

Disclaimer

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work and has not been submitted before to any institution for assessment purposes.

Further, I have acknowledged all sources used and have cited these in the reference section.

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Juliet Christine Perumal

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Date

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Where do I begin to tell the story of how great a love can be?
The sweet love story that is older than the sea
The simple truth about the love you bring to me
Where do I start?

Like a summer rain that cools the pavement with a patent leather shine
You've stayed in my life and made the living fine
You've filled my heart with very special things
With angel songs, with wild imaginings
You've filled my soul with so much love
That anywhere I go I'm never lonely.

How long does it last?
Can love be measured by the hours in a day?
I have no answers now but this much I can say
I know I'll need you till the stars all burn away
And you'll be there.¹

Indeed, where do I begin to tell the story of how great a love can be?

¹ Lai, F. & Sigman, C. 1971. Lyrics of 'Where do I begin' from the Paramount Film: *Love Story*.

This study is dedicated to the memory of my brother, Jasper Perumal,
who during his brief life taught me more about love and life and laughter
through his sparkling wit, and keen sense of justice
than several books combined.
Through his absent presence I can attest that angels do indeed, breathe.

Abstract

In an attempt to add the voices of African feminist educators to the narrative field, and to address the critique that feminist discourses have generally been couched in theoretical abstraction, this study, which was conducted with five university women educators from various parts of Southern Africa, explores the enactment of feminist pedagogies in English language classrooms. The study was guided by the principles of feminist research methodologies, which advocate sensitivity to the subjective, emotional and biographic factors that shape the researcher and researched. Drawing from a suite of data sources, which comprised autobiographical and biographical narratives, lecture observations and interviews the study explores how the social variables of race, class, gender, politics, religion, etc. have influenced the participants' feminist and language identity formation, and by extension how these inform their teaching of English from a feminist perspective, in terms of What they teach; How they teach, and Why they teach the curriculum content that they do.

Taking the view that the personal is political and potentially pedagogical, the study provides a cursory commentary on the participants' childhood and early adulthood, with the intention of exploring the potential a retrospective gaze of their identity formation has in terms of how they frame interpersonal relations with students and colleagues, and the enactment of their teaching identities. Identifying for more nuanced investigation the study tracks the trajectories of the participants' coming to feminist consciousness, with a special focus on their adoption of *project identities* which they enact through their theorizing and teaching of English from a feminist perspective.

Given their subscription and investment in narratives of emancipation that subvert social injustices and repressive domination, the study explores, at length, the complexities of feminist teacher identity in relation to the themes of difference, dialogue, and epistemologies of experience, all of which invariably encompass the overarching theme of feminist teacher authority. Acknowledging the slippery terrain of teacher and student identity calibrations, the study differentiates three ways in which authority is generally conceived of in feminist pedagogy, viz. *authority versus nurturance*, *authority as authorship*, and *authority as power*. In discussing the *authority versus nurturance* I argue for unhinging the female teacher from traditional associations of her with care-giver and intellectualised mammy. Urging for recognition of the woman teacher as female but non-maternal, I argue for a recontextualised and reconceptualised understanding of the female teacher – one that foregrounds her capability of offering critical intellectual nurturance. In exploring the delineation *authority as authorship*, which entails the mutual sharing of teacher-student personal experience in relation to broader public and academic discourses, the study cautions against the potential for personal epistemology to circulate within the realm of the familiar, narcissistic and sentimental, in the absence of meaningful critical and contextual pedagogic and educative relevance. In this

regard, I suggest the consideration of two pertinent questions: viz. i) is there a shared assumption that the personal is good and the impersonal bad? and ii) given that other discourses of the personal are operating in the feminist classroom, exactly which personal are we referring to when we seek to validate the epistemology of experience? I argue that the pedagogic and educative worth of both teacher and students' personal disclosures need to be subject to critical, analytical, and productive reflection to assess their value as knowledge.

Critiquing enclaves of feminist pedagogical scholarship that suggest divesting the classroom of teacher authority as a way of rendering it more democratic, the discussion on *authority as power* agitates for an unmasking of the inevitable pedagogic and educative authority that the feminist teacher wields in the classroom. Through empirical evidence it illustrates variants of teacher authority that operate in the classroom and supports Gore's (2002), proposition to develop a theory of pedagogy and power by acknowledging that: pedagogy is the enactment of power relations between teacher, student and other significant partners; bodies are the objects of pedagogical power relations, and in pedagogy, different differences matter; the kind of knowledge produced in pedagogy interacts with the institutional site and the techniques of power employed there; and pedagogy proceeds via a limited set of specific techniques of power.

The study concludes with a theoretical and methodological reflective synthesis. The theoretical synthesis presents the central lines of argument that emerged from the issues investigated. The methodological reflective synthesis presents the participants' comments on the validity of the study and the value that accrued to them by virtue of participating in the study.

Key Words:

feminist pedagogy diversity education identity politics critical and cultural literacy
language and gender narrative research autobiographical studies

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Portraiture in Shards

I see through a glass darkly ...

Recent scholarship among South African researchers working in the tradition of narrative research shows a growing trend towards employing technologies of self-disclosure in an attempt to indicate researcher positionality. This slant in qualitative research can be traced to calls to confront white-sheeted Klansman-type research procedures, which have become synonymous with positivistic research. Although, my study *Enacting feminisms in academia* draws on autobiographical writing as a principal data source, in this introductory piece, I will resist authoring my detailed autobiography. Instead, I provide the tentative declaration that as a social actor still under construction, I am at the time of undertaking this research, a single, heterosexual, middle-class, third generation South African woman of Indian descent, schooled in charismatic Christian ideological extravagances, and committed to a politics respectful of non-discriminatory forms of social justice.

Hailing from a home background that showed no disturbing espousals either in its gendered expectations of behaviour or division of labour, the overt and covert impulses of patriarchal culture were not immediately apparent to me. With mum and dad working together outside home, operating a small informal business (which many would be forgiven for thinking was a special wing of the Salvation Army), on returning home in the evenings they would continue their partnership cooking, cleaning and scouring, not discriminating or differentiating between gender prescribed roles or responsibilities. Left to our own devices for most of our early years, big brother Jesse played the role of nurturer, ensuring that at least we had tea and sandwiches when we got home from school in the afternoon. In this regard, unlike some of the participants in my study for whom the label 'feminist/feminism' only provided a vocabulary to articulate their nagging suspicion of patriarchal oppression, I came to feminist consciousness quite late in my academic pursuits, largely through the medium of reading, and experiencing the injustices committed against women in the work place. Growing up in a racially divided South Africa, however, meant that the social disparities and prejudices in terms of colour, language, and geographical apartheid, although paraded as natural, did not correlate with the philosophy of love, unity and respect for humanity that my parents and pastors preached with peerless ardour. The oft quoted biblical scripture, 'For God so loved that He gave ...' (despite coming under fire for its He-man portrayal of the godhead), carried the essential message of glocalised 'brotherly' caring and sharing, which transcended race, colour, creed or culture. This coupled with the injunction, to 'love my neighbour as myself', often took on the form of giving alms to the indigent in my neighbourhood. Thus, I have recollections of being steeped in humanitarianism activism, largely by virtue of us enjoying comparatively more privileged economic capital, than most of our neighbours. I recall that this was rendered more possible at sometimes than others, largely to our family vacillating between lower and middle-class strata at different periods during

my growing up. In addition, the ontological in-betweenness of my South African Indian lineage meant that I fluctuated between spaces of privilege and disprivilege. While to a lesser extent it subjected me to various tiers of marginalisation, it has bestowed on me the dubious 'privileges' associated with western colonialism: I speak English as a first language, which gives me a linguistic capital regarded as powerful and is much sought after; I have had the privilege of tertiary education; largely western strands of thinking have shaped my feminist consciousness.

Given the Eurocentric bias of Christianity, as it was, and continues to be propagated in South Africa, meant that despite living in ethnically heterogeneous Indian communities, my family experienced a cultural dislocation from the rites, rituals, and Indian vernacular languages of our community—a case of the 'insider without'. This was attributable to the fact that Christians constitute a numeric minority in most South African Indian communities. As an English-only medium household, I often browsed through the tomes of English, male authored theological commentaries, that my father spent untold hours pouring over. The highlight of my week as a twelve year old however, was our Friday afternoon visit to the supermarket, where I was guaranteed mum would buy me pastries and two Harlequin/ Gothic novels. I would read these at breakneck speed through the week, so that I could get more pastry and paperbacks on our visit to the supermarket the following week. I had compiled a sizeable collection, until one day mum picked up a book from my collection, read through a few pages and promptly asked me to give *all* of them away. The sultry tales of passionate romance was something no child should be exposed to, was her considered, non-too liberal opinion. That saw the end of my Harlequin/Gothic Collection. However, there was no love or romance lost between mum and me, and I often joined her singing harmoniously in the eclectic pop, rock, R&B, and gospel music of British and American origin that found their way into our home. From dad I inherited a passion for reading and from mum a passion for music. This engendered in me a deep love for poetry and prose, which I believe, gave me an unfair advantage over my age-mates at school. A year or two later I entered into a less than platonic friendship with a boy two years my senior, and being the industrious, student he was, he took it upon himself to give me an early start to the literary classics (Shakespeare, Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, the Bronte sisters), which were his prescribed texts. The package came complete with annotated notes, and in-person commentaries on the thematic emplotments in the text, with special elucidation on the tragedy of unrequited love and the sheer bliss of mutual surrender (a novel way to win a girl's heart! Small wonder that he was a straight 'A' student). The Eurocentric curricula (especially the English literary 'classic'), which are saturated in biblical scriptural images, also meant that I developed a cultural and linguistic capital similar to that which South African Christian National Education was engineered to transmit. In this regard, I think that my home-school socialization, would easily find empirical evidence in support of sociologist Basil Bernstein's (1996), much cited and equally criticized theorizing regarding the notion of elaborate codes.

Given the harmonious gender relations of mutual caring and consideration that prevailed in my home, where lingering conversations around the dinner table provided a place for freedom of expression, the discourse on feminism or gender discrimination was irrelevant to my experiential realities. In retrospect I realize that being a beneficiary of horizontally privileged gender relations, and a safe home environment insulated, blinded and made me oblivious to the dehumanization of others at the hands of patriarchy. With the odd exception, I naively assumed that my sheltered and protected lifestyle was normative. I attributed the episodes of weekend domestic violence in the neighbourhood to substance abuse, and did not identify its link to unequal gender relations; this despite the fact that the casualties were invariably the women and children. Now, I recall with a flush of embarrassment, my disassociation from feminism, preferring rather being remembered as a humanitarian activist. The image of Lady Godivas burning their bras in public protest against patriarchal oppression proved a trifle excessive, even for me, given my charismatic Christian background. Apart from it being a waste of good lingerie (I quipped), the entire enterprise violated my socialized perception of the essence of femininity. So with my femininity safely intact, like a dutiful daughter I studied the long received wisdom of the fathers and armed with my identity papers ventured into the education profession resolute to make teaching a subversive activity. Nothing in the campus crusades of the 1980s prepared me for the roller-coaster emotional ride that my entrance into the labour market would present me with. It was here, that I personally encountered the potency of patriarchal oppression. Sharing the disillusionment and frustration of those female educators who did not aid and abet patriarchal precepts and postures, it was as a teacher of English that I experienced the full impact of being a victim of gender discrimination. Management structures more often than not occupied predominantly by men given to exaggerated power performances; pedagogical apparatuses and rituals that excluded, trivialized, stereotyped or denigrated female realities, all served to marginalize the female school population, perpetuate gender binarism and ensure our continued subordination. Assailed by such stultifying practices it was only upon quieter reflection, heightened enquiry into gender concerns and critical maturation that the feminist light sensitized me to the pervasiveness of patriarchal deception.

In tracing my theoretical and ideological affiliations, I recall flirting with humanism, being seduced by the playful ambiguities and uncertainties of postmodernism, and am at the stage of conducting this study embracing the more expansive insights that post-paradigmatic knowledgescapes offer. Post paradigmatic thinking draws eclectically from the broad spectrum of the knowledge kaleidoscope, and has confirmed for me the permeability, mutability, and interconnectivity of knowledge systems.

Acutely, aware of the partiality of my interpretative and analytic perspectives, I offer this brief bio-profile to serve both as an excuse and an explanation for the interpretative quietitude or excesses that have dis/coloured the lenses through which the research process, in its conceptualisation, implementation and analysis has unfurled. In this regard I align myself with

Sara-Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997:85), in acknowledging the omnipresence of the researcher's sense and sensibilities in crafting and choreographing the research process and product. The pervasiveness of researcher voice, presence and positionality is poignantly captured in the following excerpt, in which Lawrence-Lightfoot writes:

*... the voice of the researcher is everywhere:
in the assumptions, preoccupations, and framework she brings to the inquiry;
in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choices of stories she tells;
in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative.*

Voice is the echoing of the self ... her eyes, her ears, her insights, her style, her aesthetic.

Voice is omnipresent and ... reflects more about the artist than about the subject.

*The portraitist's voice then is everywhere-overarching and undergirding the text,
framing the piece, naming the metaphors, and echoing through central themes.*

But her voice is also a premeditated one, restrained, disciplined, and carefully controlled.

*Her voice never shadows the actor's voices
(though sometimes is heard in duet, in harmony and counterpoint).*

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