Morrison spoke to the heart of this in an emblematic question: What intellectual feats had to be performed by the author or his critic to erase me from a society seething with my presence, and what effect has that performance had on the work? At this acute angle, we realize that the task is not simply to figure out “what to include” in our teaching of a field, but to more fundamentally interrogate and refigure the hermeneutic assumptions that facilitate the very framing of the field.

In doing this, we are asking questions that are native to educational theory and philosophy, and I am delighted that you have welcomed me as a “pedagogy junkie” in your midst for this cross-disciplinary conversation. Allow me, if you will, to speak from a knowledge base that is closer to my wheelhouse—that of critical pedagogy—to invite us all to ponder the possibilities of a critical intersectional pedagogical stance that may be fitting for the teaching of “Christian mission” in an age in which Christianity remains dominant, albeit not in numbers. At this

4 Grau, 18.

5 Grau, sic passim.

intersectional location, the missiologist is a “teaching body” inasmuch as they are an “interpreting body.” Thus, to explore who we are as “teachers of mission” with attention to great commissions and omissions, we ask two guiding questions:

1. What does it mean to take seriously our teaching bodies?

2. What does it mean to take seriously the bodies with and about whom we teach?

(Marion Grau asked these same questions of hermeneutics: “What does it mean for bodies to interpret? What happens when we interpret bodies?”7)

Let’s take the first question.

**What does it mean to take seriously our teaching bodies?**

I begin with the following striking words by education theorist Freema Elbaz-Luwisch:

> There is a body in the room. We ignore it . . . . Usually, of course, we ignore the body by ignoring it—we don’t speak about it, we don’t look directly at it, we change the subject quickly if there’s a risk of noticing it. Sometimes, however, we have to ignore it by speaking about it—by saying the right things and then carrying on with our assigned topic.8

The ignored “body in the room” in the quotation refers to an educator’s lament over the body dilemmas of those teaching in lands ravaged by conflict and violence in Israel and Palestine, where “Xs” mark the spots on the ground where bodies lay lifeless due to unceasing, brutal transnational identity politics. Few US (theological) educators could fathom their teaching/learning environments to be so deadly—unless you are teaching on the “wrong” side of town in some parts of this country ... or you are practitioners and professors whose “subject matter” is typically conceived to be an open, unknown, perhaps even perilous “mission field” that is somewhere out there.

Just as missiology has relied upon anthropology and ethnography for instincts about positional reflexivity, critical pedagogists remind us that every teaching/learning location is an “ever-changing confluence of culture, environment, politics,

7 Grau, 7.
and power,” and that the teacher must inevitably respond to the tides of their social location. This conviction follows the liberationist educational philosophy of Brazilian education reformer Paulo Freire.

“. . .[E]ducation is by nature social, historical, and political,” Freire famously declared. “[T]here is no way we can talk about some universal, unchanging role [or identity] for the teacher.” Thus, just as theology cannot be spoken from a position of nowhere, the contemporary teacher of mission must reckon with the intersectionality of their social location—the ways in which their teaching bodies are particularly raced, classed, nationalized, and sexualized not only out there in the (mission) field, but also in the academy ... and even in the pages of their writings.

Here, the existential crises of academics “minoritized” by gender and race—particularly academics of the empirical sciences—are poignant and illuminating. I stress empirical studies because, arguably more than scholars of other disciplines, these scholars must immerse their bodies in “the field” both figuratively and literally. What does it mean to teach with bodies that are constantly configured by the political markings of the multiple socio-cultural fields which we must navigate? (A more direct translation for the field of missiology could be: How do men’s and women’s bodies appear in the discourses of mission studies?)

REFLECTIVE MOMENT [2 min]

Would you take 2 minutes to chat with a neighbor about what comes to mind as you free-associate with the notions of “visibility, vulnerability, and viability” of the teaching body?

Visibility, Vulnerability, Viability

In recent years, women academics of color have broken tough ground in bearing witness to the struggle to be taken seriously within majority institutions of higher learning. Anthologies such as Still Searching for Our Mothers’ Gardens invoke the rallying cry of earlier generations of feminist/womanist scholars to continue the tradition of narrating counter-stories of the multiple jeopardy of scholar-teachers whose positionality is minoritized by the intersections of race,

9 Greenwood, 356.
11 This hermeneutic strategy follows postcolonial feminist cues, as modeled by Mohanty, Feminism without Borders, 5.
faith, gender, sexuality, and nationality. With anecdotal honesty, empirical details, painstaking research, and analytic sharpness, these educators testify to inscrutable academic dilemmas imbedded in familiar taxonomies of struggle: the problem of diversity, (in)difference, sex- and color-“blindness”; the complications with voice, power, agency, and “otherness”; the constricting normative gazes of dominant audiences; the fragmenting territorialization of identity politics; the insufferable practices of profiling, prejudice, and structural discrimination; the vexing curricular tensions and classroom power dynamics; the tenuousness of collegial ally-ship, institutional negotiations, and disciplinary politics (e.g., the feminization of a field). Three generative themes illustrate this web of complexity: the themes of “visibility, vulnerability, and viability.”

FIRST, the problem of VISIBILITY.

*Visibility*—being seen—already means to be judged by what one looks like. This enfleshment of teaching bodies is not freeing, but rather fear-ridden for minoritized teachers due to the knowledge that one is constantly under the shadows of scrutinizing gaze. It is a form of psycho-political exposure which turns teachers into what educator Ana Maria Freire calls “interdicted bodies”—“forbidden to be,” inhibited through self-monitoring. At the intra-psychic level, the demands of physical, mental, and emotional health beckon prudent attention to care of self, but such concern is often difficult to negotiate within the *habitus* of institutional and academic life. Physiologically, female teaching bodies are inevitably sexualized by mere appearance, even as we are supposed to assume an androgynous identity performance. Who cares when the teacher is only supposed to be a disembodied “talking head”—mentally objective, emotionally persuasive, physically virulent?

With biology being culturally and politically charged, we recall Audre Lorde’s description of the “mythical norm” which haunts marginalized female consciousness: “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure.” “Somatophobia” ensues as academics contend over which “-ism” is more malignant (sexism or racism), forgetting that “flesh-loathing” attitudes arise out of “interlocking” or “intersectional,” not additive, type-casting—the entwining of misogynistic, racist, heteronormative, classist, ageist, imperialistic, colonialist, jingoistic, capitalistic, and even militant type-casting of “difference.”

Taking seriously the standpoint feminist concepts of *positionality* (identity is placed- based, situational and contextual) and *intersectionality* (identity is constructed and performed within a matrix of dynamic, intersecting social identity

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markers),\textsuperscript{17} it is important to take account of the very particular ways in which oppressive body (stereo)types serve as identity straight-jackets. This entails rejection of essentializing tropes of identity—especially “victimhood” identity, as third-wave feminist scholars have long argued. Instead, we scrutinize “visibility”—being seen—along the intersecting “historical, geographical, cultural, [and] psychic” dimensions.\textsuperscript{18} Visibility often functions as a source of de-authorization. One must look the part, and it is a white-water rafting adventure to figure out which part is desired at which moment. Desperate attempts could result in “cultural impersonation,” or the mimicry of projected identity (stereo)types in order to fit in or blend in at all cost.\textsuperscript{19}

Here lies a Catch-22: is it better to be invisible? That is a converse dilemma for the teaching body. It is the problem of the second “V”—VULNERABILITY.

Whether visible or invisible, the marked teaching body is vulnerable when it comes to various levels of performance evaluations. The cooperative of women faculty of color in the aforementioned anthology reports higher external and self-imposed expectations when it comes to identity and performance evaluations. Entrenched within the institution of academic disciplines are implicit, covert standards by which scholars are assessed, and according to which vulnerable teachers may be found wanting. As the evaluative criteria for the “holy trinity” of the academia (research, teaching, and service) constantly shift, our approval ratings wax and wane based on what is deemed “valuable” at various moments.

This vulnerability of having to “write [oneself]” into the mainstream of one’s discipline and guild is portrayed with analytic lyricism in the ground-breaking anthology for anthropology and ethnography, \textit{Women Writing Culture}, edited by Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon. Reflecting on the quest for legitimacy among distinguished \textit{men} who deem their work lacking of disciplinary rigor and innovation, these women writers must reckon with the fact that the competition for legitimacy requires them to write each other \textit{off}, even as they endeavor to reclaim the trail-blazing paths of the “foremothers” of their field.\textsuperscript{20} It is akin some variation of contemporary television reality shows, in which one calculates and connives one’s way toward the winner circle. Space is limited, after all. There is usually only room for one or two.

\textsuperscript{17} See Harding, “Gendered Ways of Knowing and the ‘Epistemological Crisis’ of the West.”
\textsuperscript{18} Mohanty, 106.
\textsuperscript{19} Mohanty, 102. Floyd-Thomas and Floyd-Thomas, “Emancipatory Historiography as Pedagogical Praxis,” 127. The “superwoman-villain dichotomy” is attributed to womanist scholar Katie G. Cannon.
\textsuperscript{20} Behar & Gordon, 11.
The minoritized scholar bears the weight of representation in what Willie James Jennings calls an “economy of display”:21 they must prove that their presence serves the discipline’s best interest; they must fight to make context-specific perspectives and concerns central rather than peripheral to the “mainstream” curriculum—and they must not offend in doing so; they must demonstrate credibility and integrity in their craft, all the while mastering the art of ventriloquism; in other words, they must be fluent with the dominant “discursive currency.”22

The paranoia over tokenism, “not living up to standard,” or impostership often results in self-censoring. Minority bodies suspected of having an “agenda” are subjected to surveillance and regulation.23 When there pervades within the cultural climate the bigotry of post-racial or post-feminist blindness, one often hears hammed-up cries of “reverse racism” or “reverse sexism”: “It sure is rotten to be a straight White male these days!” someone would declare. The racial-ethnic minority female teacher suddenly realizes the vulnerability of her teaching task: on the one hand, she desires to expose a variety of “invisible” privileges at work such a statement and worldview; on the other hand, she is aware of the potential risks of being dismissed wholesale for alleged political bias.

One could charge that majority academic institutions operate by the principle of unnatural selection. It is not so much “survival of the fittest,” because Darwinian natural selection assumes that species that can adapt to their immediate environment will survive. In this case, no matter how hard they try to “fit in,” some teaching bodies remain vulnerable to (r)ejections from their host environments. The viability of the teacher as “outsider within”24 is dependent upon their ability to cultivate coping mechanisms for both pluri-cultural and fringe existence.

This takes us to the third “V”—VIABILITY.

What would it take for the teacher to remain viable in a constant state of insecurity, isolation, or alienation? Minoritized teachers have called for a variety of “fringe” practices for institutional maneuvering, some of which will be highlighted later on.25 But meta-reflections by Willie James Jennings on the “architecture of intellectual desire” are evocative for our thinking about viability.

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22 Ibid., passim.
23 Foss-Snowden.
25 See Gatison, “Playing the Game.”
In a recent anthology edited by Eleazar Fernandez, titled *Teaching for a Culturally Diverse and Racially Just World*, Willie Jennings laments: “[a]t heart, we [ ‘otherly marked’ academic Subjects] are still confronted with living in a house we did not build.”26 Describing theological curricular design as analogous to “an architectural structuring of intellectual desire,” propelled by particularly configured white, male, heteronormative “historical inertia,” Jennings describes a “love/hate psychical condition”27 suffered by “otherly marked” academics who are acutely aware that they are “resident aliens” in an ivory tower not designed for them. Jennings puts it bluntly: women and racial/ethnic faculty of color live in a house/empire built by the Master28 for his sons, and we have been trained to employ—with skill and artistry—disciplinary tools created within historic moments in which we were never imagined as likely inheritors. More disconcerting is the reminder from scholars of fields such as the natural and social sciences that a number of academic disciplines, of which missiologists are contemporary borrowers, were “from their inception” used to master us—e.g., geology, tropical medicine, anthropology were born “in service of Europe’s colonial enterprise.”29 Following Jennings—speak, within this *habitus*, the academic navigates “conceptual fetishes” that undergird the “desired structures” of the discursive space, which in turn structure their very own intellectual desires.30 A viable teacher is one who is able to assess these embedded “logics of habitation,” and is able to re-create the space through their own realized imaginative *desire*, rather through inherited structured design.

We will think about what this means for teaching tactics later on. For now, all of this said, a generative question that has not been answered pertains to the bodies that enjoy the “mythical normal” status: What does it mean to take seriously that ideal “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure” teaching body? How must those bodies reckon with their intersectional privilege?

**REFLECTIVE MOMENT:**

Would you take 2 minutes to share brief thoughts with a neighbor on this?

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26 Jennings, “What Shall We Teach?,” 110.
27 Ibid., 111.
30 Jennings, “What Shall We Teach?”
What does it mean to take seriously the bodies *with* and *about* whom we teach?

We have asked what it means to take our teaching bodies seriously. Next comes the question, what does it mean to take the bodies that we teach seriously? What does it mean for “ex-centric,” “interdicted” bodies to *occupy* a central place in the canon of your field?

Here we go back to the issue of “canon wars” mentioned earlier. Here we probe more deeply what it means to correct the omissions of our academic “canons.” Contrary to many academics’ instincts, the solution to this curricular dilemma is *not* one of arithmetic. That is to say, you cannot solve this by doing addition—add to the great intellectual mansion an extra room here for this group, a room there for that group ... so that those who want “inclusion” can have their place around the center, too. I’ve also heard of yet another equally problematic solution: Just move out of the house! If the Master’s house is cramping your style, just move out. Build yourself another home; establish your own canon; write your own textbook!

While in some measure legitimately and strategically pragmatic, these solutions come with challenges. We can enumerate a few here:

First, the problem of “omission” is *not* a problem of those being omitted; rather, as was referenced earlier in Toni Morrison’s quotation, it is a problem of those who are fighting hard to maintain their intellectual center and mono-centrism. Thus, the question for the discipline of Christian mission studies is *not* what to do with those whom we’ve excluded, but rather what to do with those who continue to engage in exclusionary strategies. It is time to examine: how has your own work been impacted by this long-standing practice of omitting women’s contributions to the history of missions? How has the field been impacted by this insidious technology of exclusion?

Second, the problem of omission cannot be remedied by appendices. Additive inclusion operates on convenience, essentialism, and repressive tolerance. German philosopher Herbert Marcuse wrote an essay on the notion of “repressive tolerance” in 1965. In it, Marcuse argued that what masquerades as democratic tolerance of multiple views and contributions “always ends up legitimizing an unfair status quo.”31 Resting on the metanarratives of liberalism and democracy (the product of which includes meritocracy based on sex-blindness and color-blindness), repressive

31 Brookfield & Holst, 191.
tolerance assumes an already equalized playing field in the sharing and valuation of sources and traditions of ideas. In reality, due to pervasive ideological conditioning, minority/minoritized repertoires are typically considered “alternative” and therefore supplemental to dominant ones—overshadowed, co-opted, or exoticized, but not “normalized.”

The effect of placing heretofore excluded traditions next to the existing mainstream is that the “radical” qualities of the newly introduced ideas are inevitably “diluted.” They are subject to unfair, uneven comparisons. Learners are told that they have the so-called “freedom” to evaluate the relative worth of the newly introduced traditions however they may choose, when in fact, few learners are equipped for such comparison and contrast. We forget that the “mainstream” is able to remain dominant due to enduring undergirding “ideological conditioning.” Thus, without ideological “detoxification,” “[r]epressive tolerance ... neutralizes dissenting [or alternative] views ... while appearing to support them.”32

Third, if our desire is simply not only to expand the Master’s canon, but to dismantle the Master’s tools, as Audre Lorde once called for, then we must reckon with the fact that the Master’s tools have shape-shifting effect, as biblical scholar R.S. Sugirtharajah has warned. The Master may have once been the Bible-and-bullwhip-wielding master, or the missionary-explorer-translator-civilizer of foreign lands and cultures. However, in today’s transnational theological scene, the Master may very well be the globalized Market, with its lexicon of “success, expediency, performance, profit.”33 (In this market-driven force field, academic questions such as “who will read this material?” is code for “who will buy this?”) Perhaps another Master is the repressive tolerance of neoliberalism in academic discourse, which claims that statistical diversity is proof of equality of rights, power, and opportunity. Perhaps there are mini-Masters to be found in the methodological paucity and rigidity of our fields, or implicit tensions among disciplinary hierarchies, resulting in the siloed existence of hyper-specializations. Perhaps even the once-cutting-edge vocabulary of the discipline—such concepts as border-crossing, liminality, polycentrism, inter-contextuality, multilogicality, etc.—has become too comfortable and safe within the Master’s house. Like Elbaz-Luwisch’s metaphoric “body in the room,” we acknowledge these notions, and then move on with the familiar “conceptual fetishes” of our disciplines.

Finally, perhaps the most dangerous problem for benign inclusion is if our inclusive practices are deployed to prove our magnanimity as earnest scholars who lift up the voices of the “marginalized and oppressed.” Argentinian theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid cautioned scholars against the use of what she calls “body parts”—especially women’s body parts—as theological currency. Arguing that

32 Brookfield & Holst, 192-193.
Theological (and scholarly) praxis is political, economic, and sexual, Althaus-Reid insisted that theologizing about liberation/salvation only in terms of the spiritual or figurative “shackled self” without regard for the physically, sexually, and politically “shackled body” is to ignore la mala vida (“bad living”) of fleshly subjects—like the women lemon vendors of the streets of Buenos Aires, who may or may not follow dominant rules of decency. For scholars like Althaus-Reid, the sexualized body should serve as the locus of interpretation for theological discourse. However, we need to move beyond touristic or voyeuristic gazing, which “expropriate[s]” local knowledges and commodifies them as “intellectual property of the owner of the intellectual system of production, the [scholar-]theologian.” How do we ensure that the “marginalized and oppressed” not become a profit margin for missiological discourse?

Taking Althaus-Reid’s cues, the teacher of mission who attends to women’s bodies as “locus” of interpretation must not take their eyes off of the day-to-day conditions of women’s life, love, and labor, as inscribed by rules of (sexual and economic) decency, productivity, and marketability. They will realize that the study and teaching of mission is necessarily an interdisciplinary task. It might entail re-examination of “women’s work” alongside re-examination of what constitutes “mission.” It might entail a feminist, materialist approach to understanding women’s roles as “carriers” and “performers” of religion across cultures, spaces, and time. The list of themes and issues for analysis seems inexhaustible.

REFLECTIVE MOMENT:

Would you take 2 minutes to free-respond with a neighbor about possible themes, issues, and/or questions?

We have spent some time thinking about the two questions: How to take seriously our teaching bodies, and how to take the bodies that we teach (with and about) seriously? In typical pedagogic fashion, after you’ve wrestled with the “who” and the “what” (and “what for?”), you then consider the “how.” How shall we teach? I appreciate the question in your Call for Papers: “What changes in [our] own teaching or in an institution’s curriculum are necessary for promoting gender [and racial] equality in mission studies?”

34 Althaus-Reid, 21.
35 Ibid., 27.

*** In a follow-up conversation, Dana Robert offered an insightful comment about the prevalence of academic co-option of missiologists’ fieldwork. Missiology as a field is dismissed as hegemonic in some (typically liberal-leaning) academic circles; however, the raw data gathered from missiologists’ scholarly labor in the field continue to be utilized for abstract theological construction.
How shall we teach?

In a letter penned for North American educators, the late Brazilian education reformer Paulo Freire wrote: “[A] teacher must be fully cognizant of the political nature of his/her practice and assume responsibility for this rather than denying it.” Freire was not alone in articulating the political nature of teaching. It is at base persuasive, if not directive; to varying degrees, it is an intentional effort to exert influence upon knowledge (what we know), affect (what we value), behavior (how we act). As such, scholars of critical pedagogy push the recognition that “knowledge is power” toward closer scrutiny of how power is configured by the boundaries of knowledge systems, and how the boundary coordinates of such systems can be “remapped, reterritorialized, and decentered” for multiplied reference points in our “reading of the world.” This epistemological disposition of what many have labeled as “border pedagogy” assumes that learners are crossers of borders that are “historically constructed and socially organized within maps of rules and regulations that limit and enable particular identities, individual capacities, and social forms.” Teachers, therefore, are also border-crossers who might do well if they learn and apply certain practices which sociologist Aihwa Ong describes of the contemporary global “flexible citizen”: “transversal,” “transactional,” “translational,” and “transgressive” practices that are “incited, enabled, and regulated by the logics” of our academic disciplines. These alliterative abstractions can be broken down into a few components of “practical wisdom” for the teacher, following the cues of those who employ critical race theory (CRT) for education aimed at gender and racial EQUITY.

For educational theory and praxis, CRT informs the examination of deep structural roots of institutional policies and everyday practices which contribute to racialization—and for our purposes here, gender omission. CRT scrutinizes the function of power/differentials in race (and gender) relations, especially the power of White male privilege (“whitestream” and “menstream”). In principle, CRT posits three central tenets. First, it highlights counter-narratives of marginal, subordinated voices as a strategy to de-centralize and de-normalize dominant grand narratives. Second, it takes advantage of “interest convergence” as leverage for championing...
The majority would be more prone to accommodate minority interest if there is overlapping benefit. Third, it targets systemic, structural change (social justice), informed by inter-disciplinary and multi-issue analyses.  

Together, CRT’s tenets and Aihwa Ong’s “transversal,” “transactional,” “translational,” and “transgressive” techniques might provide some clues for how we may forge what I propose as a critical intersectional pedagogic stance for our study and teaching of mission.

**FIRST TENET:**

Following CRT’s first tenet, the teacher of mission may learn to become a “border-crosser” who wields the transgressive power of counter-stories that subtly offer “oppositional” definitions of reality. Some call this a “pedagogy of dissent.” This means we submit our own teaching bodies as “oppositional text,” just as we strive to interject otherly-marked interpreting bodies as counter-texts to the teaching canon.

Reckoning with their social location, minoritized teachers might open up to the possibility that their own “teaching body” may serve as a living enactment of transversed norms: a “non-standard” subject asserting credibility and authenticity in ways that are slightly slanted, off-kilter, zigzagging, but enough to render problematic so-called normative coordinates of identity. Meanwhile, mythically “normative” teaching bodies might query their own privileged locations, and ask, What difference would it make if my gender and race were to become the “explicit curriculum”—open and subject to analysis of their impact upon the disciplinary status quo? In these differing ways, the identity work of these teachers would serve as counter-normative “curriculum,” juxtaposed against the written curriculum of academic disciplines which are in themselves racialized and genderized texts.

Oppositional narratives need not be mild, as womanist scholars have long insisted. What Audre Lorde called symphonic anger, “loaded with information and energy,” may very well be the emotive response in the face of “exclusion . . . of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation.” Similarly, bell hooks found her confidence through risky “back talk,” or presumptive speaking as an equal to an authority figure. Preferred over silent protest (which are in themselves no less potent), and more directive than

40 Gillborn, “Critical Race Theory and Education,” 26-7; Zamudio, Critical Race Theory Matters, 16, 22-3; Museus, Conducting Research on Asian Americans, 59; Brookfield and Holst, Radicalizing Learning, 193. See also Delgado, Critical Race Theory.

41 Zamudio, Critical Race Theory Matters, 16.


44 Lorde, Sister Outsider, 124.
informal women speech, “sharp-tongued” talking back is, for hooks, “a gesture of defiance.”45 Taking a cue from this, perhaps teachers of mission could lift up the “great omissions” as “counterdiscourse,” and equip learners with strategies to “talk back” against the normative narratives of the tradition.46

THIRD TENET:

Constructing or resurrecting counter-narratives is not to be confused with the facile celebration of difference typically found in “repressive tolerance.”47 Therefore, following CRT’s third tenet (I am going out of order here), the teacher as border intellectual passes over banal tolerance in favor of educational practices that examine power and privilege in the macro-structures and micro-realities of their academic discipline.

Education theorists Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Holst suggest three concrete practices:

1. “ideological detoxification,” or deconstruction of implicit ideological values undergirding definitions of institutional “normal”;

2. intentional disruption of privilege of all forms (viz., racial, sexual, class, citizenship status), especially those enjoyed in daily routines and institutional configurations; and

3. deep, sustained immersion in “alternative conceptions of normality,” a pedagogy of contrast which seeks opportunities for serious confrontation with difference rather than dismissing it as inessential.48

This last practice suggests epistemological re-wiring—something akin to moving from a conception of “Christian mission around the world” to “engendering mission in global Christianities” (the plural form being argued for by Peter Phan). This alternative conception of “normality” requires sustained inquiry and a shift of what education theorist Jack Mezirow calls “meaning-perspective” (worldview).

SECOND TENET:

CRT’s 2nd tenet regarding “interest convergence” is perhaps most elusive for minoritized teachers, for they must seek ways to translate their talents and interests to academic cultures “incited and regulated” by fluctuating bottom-lines. In this act of negotiation, the teacher as “flexible citizen” knows that minority interests are more

46 Mohanty, Feminism without Borders, chapter 8.
47 Brookfield and Holst, Radicalizing Learning, 190-7. The notion of “repressive tolerance” is attributed to the work of philosopher Herbert Marcuse.
48 Brookfield and Holst, 201-9.
readily considered if and when they align with dominant interests. Put differently, majority-serving educational, pedagogical, and curricular norms are unlikely to change as long as they continue to serve majority students (and teachers) who happen to be predominant and by all standards excelling.49 Thus, viability (survival) depends on vigilance with useful cues for continuous translational work. It also relies on forms of “horizontal comradeship”50 forged out of affinities or strategic alliances. More directly, we could ask, What kinds of ally-ship may be forged among teachers of mission to alter the vision, so that the problem of “gender” is not just a “woman’s issue”; and the problem of “race” is not one with which only scholars of color must address?

Reflective Moment: (Quick Minute)

What think you about these pedagogic strategies?

Conclusion

In the late 1990s, feminist theorist Zillah Eisenstein wrote:

Women’s and girls’ bodies determine democracy: free from violence and sexual abuse, free from malnutrition and environmental degradation, free to plan their families, free to not have families, free to choose their sexual lives and preferences.51

More recently, postcolonial feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty recasts the ideological conviction through the following question:

What are the concrete effects of global restructuring on the ‘real’ raced, classed, national, sexual bodies of women in the academy, in workplaces, streets, households, cyberspaces, neighborhoods, prisons, and in social [and religious] movements?52

There is a version of that question for the field of Christian mission studies. This inductive, bottom-up hermeneutic avoids sterilized explorations of the “other” and their experience, and shifts the locus of our description and interpretation of “Christian mission” to lived practices and struggles in particular, intersectional spaces of everyday life. It is what postcolonial biblical scholar Sugirtharajah calls a “praxiological deconstruction”—an unlearning of dominant ideological settings of

49 Zamudio, 47-8.
50 Mohanty, 46. Citing Anderson, Imagined Communities, 11-6.
52 Feminism Without Borders, 245.
“Christian praxis” in local and global communities, so that we can be “converted” to “the other” in new ways. It is dissatisfied with benign toleration of so-called “emerging new perspectives,” and interrogates the persistent disciplinary inertia and intransigence. It pushes the limits of our pedagogic imagination, such that we might entertain the question, what happens if we were to dismantle the “mission field” as we have learned to know it? What happens if the disciplinary world as we have always known it...would actually come to an end?

After all, are these not questions of “salvation”—one of the original driving forces of the study of mission? I submit that if we truly desire to seek and teach mission differently in the 21st century, then we start there.
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