

Feminist Anthropology and Critical Pedagogy: The Anthropology of Classrooms' Excluded Voices¹

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Critical pedagogy challenges the exclusionary practices of racism, sexism, ableism, and heterosexism in the dominant society. The exponents of critical pedagogy have rejected the traditional view of classroom instruction in favour of approaches that challenge the status quo. In this paper, by reviewing some of my teaching experiences as a woman of colour, I demonstrate that not all teachers teach pedagogy in the same way. Based on my observations, I argue that debates on critical pedagogy should include voices from outside the dominant social groups and ethnicities, be they teachers' or students' voices. Furthermore, the success of teaching for social change depends on our ability to incorporate these critical approaches in conventional courses and subject matters where, in my experience, not all students would welcome unconventional classroom relations.

La pédagogie critique conteste les pratiques d'exclusion que sont, dans les groupes sociaux dominants, le racisme, le sexisme, l'hétérosexisme et la discrimination fondée sur les déficiences. Les chefs de file de la pédagogie critique rejettent l'enseignement traditionnel au profit d'approches qui mettent en question le statu quo. Dans cet article, l'auteure démontre, tout en analysant certaines de ses expériences pédagogiques en tant que Noire, que tous les enseignants n'enseignent pas la pédagogie de la même manière. Se fondant sur ses observations, l'auteure soutient que les débats sur la pédagogie critique devraient inclure des points de vue provenant d'ethnies ou de groupes sociaux non dominants, qu'il s'agisse des points de vue des enseignants ou des élèves. Le succès de la pédagogie eu égard aux changements sociaux dépend de notre aptitude à incorporer ces approches critiques dans les matières et les cours traditionnels où, d'après l'expérience de l'auteure, tous les élèves ne sont pas disposés à accueillir favorablement des méthodes d'enseignement non traditionnelles.

Critical pedagogy challenges the exclusionary practices of racism, sexism, ableism, and heterosexism in dominant society.² Although exponents of critical pedagogy, therefore, begin theoretically with a recognition that subject position matters, this attention to race, sex, gender, and sexuality has not carried over into the practice of critical pedagogy. By critical pedagogy, I refer to rejecting the traditional view that classroom instruction is an objective process removed from the crossroads of power, history, and social context, while attempting to encourage more critical teaching and learning methods. The techniques used to challenge the status quo are not themselves

appreciated as gendered and racialized. Put simply, what works for a white female teacher may not work for a black female teacher, regardless of a shared commitment to be critical.

During the last two decades, teachers of different feminist perspectives have tried to adapt their critical approaches to conventional scholarship by addressing the way the dominant culture, through its universalistic views, creates and perpetuates social inequality. The goal is to encourage students to develop a critical and analytical approach to the social systems of which they are a part.

This currently evolving synthesis has been painfully difficult. If we begin with the early feminists' attempts to add women (read white middle class women) to the universalist view of the dominant cultures of North America and Western Europe, perhaps the most significant and painful break-through has been to overcome the blockade of "sisterhood is universal" which in effect had authorized the more privileged women to talk for all other women (bell hooks, 1988; Lazreg, 1988; Mohanty, 1991; Spelman, 1988). Thereafter, feminist scholarship(s) slowly moved on not only to recognize the social and cultural differences among women but to hear and to recognize, though reluctantly, the other voices of feminism(s). We can now link oppression of women to other forms of oppression, thus making feminists' concerns and the agenda for social change broader than sexism.³

Critical/feminist pedagogy has been advocated essentially as teaching to influence and to subvert the social system. However, the incorporation of critical pedagogy in the classroom has proved more problematic and challenging than simply including more diverse and critical material in the curriculum. There is a tacit agreement that a central objective of critical pedagogy is to encourage students to develop their ability to analyze and assess critically the social structure (Cannon, 1990; de Danaan, 1990; de Lauretis, 1986; Nelson, 1986; Weiler, 1988). Students should be assisted to locate themselves, as well as others, in the social system so as to assess the way they and others have been shaped by and in turn shape their social environments, albeit to various degrees and in different directions depending on their social positions (Razack, 1990). One of a teacher's important roles, therefore, is to facilitate students' connection of their daily and life experiences to the critical literature, much of which is written in highly abstract language.

Giving voice to students' life experiences and contextualizing these experiences in the social system have become the major strategy for encouraging critical analysis of the socio-economic environment (Frankenberg & Martens, 1985). A first step, however, is for teachers to locate themselves in the structure of the society and the classroom. They can then initiate a discussion of difference. Taking advantage of teachers' privileged position in the classroom, they can help students recognize that their interactions with one another and with their teachers are structured by the inequality of power between them.

Teachers must, however, sensitively guide this sharing of experiences and class discussion to prevent it from becoming a matter of naming, blaming, or creating guilt on the part of some. In some instances it may be helpful, as Cannon (1990) and Ellsworth (1989) have suggested, to lay ground rules that could be recalled and discussed when needed. This would empower students, particularly the less-privileged, by providing boundaries within which to assess critically the classroom dynamics, the course materials, and the social structure. On the other hand, ground rules promote privileged members' consciousness of how they, by virtue of their social position, may participate in the oppression of others (Frankenberg, 1990).

Ellsworth (1989) has refined the debate further by pointing out that a peril of critical teaching lies in its underlying assumption that the experiences and knowledge of different social groups *can* be captured, defined, understood, and shared by others, thereby overlooking the gap between living an experience and learning about it. Based on her teaching experience, she argues that the way to influence social change is not only to recognize in the classroom the presence of a multiplicity of knowledges, resulting from the way difference has been used to structure social relations inside and outside of the classroom, but also to acknowledge that these subjectivities are contradictory, partial, and irreducible to a single master discourse, even that of critical pedagogy (p. 321). The more constructive approach would be to recognize the differences and to acknowledge that our experience of others will always be partial. Any alliances for change would have to be created on the understanding of working across differences.

Razack (1990) suggests a more complex mapping of differences. She points out that individuals have multiple identities, one or more of which may be played out at any one time in any one context. She suggests we should pay more attention to and reflect critically on

how we hear, how we speak, to the choices we make about which voices to use, when and most important of all developing pedagogical practices that enable us to pose those questions and use the various answers to guide ethical choices we are constantly being called upon to make. (p. 23)

She shows that attending to oppression and discrimination often has meant less attention paid to the meaning of privilege, particularly in relation to our various subject positions. Such emphasis makes it possible to reflect not only on the way one is oppressed as a woman, black, native, minority, or member of the working or middle class, and so on, but also on how we participate in the oppression of others. This contributes to "unlearning privilege" and to developing the ability to listen and to speak to other constituencies more effectively, which in turn makes working across differences more feasible.

Minority teachers illustrate the complexities of subject position in the classroom. Exponents of feminist pedagogy have for some time been concerned about the power and authority of teachers in the classroom

(Briskin, 1990; Bunch & Pollack, 1983; Delpit, 1988). The debates, however, have been primarily framed from the point of view of white female teachers. A female teacher who is also a member of a visible minority cannot lay claim to the authority of the teacher in the same way that a white female might or that white males usually do. Moreover, what little discussion has taken place on the issue of minority authority in the classroom has been about courses that explicitly deal with anti-racist themes. Such courses may attract students already predisposed to critical thinking.⁴

However, the key to influencing social change lies in our ability to incorporate the critical/feminist pedagogy in more conventional courses. We must prepare to map the complex relationships within the triangle of subject matter, teacher, and student. To demonstrate the possibilities and challenges of developing such a mapping, I shall explore some of my own experiences (both successes and failures), emphasizing the complexities arising from the conjunction of my minority status and femaleness with the discipline of anthropology and with students who are predominantly white.

THE CONTEXT OF MY TEACHING

In keeping with anthropological traditions I here provide information about myself (as the principal informant) and my teaching context. I am an Iranian social anthropologist educated in Iran and Britain and living and working in Montreal since 1989. In addition to my research I have been teaching several undergraduate courses at both McGill and Concordia universities since January 1989.

Both universities are cosmopolitan, serving students from diverse and often visible minority groups. A relatively large number of McGill applicants are graduates with high marks from colleges and schools in Quebec and other provinces. McGill undergraduates are full-time students and many can rely totally or partially on their parents' financial support, which means they have considerable time to study. McGill does not offer evening courses and it is not enthusiastic about accepting part-time undergraduate students. In contrast, Concordia prides itself on offering educational opportunity to the working population, developing a reputation as a non-elitist university. It strives to offer flexible timetables, and almost all courses are offered both in the day and evening. On average undergraduates at Concordia are older than McGill, many are registered part-time, and a large number have full-time jobs.

I taught "Women in Socio-Political Movements in the Third World," as an introductory women's studies course; "Femaleness, Maleness, and Otherness in Cross-Cultural Perspective" as a second-year anthropology/women's studies course; "People and Cultures of the Middle East"; and the introductory anthropology courses "Cultures of the World" and "Comparative Cultures." Presently I teach "Making and Unmaking Anthropological Theories," "Anthropology and Contemporary Issues," and "Maleness, Femaleness, and

Otherness in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” and I am testing some of the approaches discussed in this paper.

Historically, “participant observation” has been the major anthropological methodology. It entails that anthropologists learn the languages of and live in the communities they study. Ideally they are to advance an understanding of the culture and worldview from within that particular culture and community. Anthropology, influenced by postmodernist theories, is undergoing an appraisal from within (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Marcus & Fischer, 1986), with debates on the failure of anthropologists to acknowledge the way their cultural values and intellectual interests have influenced the kind of data collected (Crapanzano, 1986), and other failures to pay enough attention to the differential power relation between them and their informants (Asad, 1986; Rosaldo, 1986). Methodologically, this paper is reflexive anthropology of my own teaching with me as participant, observer, and reporter.

TEACHING ANTHROPOLOGY

As an anthropologist, I am well aware of the way a discipline may influence, construct, or confirm social inequalities. Anthropology has grown out of the geo-politics of colonial domination, in particular British imperialism. The fascination with non-Western cultures was political in seeking often to subordinate or to devalue other societies, and to justify subhuman treatments meted out by the colonizer (Asad, 1973; Howard, 1983; Kabbani, 1986; Said, 1978). Simultaneously, Western preoccupation with these societies resulted from a prior concern with understanding the origins of Western man. Therefore, uncritically, Western cultures and worldviews formed a yardstick for assessing or, as is often claimed, translating non-European cultures for the European and the dominant North American cultures (Fabian, 1983). Anthropologists attempted to reconstruct the distant past of Western Europe through an understanding of so-called “primitive,” preliterate cultures. That is to say, they viewed these societies as the living dead—a convenient perspective for the ideology and material practices of imperialism. The central question for Western anthropologists was neither how the other societies were organized nor whether everybody was “like us.” Rather, the focus was on phenomenological differences, seen as subordinate even if at times exotic (Asad, 1973; Said, 1978).

Despite much criticism of anthropology from within (see for instance Gough, 1968; Magubane, 1971), few practitioners tried to “decontaminate” concepts and perspectives from the ideology of imperialism in mainstream (read “respectable” and “scientific”) anthropological writings.⁵ The infiltration of postmodernism and reflexive anthropology opened up new possibilities (Marcus & Fischer, 1986).⁶

The history of feminist anthropology during the last two decades provides a good example of anthropology’s failure to transform itself into a science

that studies other societies “from within.” Feminist anthropologists have had considerable success in reinstating women in anthropological perspectives by developing a critique of the male biases that had led to exclusion and silencing of women.⁷ However, they failed to extend their criticism to other forms of exclusion, largely through neglecting to examine their own privileged position as members of the Western societies (Amos & Parmar 1984; Lazreg, 1988; Mohanty, 1991). Anthropology has still to come to terms with the racism inherent in its development as a discipline. Emphasis of the much softer term “ethnocentrism” has blocked development of analytical tools for the examination of power relations between anthropologists and their objects of study, the “other people.”

Feminist anthropologists have criticized the way male biases have made women marginal despite their strong presence in the anthropological literature, which historically evolved around kinship systems as form of social organization (Moore, 1988). But in the eyes of the Third World, feminist anthropologists have been guilty of the same crime as conventional anthropologists. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s they typically studied and documented women’s lives in the Third World to understand and to improve their own position in their own societies (see, for instance, the popular edited collections *Women, Culture and Society* [Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974] and *Toward an Anthropology of Women* [Reiter, 1975]). The women of the Third World once again were the objects of study by the First World for its own ends (Lazreg, 1988; Mohanty, 1991). In striving for their own political objectives, Western feminist anthropologists frequently assumed that any apparent asymmetry in male-female roles in a society necessarily meant inequality (Dubisch, 1986; S.C. Rogers, 1975, 1978). They studied non-Western women as women and not as social agents in the context of their own societies. They contributed to modernization of stereotypes of women in “primitive” and “uncivilized” cultures by presenting them as passive victims of barbaric males.⁸

Given its history, I had assumed that anthropology, with its blatant short-comings, would provide an excellent example for students to see how the pervasive ideology of a society influences creation of “knowledge,” which in turns reproduces existing power relations.⁹ However, my presence as a teacher of anthropology seemed to many students to contradict criticisms of the discipline. They raised such questions as, “If anthropology was a colonial discipline, how would I [a Third world woman] explain my position within it?” or “Do you think that if Third World people were to conduct an anthropology of their own society they would do a better job of it?” I came to realize they were troubled less by the substance of criticisms of the discipline of anthropology than by me—a non-western female—being their professor.¹⁰

On the other hand, some students took the criticisms seriously, concluding that the task of decontaminating anthropology was impossible and the discipline therefore not worth studying. Both kinds of response are unsettl-

ing to me as an anthropology teacher. Despite the criticisms, I foresee potentially great contributions from a reborn anthropology in the construction of a new and more inclusive world vision in both the Third and First worlds. At least two major trends may cause the rebirth of anthropology. First, a considerable number of non-Western anthropologists, with their own national and cultural concerns, are joining the discipline. Their diverse outlooks will necessarily influence the reorientation and thereby lay the ground for development of anthropology as a cross-cultural discipline (Asad, 1986; Gerholm & Hannerz, 1982; Marcus, 1986). Second, recent debates among anthropologists have led to a much more thorough re-examination of all the theories, practices, and writings of anthropology, at least theoretically paving the way for the evolution of a new and more incorporative anthropology suitable for the emerging postmodern world (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). However, when it comes to my teaching, I have not always succeeded in devising an appropriate set of strategies for a critical but constructive approach to my discipline. When I look in the literature, particularly for practical advice on critical pedagogy, I find little that is helpful.

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

My teaching experience does not support the implicit assumption in much current critical pedagogy literature that students are necessarily willing agents who welcome unconventional classroom interactions and a critical approach to the social structure. Developing such an approach demands of students more than commitment. It often entails unlearning the learning methodology they have relied on throughout their schooling. For instance, to learn to question material, particularly that written by famous and well-established academics, is unsettling for many undergraduate students, whose schooling has been oriented to texts and teachers as the repositories of knowledge. The situation is complicated by the fact that not all university instructors expect students to develop a new approach to studying. Students may even at times be reprimanded for any such audacity.¹¹ One student once complained that he was discouraged because in my classes he always left with more questions than answers; he claimed many other students felt the same way. Students who have to deal with uncertainty in many aspects of their personal life often resent unsettling classroom relations.

Another student objected to an assignment by asking how I could expect him to write a critique of Geertz's work (despite having discussed it in class) when he was only an undergraduate and Geertz was anthropology personified. He thought he was not in position to question Geertz and would rather simply write a report on his work. After years of formal and informal education most students learn to accept and respect authority, including that of well-established academicians, despite the conventional wisdom that freedom of thought is to be encouraged. Non-conformity is not always easy. One might wonder whether we have much ground to assume that students

will be enthusiastic about courses that question the answers they have either internalized or left unexamined.

Studying critically demands more time. One of my mature students complained that I was demanding too much of their free time not because I had asked them to read more than other instructors, but because they were required to question every paragraph, think of its implication for the wider society, draw parallels with other cultures, and so on. He said he was just a student, who, on top of his family responsibilities, wanted to graduate and perhaps to find a better job, and that he did not want to change the society nor did he believe such efforts could change the world.

Similar exchanges with others confirmed at least some of the reasons I experienced more resistance from students at Concordia than at McGill. As indicated earlier, students at Concordia are often self-financed and many have family responsibilities; thus they have little time to explore alternative learning methods regardless of their talent. In contrast, a bigger percentage of McGill students are young, are full-time students, and are financially supported by their parents. Moreover, they also may have had a stronger pre-university education, which makes experimenting with different methods of learning less threatening.

TEACHING AS A POSITION OF AUTHORITY

Scholars of critical pedagogy have not questioned in their debates the power and authority of minority teachers. Even feminists have tended to examine the issue mainly from the gender point of view, omitting race and class. Such exclusion in debates that challenge exclusionary practices is only one indicator of the difficulty and complexity of the battle that exponents of critical pedagogy have taken up.

Much of the literature is written as though teachers engaging in critical pedagogy are middle-class whites or, occasionally, from successful minorities in Western societies. As a “token” outgroup teacher, I face different reactions than do most mainstream teachers.¹² The legitimacy of my occupying the powerful position of teacher in a classroom is, at best, shaky. As a rule, most minority teachers, particularly those in the early stages of their career, have to invest much energy in establishing themselves as *bona fide* teachers both in the eyes of their students and in the eyes of colleagues (Bannerji, 1991; Ng, 1991).

The problems of a visible minority teacher can be highlighted by several of my own classroom experiences. On the first day of teaching an introductory women’s studies course (January 1989, at Concordia) entitled “Women in Socio-Political Movements in the Third World,” I introduced myself by giving some information about me and my research areas. The first question I was asked was not on the course content or even Iranian politics but whether many Iranian women had doctorates. I answered by asking “Do a lot of Canadian women have doctorates?” Then, seizing the opportunity, I

continued to discuss the fact that in many societies, whether Canadian, Iranian, or British, women have been discriminated against, and drew the students' attention to some of their reading materials. I then turned their attention to the fact that Iranian women, like women in other societies, are not a single entity but constitute different classes, ethnic groups, and so on. I pointed out the peril of lumping women of other societies or social groups together and stereotyping them. However, students' next comments were "But you could not have obtained your doctorate if you had remained in Iran" and "The West has given you that opportunity," which indicated I had failed abysmally to communicate my points.

Many times, both in the classroom and outside it, students asked me to define myself more clearly. Once an organized group of my anthropology students at McGill asked me "How could you in one single lecture say 'we in the West,' as if you are a member of this society, then speak of 'we Muslims,' and later 'we in Iran,' and so on?" My answer was that I, like them, have several subject positions and identities that, naturally, I call upon as I see fit to communicate my point at any one time. I reminded them that this is not any different from the way they may refer to themselves at various times as a student, as men or women, as Canadian, or as white, black, and so forth. Their reply, that "that's different," indicates that such an explanation is less than satisfactory, particularly for my white "mainstream" students. On the one hand, I feel I should congratulate myself for bringing these issues to the attention of my first-year students to the extent that they want to discuss them. On the other hand, I can't fail to see that they have trouble coping with my multiple identities because to them these are contradictory while their own multiple roles are not. How could I be an Iranian woman, a Muslim, and a professor at the same time?

Other groups of students frequently ask me why I insist on identifying myself as a member of a visible minority, a Muslim woman, an Iranian, when clearly I can be a professor like others. These questions echo comments from colleagues and friends who in different ways claim that I "can pass" or that I "am not so dark" or that I "look European." In other words, many would gladly accept me as mainstream, even forgive my foreign accent, as long as I do not insist on reminding them that I carry a cultural heritage and life experience different from their own. I often wonder whether for them the crux of the matter is that my multiple identities, unlike theirs, seem incompatible and my calling on my other identities challenges their stereotype of who should be an immigrant and who should occupy the position of teacher and colleague.¹³

My authority and knowledge is easily questioned, particularly if I deviate from conventional norms or if I criticize an anthropological or feminist approach to so-called Third World women. My acknowledging the inequalities in power relations between students and teachers is seen not as an attempt to point out institutionalized inequalities but as my not being confident as a teacher or as compensation for my lack of knowledge. In

making room for dialogue, I am seen not as a liberal teacher experimenting with or advocating a different pedagogy, but as someone lacking experience in controlling a class, or, worse yet, as someone too lazy to deliver more conventional lectures. The risks of practising critical pedagogy are clearly not the same for everyone.¹⁴

Dealing with politicized students and in courses more overtly political may cause even more serious problems for a visible minority teacher. I found it ironic that students of women's studies, a discipline founded on a critical approach to conventional scholarship, should be so resistant to raising questions about feminist scholarship.¹⁵ For instance, in the course on "Women in Socio-Political Movements in the Third World," a discussion of why the notion of "sisterhood is universal" was rejected by "Third World" as well by marginalized women in the Western world and why it has been criticized as an imperialist idea was interpreted by some women activists as an indication of *my* "incorrect" feminism. My criticism of the conventional feminist approach to Third World women, particularly Muslims, was openly challenged as being a cover-up for the injustices of Islam, though no student had studied Islam or Muslim societies before taking my course. Not only did my being a Third World woman not help me in teaching the subject, it invariably became a barrier to getting students to focus on the debates. Clearly, a subtle but overt racism interfered with my authority as a teacher. One must ask, therefore, why a discussion of these fundamental elements of critical/feminist pedagogy has been avoided.

These student reactions occurred despite extensive lectures on and class discussions of the necessity of contextualizing each case and avoiding broad generalizations concerning the popular but general category, Muslim women. I argued this label was no more useful in understanding women of a specific society than the category "Christian women." These reactions recurred despite my allocating an important part of the course to exercises in deconstructing reading material and data and placing both the writers and the objects of their writings in their historical contexts. Furthermore, I had made it a rule for myself always to mention, where applicable, the positive impact of the West, even as colonial powers, on the economy and cultural change in societies we studied. This was an attempt to distance myself from those who have been trapped in total rejection of the West and what the West has to offer other societies. Moreover, I calculated that this strategy would pave the way for healthy and constructive interaction between the visible minority students and others. I had also hoped in this way to enhance my credibility as a reasonably "impartial" scholar in the eyes of my First World students. Nevertheless, tension remained high, and many of the students' questions and class interventions were designed to discredit me rather than to further an analysis of the relationship between oppression of "First World" women and women of the "Third World."

The resistance of my feminist activist students very closely resembled the experience of a group of feminist professors at the University of Arizona

who, to encourage and facilitate inclusion of a feminist framework in mainstream courses and scholarship, ran a series of cross-disciplinary seminars and workshops for male faculty. They found that many male (mostly tenured and senior) faculty members were resistant to crediting feminist scholarship or to seeing either women or themselves from a woman's perspective (Aiken, Anderson, Dinnerstein, Lensink, & MacCorquodale, 1987). Resistance came in a variety of guises: often male faculty were selective about what they heard; feminist scholarship was labelled as ideologically-motivated; male faculty failed to explore the ideological implications of traditional epistemology of the conventional discourse. Similarly, my white, committed feminist students were unable either to comprehend Third World women's perspectives or to see themselves critically.

I had speculated that this resistance was due to the fact that many students in my class were activists and that some were also engaged in or intended to engage in, research on Third World women, and considered taking my course a step toward their goal. In effect, I had undermined their commitment to the notion of universal "sisterhood" and, in fact, had raised questions about their motives. These discussions and the teaching of critical thinking did not empower these students; but questioning their commitment to the women's struggle did augment their self-righteousness. I had forced them to see how their position as white women had given them the power to decide unilaterally *not just* to choose Third world women as the objects of their research and work, but also to assume that their work would contribute positively to the lives of Third World women.

By the middle of the term, however, I realized that my understanding of the situation had been at best only partial. I invited a white female colleague to give a guest lecture on women in Uganda.¹⁶ In her talk she discussed some of the same issues and criticized the conventional feminists who, in dealing with women of the Third World, often fail to listen to them and, in a variety of ways, impose their own vision on the Third World. To my surprise, much of the tension in the class had evaporated by the following session. The few students who had tried to sabotage the class were isolated, and for the rest of the term we had constructive discussions. Over the next few sessions many students drew parallels between the points I was making in my lectures and what my colleague had said in her talk to the class, as though to legitimize my points of view. I could not help but suspect strongly that the discussion by my colleague, who was a white woman with very acceptable scholarly credentials, had legitimized my position in the class. If this is a correct assessment (and I believe it is) it indicates that my being of a racial and cultural minority has compromised my authority in the classroom despite my occupying the position of a teacher.

On the positive side, I should acknowledge that I spend much less energy than many of my colleagues in devising special rules or methods for encouraging visible minority students to participate in class discussion. Some students have approached me to say that after so many years of being silent

in school and in university they have, for the first time, participated in classroom discussion and expressed their views. One veiled Muslim woman came to see me after class just to say that she and her friends, who had taken various courses with me, thought it refreshing and reassuring that I had managed to retain so much of my cultural identity without having to deny the influence of the West and Western scholarship on the construction of who I am. At such times I feel rewarded and privileged. These comments remind me of the potential contribution of critical pedagogy in encouraging our society not just to tolerate differences as exceptions to the norm, but also to see them as equally valid and integral features of the collective. To minority students, however, I represent more than just potential change in the society: every time I assert my identity as a Muslim woman, an Iranian woman, an immigrant, I also communicate to them that the change is happening and is real, small though it may be. It is this communication that encourages them to break their silence. But I cannot ignore that the majority of my students are white and middle class. Reaching out to them will give me the feeling of being a successful practitioner of critical pedagogy.

I sometimes wonder whether there would be greater engagement with the themes of imperialism, alternative feminisms, and other critical issues if I did not embody them. Some minority teachers have speculated that anti-racist teaching may be more effective when whites teach whites.¹⁷ I wonder whether for the sake of more efficient teaching I should seek affirmation through the direct and indirect intervention of my white colleagues. On the other hand, I ask myself how I can empower my less privileged students if I, in the position of teacher with all the right credentials, were to fail to face up to the challenges of classroom interactions, let alone of society at large. How could I be expected to contribute to the development of critical pedagogy if the price I have to pay is the denial of my own identities? I wonder if my contribution to the development of critical pedagogy should be limited to my insistence on being recognized as who I am by incorporating my life experiences as a minority in the classroom interactions.

Ironically, in experimenting with different strategies I observed that students responded more positively to “critical thinking” when I distanced myself from them, even beyond providing “teaching leadership” (Briskin, 1990; Shrewsbury, 1987) and acting the more powerful and knowledgeable teacher, delivering lectures, and answering questions.¹⁸ I incorporate minorities’ life experiences and worldviews, including my own, in my lectures, not as a subject whose validity is open to question but as a statement of a reality they should know. By monopolizing the conventional language and authority of a teacher, I implicitly make it difficult for students to negate these experiences. Instead I encourage them to ask questions to clarify the issues involved. What I have found useful was to provide students with questions and essay topics that would stimulate critical thinking. For instance, in my anthropology classes, students routinely have to imagine they are an anthropologist from the society we had studied in the class and write an anthropo-

logical piece on an assigned topic concerning Canadian society from the point of view and for the consumption of their imagined society. Although some students resist, others go as far as enjoying the exercise in being ethnocentric from the point of view of an outsider. This then often gives me a chance to point out pitfalls of the ethnocentrism, racism, and self-righteousness of one culture in facing others.

Despite my success with this strategy, I wonder to what extent I can call this method of teaching "critical pedagogy," since my success stems in part from asserting my authority as teacher. The critical or even feminist pedagogy literature offers me little guidance. Clearly, visible minority teachers face questions and dilemmas fundamentally different from those white teachers face.

There are further issues one should not overlook. To practise what I preach, I, too, place myself objectively in the social structure of my environment. Thus I am conscious that I, like most other minority teachers at the early stages of their career, am even less secure than junior white male or female teachers. I should not talk too loudly about the problems I have in the classroom lest they be used against me; this is the cautious warning I frequently hear from my minority colleagues and friends, whether they be accountants, economists, sociologists, linguists, or chemists. These warnings further confirm my feeling that what I face is more common than the literature indicates or than other minority teachers are prepared to admit publicly.¹⁹

Visible minority teachers' choice of silence is the outcome of their lack of trust in the system and in the support of their colleagues. I do not have statistics for universities, but a study in Toronto indicates that 50% of human rights complaints by non-whites about whites in the workplace resulted in the non-whites being disciplined (Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, 1989). There is no reason as yet to assume that educational establishments are not generally quite prepared to view complaints from students as a sign of short-comings on the part of minority teachers.

Moreover, as a token teacher I fail to be regarded as an individual either in my own or other ethnic communities. I am but a representative of a variety of other social groups and therefore my failure is viewed not just as mine but theirs too. For instance, when I participate in Iranian community events I am often introduced to the younger generations as a person who should be their role model. Others say how proud they are that people like me will prove to "Canadians" that Iranian women are not all bundled up in the black veil at the mercy of their husbands. I can provide many more examples of the kind of pressure that I and my other minority colleagues face. By engaging in critical pedagogy, minority teachers confront a situation and take risks fundamentally different from those of mainstream teachers.

The success of teaching for change depends on our ability to develop a holistic and fluid pedagogy that can accommodate the dynamic interaction

of a complex matrix of students, teachers, and subject matters, a matrix with a built-in ability to allow the less central voices, whether of teachers or students, to be heard and incorporated in the collective without being forced to assimilate. Minority teachers cannot be expected to participate in developing feminist/critical pedagogy if their experiences are marginalized by the very movements that work to do away with the margins. For my part, I would like to see a much more pronounced recognition that not all teachers nor all students react similarly to critical pedagogy. Lectures, for example, are more effective than shared dialogue in some instances. They provide me the distance that I and my students seem to need to practice critical thinking, if not critical teaching.

NOTES

- ¹ I am indebted to Sherene Razack for incisive comments and wish also to thank the anonymous referees, Vandra Masemann, Sandra Kirby, Linda Briskin, Rebecca Coulter, Martha Saunders, Patricia Lynn Kelly, and Anthony Hilton.
- ² Critical pedagogy is neither new nor a coherent body of theory. There are well-documented debates by the Workers Education Council of Britain and other European countries on the necessity of incorporating workers' world-views and experiences in teaching materials and methods (Johnson, 1988; Mendell, 1990; Polanyi, 1944). The more current debate is advanced by Henry Giroux, Roger Simon, Pamela Fishman, and Peter McLaren, to name a few.
- ³ In practice, as the theme of this paper suggests, such a broadening of the feminist agenda has remained limited.
- ⁴ One important exception is the work of Patricia Williams (1991), who has written (as a black woman) on her experiences in teaching contract law to white students.
- ⁵ The continuing lack of credibility of the discipline in the Third World stems from this lack of effort (Howard, 1983); perhaps the present crisis in anthropology and the fact that "the others" now talk back can lead anthropology to become a more international discipline (Marcus, 1986; Rabinow, 1986).
- ⁶ The advocates of postmodern anthropology, however, have yet to produce work that demonstrates a significant departure from traditional anthropology.
- ⁷ For an overview of the development of feminist anthropology, see Moore (1988) and Strathern (1987).
- ⁸ Guided by these findings, many feminist anthropologists, along with others, unequivocally advocated development of free-market economic relations, western style, in these societies, claiming that such change would necessarily improve women's position (Sivanandan, 1982), disregarding work that documents a market economy has worked to the disadvantage of women both in the West and in the Third World (Boserup, 1970; Friedl, 1967; Pinchbeck, 1981; B. Rogers, 1980). While talking about women they talked for women. Ironically, Third World women's rejection of western feminists' political stands was dismissed as a sign of their backwardness.
- ⁹ For instance, I often review the role of anthropology in development of social Darwinism and its sexist and racist implications (Gould, 1981).

- ¹⁰ On a number of occasions I was asked if it wasn't it hypocritical that I, who studied and earned my living from teaching and practising anthropology, should criticize it. Others asked whether if I participated in the discipline, I would also have the right to be critical of it? I reminded them that at least part of their reading material—Gough (1968), Asad (1973), and Howard (1983)—was also written by anthropologists from both the First and Third Worlds, and that such criticisms are intended to improve the discipline, not to negate it. But often they were not convinced. This is reminiscent of the view that an immigrant ought not to have the right to criticize the “host” society.
- ¹¹ In fact, some students have confided in me their complaints about instructors who had criticized their work with comments such as “Studying is more than talking about women; how about some real work?” or “When you become a prof, you can teach what you like, but now you have to study what I teach.”
- ¹² I have used “token” to refer to the persons included in small numbers to confirm that the mainstream is “tolerant” without threatening the mainstream group's group dominance (Bell, 1987; Luz Reyes & Halcon, 1988).
- ¹³ For a discussion of forms of everyday racism, see Essed (1990, 1991).
- ¹⁴ The comments in this paragraph are based on my course evaluations. Many students praise my personality as friendly, approachable, and informal. They enjoyed the lively classes and yet in the same breath wished I could control the class so students could learn more, rather than listening to one another.
- ¹⁵ Although I have mainly taught introductory women's studies courses, a considerable number of students were beyond their first year of university. This circumstance was due partly to the pattern in which women's studies courses are offered, and partly to the fact that my course was the only one the Simone de Beauvoir Institute had offered on Third World women.
- ¹⁶ Rosalind Boyd, of McGill University's Centre for Developing Areas, had just returned from Uganda. Her talk was subsequently published (see Boyd, 1989).
- ¹⁷ Sherene Razack (personal communication, May 1991).
- ¹⁸ During 1991–1992, I have continued to experiment with different strategies. Although I have not received the course evaluations for this period yet, I felt all year that I am more effective in teaching critical thinking when I assume the role of a conventional teacher and distance myself from my students.
- ¹⁹ This is not unlike the experience of women and particularly feminist teachers. The major difference is that even the feminist pedagogy literature deals mostly with sexism in the classroom but remains silent on the question of racism and problems of minority teachers.

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