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**East Meets West:
Teaching the Elite on Both Sides of the Pacific**

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ABSTRACT: This paper reports a study of female professors teaching in foreign context. Its goal is to provide the public with an embodied understanding of these experiences.

East Meets West:

Teaching the Elite on Both Sides of the Pacific

Park (1928) describes the condition of marginal man is that of “a cultural hybrid, living and sharing intimately in the life and traditions of two distinct people” (p. 892). While there has been concerted effort to study the lives of female academic faculty in terms of class (Dews, Leste and Leste, 1995), race (hooks, 1989, Williams, 1994) and sexuality (Mintz & Rothblum, 1997), relatively little of this attention has been devoted to the female ex-patriate experience. This void has left us with a series of questions: How do female foreign academics’ private and public lives intersect? Do the relationships they have outside the academic sustain or undermine a foreign professor’s chances of success? This paper seeks to answer these questions by studying foreign academic women’s lives holistically: one person trying to carve out an academic identity for themselves in the East, the other in the west. In examining the interplay of multiple forms of marginality, these hidden interstices will shed light on the struggles involved in teaching in the diaspora.

The literature on marginal existence resides within two predominant strands. The first focuses on cultural incongruity primarily in terms of deficit, resulting in lowered self-confidence, powerlessness and normlessness (see Adorno, 1951, Goffman, 1963, Gue, 1985; Kanugo, 1982; Park, 1928). In the book *Outlandish*, for example, Jewish-German philosopher Theodor Adorno is quoted as saying, “Every intellectual in emigration....is, without exception, mutilated.... [and that] his language has been expropriated, and the

historical dimension that nourished knowledge, sapped "" (*Minima Moralia*, 1951, cited in Nico, Israel, p. 53). In contrast, the second stream conceptualizes marginality as a positive attribute, enabling one to live beyond the boundaries of national and cultural identities.

Harding (1991), for example, asserts that the marginal individual can “exploit the friction, the gap, the dissonance” between situated “in a least two places at once—outside and within, margin and centre...”(Harding, 1991, pp. 103-104). Bell hooks concurs, claiming that the marginal individual can formulate “an oppositional world view” which, if articulated, can provide “a sustained blueprint for change” (p. 76). Giving these competing views on the effects of marginality, we now turn to the voices of the researched.

Dora’s Story

Illegal entry

While Dora’s departure to a new land actually took place in the twenty-first century, her reasons for leaving were firmly rooted in the 20th. Being a student during the massive restructuring in education that took place in Ontario, Canada in the 1990s, she experienced a more than doubling of her tuition rate within five years, the chronic under funding of students in her department (only one in six received any kind of financial assistance whatsoever), the loss of reduced post-residency fee, and a corresponding decrease in the amount of loans available to Ontario students (Whittington, 2004). In addition to the increasing costs of her education, the calls for “efficacy” and incisive cost-cutting within the public sectors has led to an increased reliance of adjuncts and students to do the bulk of the teaching in universities, making it less likely for those obtaining doctorates, particularly in the “less job ready humanities,” to secure an academic position once finished (Nelson, 1997). Having incurred \$60,000 worth of debt in the process of completing her doctorate, and having little luck in

securing full-time employment in both academic and non-academic sectors, Dora decided to secure a post in Asia, a place where the economic demands of global capitalism has placed a high demand on learning English.

As her attempts to secure more legitimate jobs were unsuccessful and her financial resources were at the breaking point, she felt shoved into taking a post in Korea in the illegal teaching sector. The numbers of people who are teaching currently teaching illegally right now in Korea is unknown. Some estimate in the hundreds of thousands. While the conditions are work in are better than the ones faced by illegal migratory workers such as Phillipinos and Indonesians, some restrictions are applicable to both cases. Firstly, those who are caught are immediately deported and required to pay a fine. Secondly, not having a working VISA makes it very difficult for the worker to either change employers or find a place to live. Dora felt it was this condition of illegality that in large measure determined with whom she worked and with she associated. These conditions will now be described in detail.

Friends

Although the new ex-patriate teachers are under pressure to be successful at their jobs, perhaps the most urgent problem is one of social support, particularly when one does not know the language. With family and friends away, they often do not understand what the person is going through, often resulting in immigrants turning to their fellow nationals in order to help ease their transition.

But Dora soon came to the conclusion that forming friendship in an alien context is not the same as forming friendship in one's homeland. As she says:

Firstly, one's choices for friends is extremely limited, particularly if one doesn't speak the language. Secondly, in cases where the home language of the potential friend may be the same, there is no guarantee that they will want to take on a recent ex-patriate as a friend, especially if they are well-established in the new country. Thirdly, even in cases where one does establish a friendship, chances are that the friendship may not have longevity. Ex-patriates are often transient workers and can be difficult to contact...So it's never really spontaneously the way it is at home, and this is doubly so once you become illegal.

In Atkinson's (1989) discussion of the five stages of minority identity transformation, he says that the newcomer will more strongly affiliate with the dominant culture's values and lack awareness of their personal ethnicity. This often means that there is negativity shown toward other foreigners or those with similar ethnic backgrounds. For Dora, the over-identification on the part of many foreigners with the Korean culture made it difficult for her to assert her own cultural worth and find acceptance.

Trapped within framework of illegality and monolingualism, her associations tended to be with foreign factory workers, prostitutes, cab drivers, ex-cons, and nannies, often people with whom she shared living arrangements. These groups provided her with intermittent friendship and knowledge of how to navigate the culture, which often contrasted with the official views of Korean culture that would she would later hear in classrooms. In one account, a Phillipino factory worker had to hide in a hotel room all night to avoid immigration authorities. These stories, while interrogating the "official" image of Korea, also interrogated her own sense of entitlement. As she says, "There were times when I would feel sorry for myself, but then when I'd talk to them, I'd think, 'What do I have to complain about?'" Being made aware of both her race and her class by ongoing contact with those whose identities were different than her own, she was forced to confront her own implication as an oppressor, even as she was attempting to navigate her minority status in a foreign land (Ellsworth, 1997). This restructuring of self necessitated by the need for social support was

experienced as both traumatic and enlightening. It raised her appreciation for class and racial differences while simultaneously increasing her own sense of displacement.

Working

One of the major concerns of the recent immigrant is economic survival. The work that Dora could get would be similar to that of the working conditions of adjunct professors (see also Ray Pratt, 1997), although the institutes of higher education were run within the private sector. Contracts lasted anywhere from 6 to 10 weeks and had to be renewed at the end. Pay scales were similar, regardless of experience, though the men usually got more. There were no pensions or social benefits. There was no money for research or attending conferences. There was also a similar customer client/bottom-line approach to managing teachers. If evaluations were unsatisfactory or if numbers of enrolment were low, termination would ensue. Given that these professors are so far away from home, there is intense pressure to succeed.

Dora felt there are also a number of benefits in working abroad. Unlike adjuncts in North America, English contracts teachers are generally well-paid for their services in relation to the cost of living. Dora reported that it was not uncommon for contract workers to be paid 4,000 dollars a month at a private institute. There was also less of the “micro-management” that she found at home. She reports:

I had this adjunct position while I was finishing my dissertation. It was a second year course. Sixty-two students and no TA. And this dean comes up to me and says, “How are you doing?” You know, I think she really cares. And then immediately after she says, “You know, last time, we had an enrollment of 70 in this course,” like somehow my numbers aren’t high enough, like I’m somehow failing because I’ve only got 60. But over there, I don’t know if it’s because they need you or what, but they don’t harass you like that.

She also felt a greater collegiality among staff and administration: “At home, I would usually go into a school, teach a part-time course and leave. But here, administration would often take you out to dinner and the people that you work with are often more willing to talk about classes or swap resources, something that rarely happens at home.” This sense of inclusion could be due to collectivist norms of Asian culture (see Seagren & Wang, 1994) than the more individualist ones found in North America or it could be due to the shortage of qualified English professors, thus decreasing potential competition for resources. Whatever the case, Dora’s story suggests that the extent to which one is exploited on the basis of their labor can be mitigated if the socially produced meanings of “English professor” and the context in which those meanings circulate endow one with sufficient power to assert their value.

Yet her sense of empowerment was also mitigated by being fully entrenched in what she saw as largely a “White male academic culture.” Out of the 20 staff members she worked with at various work stations, only six would be women, and of those, only one would be a woman of color* (Footnote: Cooper and Stevens (2002) claim that within the 36% of instructional female faculty in the United States, only 4 percent were women of color. Dora’s figure represents half that.) Furthermore, the workload was often dispersed unevenly, with women tending to teach the senior classes (for the same pay) and in some cases, teaching twice as many courses. As she says, “the women worked harder than the men and often received lower teaching evaluations.” This greater acceptance of certain groups over others was also reflected in the longevity in the profession. Dora states: “It was usually the white males that stayed the longest, often taking up permanent residence and, in some cases, finding a Korean mate to help ease the tensions involved in being a foreigner.” Similar to

studies done in North America, she feels that little sensitivity was shown toward agism or family issues (e.g., Armenti & Acker, 2001; Ulku-Steiner, Kurtz-Costes, & Kinlaw, 2000), which may explain why most of the female ex-patriate professors were young women without children. Thus, in as much as the job offered the empowering salary that comes with a high status masculinized job, it also offered male-centred working conditions that come with that salary, producing many of the same impediments to success that academic women face in other countries (e.g., Acker, 1994; Chilly Collective, 1995, Kamu, 1996).

Health

Marie Jahoda (cited in Bennis, 1966) describes a healthy personality as one who “actively masters his environment, shows a certain unit of personality, and is able to perceive the world and himself correctly” (p. 52). By the end of one year, Dora felt she had achieved a certain degree of mastery over her environment in that she was able to contend with her basic survival needs, such as asking for directions and securing employment opportunities. This provided her with a tremendous sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. Yet in having to learn so much in so short a space a time, she also felt that she burned out in the process. Physically, she was subject to a number of respiratory and eye infections, making it difficult for her to obtain new employment and sustain her current employment prospects. Her dormitory, one of the few places that would take in an illegal worker, only aggravated her condition as it was infested with mold. Though paying for doctors and drugs was not expensive, the nature of the contract work, much like the adjunct work in North America, made it impossible for her to take any sick time to recover. Mentally, she went through periods of depression and paranoia as she became increasingly cognizant of her status as an outsider on many different fronts (Footnote: Ironically, while foreign students are often

offered counseling services, no such services are available to foreign professors, see Pederson, 1991). This state of chronic poor health induced by living in stressful living conditions was exacerbated with the knowledge that her brother had been afflicted with a serious illness at home. As her brother's condition continued to deteriorate, she eventually left her post in Korea--although with the increased reliance on casualized labor in North American universities (Cox, 2000) and the agism that exists in the non-academic job market, she feels there is a high probability she will go back.

Lu's Story

Reasons for leaving

Lu's experience of exile stems from an early age. Her grandparents, attempting to escape the communist invasion of China, fled to Hong Kong in 1949. Given the grandparents' impoverished situation, their children did not go to the fee-paying schools and were forced to work at a young age. Though Lu's parents were not educated, she was strongly encouraged to pursue higher education. Lu did well in school, being 2nd in her class. Yet due to the competitive nature of the Hong Kong universities, this was not enough to gain entrance. Given her family's fears of the impending Chinese takeover in 1997 and her strong desire to pursue university education, she and her family immigrated to Canada. Looking back, she smiles when she says, "I felt so fortunate when they accepted me into Canada and I could pursue my dream."

The initial years

Lu had learned some English in school, yet the English she learned in school was mostly book learning. As a result, her English conversation skills were poor and she found it difficult to make simple verbal requests. Working by day and taking university courses by

correspondence, she reflects, “I think back then, I had no confidence. I was desperate to be accepted so I hung around with only White people, trying to be like them and pretending racism didn’t exist.” Dyer (1993) argues that whiteness retains its invisible power because of it becomes the normalized centre which all “others” are defined. Similar to Dora, Lu felt an intense need to find social acceptance. Unlike Dora, however, she did not seek friendships among fellow foreigners, but rather, spent much of her efforts in trying to gain recognition and approval from the mainstream, a desire which she feels was fueled by an underlying racist belief that White is the superior class (see also West, 1990). Though she realized that categorical discrimination existed towards her own national group, she believed that by her own Herculean efforts, she would be able to “pass” as White.

Life in the academe and awareness of difference

In the second ten years of her stay in North America, Lu’s desire to join with mainstream began to dissipate. Discovering that her friendship network was weak and one-way and receiving maltreatment from store clerks and governmental service providers, she became aware of her second class status. Speaking of a particularly hurtful comment she received while doing her Master’s, she says:

This prof gives me a C- and I asked him to give me feedback, and write in the middle of this class, the male prof says to me, “I am the gatekeeper and I don’t think people from another country should be allowed to teach here.” You know, he said it front of the whole class...So I went to writing workshops to help me improve.

In their qualitative study of minority women faculty, Erickson and Rodriguez (1999) argue that white male resentment toward affirmative action policies can often impede one’s entry into academia. In an attempt to combat this resentment, Lu takes writing classes to “prove” her worthiness as a scholar.

After finishing her doctorate at a University in the United States, Lu landed a tenure track position. In describing that locale, she says, “The white people there were really nice. They’d invite you out to dinner and make you feel at home.” Yet it was a completely different story when she talked about relationships at the university. Although the job afforded greater security than the contract positions extended to Dora in Korea, she did not have the same amount of autonomy in designing her curriculum and in many cases felt that she was constantly under the scrutiny of the Dean:

So I have this car accident. I’m partially paralyzed in one arm and I’m blind in one eye and I tell the dean I can’t come in. So what does she do? She starts to harass me. She actually marches right over to my apartment, tells the superintendent to let her in. You know, like what, I’m lying?

She later reports how she was spied on by another male professor:

This guy flirts with me. He says he’s married. I say I’m not interested. So he comes into my class, without warning, says, “Would you mind?” he just invades my space but I felt I couldn’t report him as the harassment was sort of indirect.

Becoming discouraged by the hostile climate at her first university, she “job jumped” to another institution, a frequent strategy used by minority woman faculty in their fight to survive an academic career (see Erikson & Rodriguez, 1999).

Unfortunately, her second university provided her with little more support than the first. She was not invited to teams that decide on grants nor was she is not informed of certain hiring decisions. There were no formal provisions for mentoring new faculty, which meant that mentoring occurred on an ad hoc basis, if at all. As she says:

It was really a hit and miss sort of thing. These two white males were supposed to mentor me but they never showed up for any of the meetings I would schedule. Here they were putting it down on their CV, but they never actually helped me.

For Lu, the rare opportunity to interconnect with colleagues only intensified her existing feelings of isolation and loneliness. The one “friend” that she did have advised her that she was good teacher and didn’t need to publish. Not having an extended network of people with whom she could verify this information, she followed this “advice” and was later penalized for it in her evaluation.

These work-based exclusionary practices were not merely restricted to the interactions with colleagues. In one instance, Lu was congratulated by an administrative assistant for her presentation at an award ceremony because “she could hardly hear her accent.” In other, she was denied access to work by a security guard because he did not believe that she was a professor. Lu states:

He detains me and questions me about my degree, where I got it from you know? And then he finally writes “Teacher @ X University” on the back of my work permit, not professor, teacher. Just using his power to humiliate you. And then I go to class and tell the students about it and one of the students sticks up for the guard, you know, say he was just doing his job. And it ticks me off, you know, here I think I’ve been here for 15 years, I’m a contributor, and once again, I’m given the message, “you don’t belong.”

Rockhill and Tomic (1995) argue that “ignorance is knowledge/knowledge is ignorance, depending on who knows/who does not know.” (p. 209). In this example, we see the how this “knowledge” of the proper bodies in teaching enable both the administrative assistant to reaffirm Lu’s illegitimacy within the profession. .

Beyond Survival

In her discussion of “otherness” in the workplace, Richards (2002) argues that many marginals adopt a stance of indifference as “a cloak of protection to avoid succumbing to the negative discourses and practices directed towards her/him” (p. 332). Realizing that

categorical discrimination exists toward their own group and that wider processes of power are implicated in perpetuating this inequity, the main strategy advocated by marginals in this stance is to detach oneself from an uncaring system. Feeling ignored, overlooked, and unappreciated in her professional and her personal life, Lu feels that current coping strategy resides within this perspective:

When you are immigrant faculty, it's hard to form relationships with the dominant culture because they feel they don't need you. And it's hard to form relationships with other marginals, because they feel their own situation is so precarious that they can't afford to help you. So I've just become self-sufficient. I am content to live in a private world. I can see the outside, but they cannot come in to get me.

Similar to Dora, Lu's feels that her sources of support are limited by virtue of her less than desirable status. In order to cope with "not being like them," she lessens the culture's grasp on her by living in largely in seclusion and becoming less reliant on others to sustain her well-being. Having reestablished a connection with her own society, she comments, "I guess I've learned to live with the limitations of this society. I love working with students. I try to get my satisfaction from them and from my family and that's it."

Conclusion

Navigating one's identity in a foreign land is a complex and multi-layered process. For the women in this study, survival in a foreign land depends as much on forming relationships outside the university as it does within. The pressures to survive are experienced differently in different locations. While both came into their new societies as adults, Lu's situation of one of being a landed immigrant and then Canadian citizen, while Dora was an illegal resident. Their citizenship status in their new homelands led to employment in two very different educational sectors: one tenure track, the other short-term contract positions, each enabling different strategies for subsistence. While Dora relied

primarily on the dominance of her own language to help her secure academic positions and to make friends with English-speaking foreigners, Lu was aided by the closeness and solidarity of her immediately family. Each journey was also given a particular character by the length of time of the ex-patriot professor stayed in the country. Given her relatively short stay in Korea, Dora's experience was largely one of functional adjustment (i.e., learning what to do in order to get by) while Lu's account was saturated with struggles of acculturation and resistance to assimilation (Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner & Trimble, 1989).

Examining these stories with respect to the literature on marginality, it can be said that both experiences revealed a shifting self, one in which the ex-patriot felt at one moment powerless, and then in the next, powerful. Certainly, there are benefits associated with being an ex-pat professor. Both spoke of the economic benefits associated with migration and the satisfactions derived from being a professor. Yet, as both stories attest, there are many hardships which also accompany exile and it not a lifestyle that everyone can sustain. As Dora says:

Though some people might think it's a great adventure to just get up and start a new life, seldom do they realize what you'll be up against. The 8 by 8 room with mould on your walls, drug needles lying on your communal bathroom floor, immigration police always lurking around the corner and nobody wanting to be your friend. This is the immigrant lifestyle which I expect very few people who tout the virtues of marginal existence have to live on a daily basis.

Through this paper, we have charted a struggle, a struggle of two female academics to gain acceptance both inside and outside the university. Dillabough & Acker (2002) state:

Our future ability to identify, judge and ultimately challenge the local and macro forces of change regulating workers' lives on 'the left hand of the state' means that we must not only concern ourselves with the concept of women's local or situated histories as workers, but also with how such local histories and sites interact with forces of contemporary social change, only one of which is globalization." (p. 253)

Ongoing geopolitical instability combined with international competitiveness, corporate downsizing and the privatization of public services will radically alter our definition of “career” in the twenty-first century. If we are to understand female academic experience more fully, we must also look at the part these forces play in mediating the construction of an academic identity, and on the basis of those stories, introduce legislation that would take into account of the unique concerns of the female immigrant professor in navigating this often treacherous terrain. In this way, universities would not only act as a “home” for those of similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but also be a home for nomadic professors all over the world. Until that happens, however, many ex-patriate professors will continue to live in silent exile, their stories lost in a language that is not their own.

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