
**ABSTRACT**

In the face of persistent yet heterogeneous global injustice and inequality, what is the task of the feminist epistemologist in the era of globalization? In an attempt to answer this question, this essay performs several tasks. First, it provides a reading of the institutional fields of feminist epistemology and globalization studies that is relational. Second, I advance the thesis that the occlusion of issues of globality within feminist epistemology, wittingly or unwittingly, commits a predictably familiar and tired move: it allows transnational and neocolonial feminist complicities to remain unchecked and unperceived. Therefore, my argument goes, feminist epistemology, unless it is theorized within a global frame, will tarry insufficiently in any attempt to answer questions of global injustice and inequality. Feminist epistemologists should be concerned with the diverse epistemics of various subjects’ modes of being and doing because knowledge production practices, be they feminist or otherwise, are nothing if not heterogeneous. Feminist epistemologists should expand their academic pursuits outside of the boundaries of their institutional disciplinarity in order to consider the scholarship of those working on questions of globality. Were feminist epistemologists to do this, they would open up the possibility of theorizing feminist epistemologies that are attuned to the heterogeneous logics of knowledge production practices within the diverse conditions of globality they would then be a position to “acknowledge a responsibility toward the trace of the other, not to mention toward other struggles.” In the doing, they would irreparably change the face of feminist philosophy.


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Situating Feminist Epistemology in a Global Frame

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Introduction

varieties of feminist theory and practice must reckon with the possibility that, like any other discursive practice, they are marked and constituted by, even as they constitute, the field of their production.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

If feminism is set forth as a demystifying force, then it will have to question thoroughly the belief in its own identity.

T. Minh-Ha Trinh

In the face of persistent yet heterogeneous global injustice and inequality, what is the task of the feminist epistemologist in the era of globalization? In an attempt to answer this question, this essay performs several tasks. First, it provides a reading of the institutional fields of feminist epistemology and globalization studies that is relational. Second, I advance the thesis that the

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3 By ‘feminist epistemology’ I mean to indicate two different conceptions: 1) the institutional, disciplinary, and discursive field consisting of a limited number of scholars, located mostly within the U.S., who have been in scholarly dialogue with each other for approximately 20 years concerning the topic of ‘feminist epistemology’. These scholars, situated mostly within philosophy departments (as opposed to women’s studies, feminist studies, or gender studies departments) are primarily concerned with the question of how to theorize feminist knowledge: through what normative constraints, what experiential faculties, what conditions of cognitive status, what operational modalities of rationality, what criteria of justification, what standards of truth, etc. I am thinking, for example, of Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, Lorraine Code, Eve Browning Cole, Donna Haraway, Kathleen Lennon, Margaret Whitford, Linda Alcoff, and Elizabeth Potter, among others. Many of these scholars are routinely anthologized together in collections of feminist epistemology. See, for example, Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintinka, eds. *Discovering reality: feminist perspectives on epistemology, metaphysics, methodology, and Philosophy of science.* (Holland, Boston, and London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983); Sandra Harding (ed.) *Feminism and methodology* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987); Linda Martin Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (eds.) *Feminist epistemologies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); and Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford (eds.) *Knowing the difference: feminist perspectives in epistemology* (New York: Routledge, 1994);
4 By ‘feminist epistemology’ I also mean a broader definition of the epistemics of feminist knowledge production that considers questions of historical and epistemic heterogeneity to be central to theorizing adequate knowledge. In this sense, this essay is an argument for an expansion of the definition of feminist epistemology that moves from the first toward the second.
occlusion of issues of globality⁴ within feminist epistemology, wittingly or unwittingly, commits a predictably familiar and tired move: it allows transnational and neocolonial feminist complicities to remain unchecked and unperceived. Therefore, my argument goes, feminist epistemology, unless it is theorized within a global frame, will tarry insufficiently in any attempt to answer questions of global injustice and inequality. Feminist epistemologists should be concerned with the diverse epistemics of various subjects’ modes of being and doing because knowledge production practices, be they feminist or otherwise, are nothing if not heterogeneous. I am not calling for a liberal, multiculturalist anthropology of epistemologies. I am, rather, suggesting that it is simply not enough for feminist epistemologists to preoccupy themselves solely with issues generally accorded a greater measure of esteem in philosophy departments such as objectivity, cognitive faculty, rational justification, and scientific authority. While it is certainly appropriate to consider these matters when the question of gender is at stake; nevertheless, they do not span the entire spectrum epistemic practices. Therefore, feminist epistemologists need to expand their academic pursuits outside of the boundaries of their institutional disciplinarity in order to consider the scholarship of those working on questions of globality.⁵ Were feminist epistemologists to do this, they would open up the possibility of theorizing feminist epistemologies that are attuned to the heterogeneous logics of knowledge production practices within the diverse conditions of globality.⁶ They would then be a position to “acknowledge a responsibility toward the trace of the

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⁴ By ‘globality’ I mean a global frame of analysis. Gayatri Spivak asks the crucial question: “In what interest, to regulate what sort of relationships, is the globe evoked?” in “Cultural Talks in the Hot Peace: Revisiting the ‘Global Village’,” in Cosmopolitics: thinking and feeling beyond the nation, Eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Indianapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 329. Spivak answers that “Globality is invoked in the interest of the financialization of the globe, or globalization” (330). I therefore employ Spivak’s definition of a transnational world:

That it is impossible for the new and developing states, the newly decolonizing or the old decolonizing nations, to escape the orthodox constraints of a ‘neo-liberal’ world economic system which, in the name of Development, and now ‘sustainable development’, removes all barriers between itself and fragile national economies, so that any possibility of building for social redistribution is severely damaged.


⁵ This is another way of saying that knowledge production simply is not solely an issue for philosophers hiding in the ivory tower, but is an every day, ground-clearing activity that is partially constitutive of the possibility of globalization. In other words, I am arguing that feminist epistemologists need to look at knowledge-production not as if it is only something that they themselves do, but as if it is something that all subjects and agents do (in heterogeneous ways).

⁶ By ‘the logics of knowledge production within the diverse conditions of globality’ I mean logics which include, but are not limited to, the logics of capital flow, the logics of discursivity, the logics of scattered hegemonies such as patriarchies and regimes of heteronormativity, the logics of nation-state formation and relation, the logics of value-coding practices, logics of the international division of labor, and the logics of institutionality.
other, not to mention toward other struggles.” In the doing, they would irreparably change the face of feminist philosophy.

I provide ‘reasonable plausibility’ for my argument by critically reading Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, Gayatri Spivak, and Tani E. Barlow as feminist theorists whose scholarship situates knowledge production practices within globality without reducing the heterogeneity of their epistemics. These theorists are exemplary in that they demonstrate the decentered, displacing quality that transnational feminist theory can affect on cultural and economic politics, as well as the politics of knowing and doing feminism, by deconstructing the breach between culture and economy, and thus between feminist theory (epistemology) and feminist practice (ontology). That is, these theorists, despite their many differences, emphasize the necessity of thinking globality as irreducible heterogeneity, and therefore underscore the specificity that feminist theorizing requires if it is to be capable of analyzing the innumerable geopolitical manifestations that globalization has now taken. The production of knowledge thereby becomes, in their work, not only a point of problematization, but also a point of crisis and intervention. What my reading of their scholarship shows, I hope, is that transnational feminist cultural studies offers critical and viable alternatives to exclusionary versions of feminist epistemology that are inadequate to theorizing knowledge production practices within the heterogeneity of current geopolitics. Putting my argument in this form enables me to confront the differences and tensions between what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan have called “liberal and more progressive forms of feminism.” In other words, I argue that if progressive feminist theorizing is to have a thoroughly transformative role in the thinking and practicing of globality, then it will have to follow the advice of Gayatri Spivak and T. Minh-Ha Trinh given in the epigraphs above by putting into question both its enabling conditions and its identity. Transnational feminist cultural studies, I contend, is one area of scholarship that is doing this, and with enormous success. If subsequently theorizing through transnational feminist cultural studies enables the insight that thinking through

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7 Ibid., 198.
8 Spivak uses the term ‘crisis’ to refer to the moment at which the “presuppositions of an enterprise are disproved by the enterprise itself.” The postcolonial critic: interviews, strategies, dialogues (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 139.
9 As Tani E. Barlow puts it, “neoliberal feminist scholarship is not sufficient to the questions on the horizon” because it refuses to envision contemporary geopolitics historically. “‘green blade in the act of being grazed’: Late Capital, Flexible Bodies, Critical Intelligibility,” differences 10, no. 3 (1998): 147.
the role of knowledge production in the production of globality and the role of
globality in the production of feminist knowledge means attempting to grasp
irreducible difference as heterogeneity, then transnational feminist cultural
studies will provide one telling example of how to rethink feminism’s
relationship to theory and practice, to specificity and singularity, which is also to
say, to history and ethicopolitics.

Situating Knowledge Production in Enabling Conditions

In their essay “On Critical Globality,” Alys Weinbaum and Brent Edwards
suggest that scholars of the cultural, political, economic, and social
dimensions of ‘globalization’ must carefully attend to their geopolitical
situatedness within dynamic, uneven, and complex relationships of power if they
are to attune their ethicopolitical sensibilities to their analytic strategies.11 The
scholar of ‘globality’ should be intent on, in Weinbaum and Edwards’ words,
“becoming conscious of the place from which one speaks.”12 This, they contend,
is one of the only viable ways to work against the universalizing and
(neo)colonizing tendencies inherent within scholarship that ignores, or is
uncritical about the mediated nature of its access to, its enabling conditions, but
that nevertheless claims to be ‘global’.13 Much of such scholarship, they argue, in
fact tacitly reinforces, instead of displaces, the positionalities of the West as core
and the Rest as periphery, i.e., Europe and the U.S. as (neo)imperial center and
the third world and the south as colonized margin.

On a general level, Weinbaum and Edwards’ call echoes many similar arguments
put forth by those within the emergent field known as ‘feminist epistemology.’
Donna Haraway, for example, has argued persuasively that achieving accurate
knowledge about social relations entails acknowledging that the production of
knowledge is always “situated,” always “partial [and] locatable” within the
particularities of the spaces of social and historical matrices.14 Weinbaum and
Edwards, like Haraway, are not content to solely invoke the ‘situatedness of
knowledge’ for its own sake. Neither are they interested in getting epistemically
‘situated’ simply to enjoin in uncritical academic navel-gazing. Rather, decoding
and historicizing the situatedness of knowledge means first of all, as all three
scholars have argued, refusing to reduce the radical heterogeneity of the

12 Ibid., 258.
13 Ibid.
14 Donna Haraway, Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature (New York: Routledge, 1991),
191.
contemporary historical moment to a common epistemic denominator. At its most fundamental level, the politics of situating knowledge in its heterogeneity thereby entails interrogating the differential enabling conditions of the specific sites from which subjects produce knowledges. Both Weinbaum and Edwards and Haraway alike thereby remind us of the critical importance of the specific conditions of possibility that facilitate our own practice as academics. However, as Pheng Cheah suggests, we cannot just assume “the possibility of a self-reflective critical consciousness capable of grasping the limits of its own situated perspective in order to transcend provisionally the discursive formation that this consciousness inhabits” and then simply call it a day for our epistemic efforts at grasping the globe; this would be to ignore the persistent significance of the specificity of the differential epistemics of globality. Just as there is no outside to discursivity, there is no space outside of situatedness. Likewise, in a certain way, there is no outside of globality. For just as the institutions which facilitate academic production—be they juridical, national, disciplinary, economic, discursive, or otherwise—cannot be exempted from critical interrogation in scholarly work precisely because they condition and inform scholars’ own practices in both the strictest political and pedagogical senses, neither can we simply assume that our conditions of possibility can be interrogated once and for all.

Tani E. Barlow has contended that “formulating general laws and universal lexicons is not the task of historians” and I would like to build on Barlow’s point by arguing that this insight does not just hold for historians. It also holds for feminist epistemologists because the production of knowledge only happens under highly specific historical conditions. According to Barlow, one task of the historian should be to “emphasize the instabilities inherent in globalizing claims written into much used analytic categories such as ‘Asia’ or ‘revolution’ or ‘women.’” Emphasizing instabilities as such brings to light the complex constitutive conditions under which globalized catachreses are produced by historical subjects. The kind of scholarly work Barlow is suggesting is therefore

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16 But this does not mean, of course, that discursivity, situatedness, and globality is all that there is in some finalistic ontological sense. It solely means that it is through discursivity, situatedness, and globality that historical heterogeneity can ever be articulated.

17 Barlow, “green blade in the act of being grazed”, 131.

18 Ibid., 120.

19 Gayatri Spivak states in *The Postcolonial critic* that a ‘catachresis’ is a concept-metaphor “without an adequate literal referent” (154). Spivak spells this notion out in terms of how: “A deconstructive awareness would insistently be aware that the masterwords are catachreses…that there are no literal
that of a deconstructive feminist historical analysis: “To undo the presumed relation between signifier and signified, historical event and historiographic convention (e.g., “gender,” a signifier of difference, in “development,” a metaphor of control over global processes) and to hold these ensembles up to scrutiny is a useful undertaking, since the logics in question animate forces that discipline into manageable categories conditions of unspeakable heterogeneity.”

Taking Barlow’s historical lesson to the interstices between feminist epistemology and globalization studies, I want to inquire into the institutional politics of their situatedness within, and relationality to, certain enabling conditions that I am calling, for lack of a better term, globality.

Feminist Epistemology and Globalization Studies

I am a student of both feminist theory and philosophy. Although today there is generally a great deal of overlap between these academic sites, what is not often noted is that the specific relationship between feminist theory and the study of philosophical epistemology was first firmly consolidated when Discovering reality: feminist perspectives on epistemology, metaphysics, methodology, and the philosophy of science, edited by Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka, was published in 1983. Catherine Hundleby goes so far as to call this book “the first collection of feminist epistemology,” but although this book is the first collection to formally ask questions about how feminism might contribute to “a new theory of knowledge,” it is not actually the first feminist scholarship to ask questions about feminism and epistemology. However, I point to this text here because I

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20 Barlow, “green blade in the act of being grazed”, 120.
21 I should note in passing that when we ask “What does it mean to say that feminist epistemology is ‘situated’ somewhere?”, it would be useful to identify the nature of the question itself. That is, is this a geographical question? A national question? A theoretical question? An institutional question? An epistemological question? A political economic question? I believe that the kind of question this is depends on how we understand, in a word, situatedness, but more on this later.
25 According to Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford, scholarship on ‘feminist epistemology’ was being published as early as 1981 in journals such as Metaphilosophy and Liberal Education. See their
think it should alert us to the (not so) simple fact that feminist epistemology has a history. Twenty five years since the publication of this text, the field of feminist epistemology has emerged as a specific (interdisciplinary) site. This scholarly domain has generated what should be understood as its own methodologies, cannons, analytic strategies, philosophical tools, and critical procedures for understanding the epistemics of knowing practices. Feminist epistemology therefore has a complex, unique, and singular history, and this history, for the most part, has yet to be written.

As a student who has studied feminist epistemology for the last few years, I have learned that defining the term ‘feminist epistemology’ is, at best, a slippery enterprise. For the moment I will refrain from offering my own definition of this term and will instead turn to feminist epistemologists Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford, who assert that the special contribution of feminist epistemology to scholarship in general is that it brings to the fore “the power relations at the heart of knowledge production.” As they define it:


Feminist epistemology is neither the specification of a female way of knowing (there is no such thing) nor simply the articulation of female subjectivity which reveals itself to be diverse, contradictory and at least partially discursively constructed through patriarchal oppositions. Feminist epistemology consists rather in attention to epistemological concerns arising out of feminist projects, which prompt reflection on the nature of knowledge and our methods for attaining it.28

In this same vein, feminist epistemologists Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter argue that while feminist epistemology reveals “the politics involved in knowledge,” feminist epistemology does not putatively consist of “a reduction of epistemology to politics.”29 Rather, feminist epistemology provides a space for thinking through the manifold ways in which, in Alcoff and Potter’s words, “values, politics, and knowledge are intrinsically connected” and mutually constitute each other in a field mediated by difference.30 Within such a wide-spanning definitional schema, it is no surprise that Alcoff and Potter contend that the field of feminist epistemology is “internally heterogeneous and irreducible to any uniform set of theses.”31 This essay, however, is neither a literature review of the field’s wide-spanning and heterogeneous scholarly productions, nor is it a genealogy of feminist epistemology’s heterogeneity. Instead, it is intended as an intervention in that heterogeneous history itself.

My point of entry into this history is, by necessity, through my location as a scholar situated within the U.S. academy. It is from within this uneven yet shared site that Weinbaum and Edwards, who work within American studies and literary criticism, observe that much recent scholarship in the U.S. in the humanities and social sciences has been moved to analyze “processes of globalization as they impact on culture and society.”32 I do not think that it would be unfair to go somewhat further and say that the study of globalization has become big business in contemporary academia,33 particularly within the U.S., as

28 Ibid., 13.
30 Ibid., 3.
31 Ibid., 3.
it frequently draws the eyes and ears of both cultural studies specialists and corporate executives. As I understand it, the interdisciplinary site of globalization studies primarily involves considerations of political economy, the nation-state system, transnationalism, and flows of culture, community, and capital across global and (trans)local spaces. According to Arjun Appadurai, a major theorist of “the cultural dimensions of globalization,” the study of globalization requires attending to “certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics that we have only begun to theorize.” So while globalization studies involves analyzing “the globalization of multinational capitalism” it also includes critically researching “the destabilization [and restabilization] of nationalisms, the production of dynamic border zones, and reconfigurations of identities as well as… [the consolidation and disruption of regimes of] transnational corporate exploitation.” In other words, the study of globalization is nothing if not heterogeneous (which does not mean of course that structural and institutional patterns cannot be tracked).

I note this here because it would be easy to assume that discursive heterogeneity is one of the few things that globalization studies has in common with feminist epistemology. However, the presumed disconnection between feminist knowledge production and globality, apparent in much scholarship in both globalization studies and feminist epistemology, seems in need of serious reconsideration. It is the work of this essay to suggest that invocations of the supposed difference between feminist epistemology and globalization studies preclude any consideration of the role of globality in the production of feminist knowledge and vice versa. This, I want to contend, consolidates, rather than destabilizes, existing regimes of neocolonial power relations. This consolidation, in turn, prevents opening up the possibility of, in historian William Haver’s words, “a historical, political practice that would be something other than a continuity with, or maintenance of, the present.”


The Occlusion of Globalization within Feminist Epistemology

Feminist epistemology has not, for the most part, attended to questions being raised within recent studies of ‘globalization.’\(^{38}\) As I see it, the occlusion of the issue of globalization within feminist epistemology could be explained in at least two ways. Firstly, it could be explicated by reference to the scholarly ‘common sense’ that says that feminist epistemology is about the feminist philosophical analysis of the politics and practice of knowledge production, while globalization studies, on the other hand, is about the analysis of cultural flows and capital mobility within global capitalist postmodernity. This first possible explanation is not just an account of the supposed difference in content between feminist epistemology and globalization studies, but is also disciplinary, that is, institutional. In other words, the occlusion of globalization within feminist epistemology could be said, were we to make certain assumptions, to make sense considering the disciplinary structure of knowledge formations within contemporary academic institutions: put crudely, it comes down to the claim that what philosophers essentially do is philosophize (whether they are ‘feminist’ or not), and that philosophizing does not involve analyzing and thinking through the heterogeneous political and cultural economies that constitute what Gayatri Spivak calls “globality” or the “financialization of the globe.”\(^{39}\)

The second possible explanation, not unrelated to the first possibility, is that the occlusion of globalization within feminist epistemology is due to the fact that feminist epistemology is largely produced within frameworks that centralize (and thus naturalize and take for granted) the West and the U.S. as paradigmatic models for knowledge production. This would be another way of saying that those who do feminist epistemology are by large situated within the West and the U.S. and that they, by virtue of their situatedness, assume that they do not need to attend to the fact that their situatedness can easily make them complicit with neo-colonial practices of academic production.

The occlusion of globality within feminist epistemology should alter us to something very particular. That is, whereas almost every discipline within the humanities and the social sciences—from sociology to history to political economy to literary criticism—has felt the need to comment on the question of

\(^{38}\) There are at least two feminist epistemologists whose work I see as exempt from this. See Kimberly Hutchings, “The Personal is International: Feminist Epistemology and the Case of International Relations” in Knowing the difference: feminist perspectives in epistemology, eds. Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford (London: Routledge, 1994).

‘globalization’, feminist epistemology has been curiously silent. I will consider this silence by analyzing the two positions briefly sketched above in greater detail.

Let us first consider the possibility that feminist epistemology and globalization simply have different disciplinary content areas, and, therefore, do not have anything in common to raise to the level of interdisciplinary academic dialogue, debate, or contention. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter’s important anthology Feminist epistemologies (1992) seems to make the case most strongly for this possible explanation, that feminist epistemology does not deal with questions of globalization because of the disciplinary structure of academic institutions. According to Alcoff and Potter, feminist epistemology must be thought of as constituted in relation to ‘traditional epistemology,’ which can be conceived as a search for “a theory of knowledge in general.” This seemingly banal historical insight, certainly not incorrect I think, is posed by Alcoff and Potter in terms of the relationality between the history of philosophy and the history of feminism. In this sense, Alcoff and Potter argue that ‘traditional philosophy proper’ is in need of insistent critique because it has been historically dominated by questions of “the nature of knowledge itself, epistemic agency, justification, objectivity, and whether and how epistemology should be naturalized,” questions which obscure the role of gender, politics, and history in the production of knowledge. Alcoff and Potter therefore contend further that the academic site of feminist epistemology is constituted through the feminist interjection of questions about gender, politics, and history (questions they see as outcomes of feminism) into the heart of traditional philosophical discourse.

What Alcoff and Potter do not attend to, though, is the possibility that feminist epistemology is also constituted in relation to global processes. Their definition of history thus seems to be reductive in more than one sense, because it occludes the heterogeneity of the global processes that may contribute to the enabling conditions which constitute the possibility of the production of feminist epistemology such as, for example, global economic relations, the history of imperialism, U.S. overconsumption, etc. However, it is necessary at this early point in my analysis to point out another historical caveat for consideration: that

40 Here I am invoking a strong distinction between feminist epistemology and feminist theory. Transnational feminist theory, in particular, has been attentive to the question of globalization. I will take up some of this scholarship later in this essay.

41 Alcoff and Potter, “Introduction”, 1. This is similar to Patricia Hill Collins’ assertion that in Black feminist theory that epistemology “is the study of the philosophical problems in concepts of knowledge and truth,” (202).

42 Ibid., 1.
globalization discourse in academia is slightly younger than feminist epistemology, that while it has flourished recently, when Feminist epistemologies was published it was much less visible, although it was not, despite what some may claim, completely invisible.\(^4\) This, though, does not seem to me to account for the lack of attention paid by Alcoff and Potter, or the contributors to the volume for that matter, to questions of how knowledge is produced in both local and global contexts. Although Alcoff and Potter convincingly argue that “to be adequate, an epistemology must attend to the complex ways in which values influence knowledge, including the discernible social and political implications of its own analysis,”\(^4\) questions of nationalism, transnationalism, globalization, globality, and neocolonialism do not seem to be on their, or the contributors, list of feminist epistemic priorities. That is, it is not clear which ‘values’ and ‘social and political implications’ of our own analyses Alcoff and Potter want us to attend to.

Despite this confusion, it would simply be ignorant to argue that feminist epistemology and globalization studies are not situated differently within the disciplinary structure of academia, that their content areas are not significantly different, and that their methods, bodies of theory, historical archives, analytical strategies, and critical procedures are not quite different. But it also wouldn’t be entirely off the mark to argue that the absence of questions of globality and related topics in Alcoff and Potter’s anthology is a product of an implicit U.S.-/euro-centrism that produces what are, at least in certain ways, neocolonial feminist epistemologies. Despite the apparent disjuncture between the discourses of feminist epistemology and globalization studies, and despite the traces of a residual neocolonialism within certain feminist epistemologies, it is part of the agenda of this essay to suggest that thinking the politics of knowledge production ethically must mean, in the most robust sense, thinking the politics of globality. It is not just that the topic of ‘globalization’ can be immensely useful for the feminist epistemologist; it is that the feminist epistemologists’ occlusion of globality consolidates neo-colonial power relations by reinforcing retracements that have a long history within traditional masculinist philosophy, not to mention in the history of imperialism. This is not to accuse feminist epistemology of making, as Gayatri Spivak says, “the straight white Christian man of property the ethical universal,”\(^4\) but it is to note the role of the history of masculinism and


imperialism in the constitution of the enabling conditions which produce both feminist knowledges and politics.

Situating “Situatedness”

Vivek Dhareshwar wrote several years ago scholarly criticism in the age of globalization must “examine its own location and site of production.”46 In this spirit, or perhaps in contradistinction to it, there has been a recent trend among feminist theorists in the social and human sciences to characterize knowledge production as a process that is invariably tied to concepts such as ‘positionality,’ ‘locality,’ ‘situatedness,’ and ‘embodiment.’ For example, Alcoff and Potter ask the crucial question, “How does the social position of the subject affect the production of knowledge?”47 Articulating the role of the ethicopolitical in what might be taken as a response to this question, feminist theorist Caren Kaplan proposes that “The struggle for accountability requires a negotiation…[between] positionality and the knowledges produced from those locations [that position subjects].”48 M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, editors of the superb collection Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures, comparably suggest that thinking through transnational feminist practices in globalization requires “grounding analyses in particular, local feminist praxis…but we also need to understand the local in relation to larger, cross-national processes.”49 Not disagreeing with Alexander and Mohanty’s analysis, I nevertheless would point out, following literary critic Bruce Robbins, that the problem with performing the kind of critical work they advocate is that “habits of thought and feeling [are] already shaped and have been shaped by particular collectivities, that are socially and geographically situated, hence both limited and empowered.”50 The predicament of the feminist epistemologist within globality is how to ascertain in what ways and to what ends subjects of knowledge are both specifically limited and empowered by their ‘situatedness.’

The exigency of a being in space that is simultaneously constraining and enabling of certain social, political, and epistemic possibilities is noted by feminist

48 Kaplan, Questions of travel, 169.
epistemologists Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford, who echo Robbins’ claim when they argue that “all our interactions with reality are mediated by conceptual frameworks or discourses, which themselves are historically and socially situated.” What such historically and socially mediated situatedness means—how to address it, how to come to terms with it, what to do with it—however, is an issue they fail to address. Feminist historian of science Donna Haraway, in the oft-cited “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” has made similar, although more conceptually nuanced, arguments by theorizing a somewhat curious doctrine of ‘feminist objectivity.’ Haraway turns traditional notions of objectivity as the “view from nowhere” on their head by reasoning that “feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object,” and, furthermore, that “feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges.”

In a like manner, Sandra Harding contends not just that “all knowledge attempts are socially situated” but, moreover, that knowledge production practices are always “embodied and visible not only in that they start from some particular set of lives, but also because conceptual frameworks are always those of a particular historical moment.” What Harding calls “strong objectivity” is, Harding suggests, a theoretical tool for understanding the critical role that locality plays in knowledge production practices. According to Haraway’s reading of this critical concept:

Strong objectivity insists that both the objects and the subjects of knowledge-making practices must be located. Location is not a listing of adjectives or assigning of labels such as race, sex, and class. Location is not the concrete to the abstract of decontextualization. Location is the always partial, always finite, always fraught play of foreground and background, text and context, that constitutes critical inquiry. Above all Location is not self-evident or transparent. Location is also partial in the sense of being for some worlds and not others.

\[55\] Ibid., 244.
Despite the fact that Haraway’s reading of ‘strong objectivity’ seems to make ‘location’ more of an ambiguous concept than anything else, Haraway’s last claim here—that ‘location is partial in the sense of being for some worlds and not others’—seems to me to point to the curious paradox of recent calls to ‘contextualize’ knowledge production practices through recourse to such concepts as ‘positionality,’ ‘location,’ ‘situatedness,’ and ‘embodiment.’ That is, many feminist epistemologists call for the contextualization of knowledge production without situating their own knowledge production practices within what I am calling ‘globality,’ without performing what Gayatri Spivak calls “a scrupulous declaration of ‘interest’.”

Spivak calls attention to the role of ideology in the articulation of the scholar or intellectual’s enterprises time and time again because Spivak is fundamentally concerned with complicities, be they transnational, neocolonial, feminist, or otherwise. By calling for ‘contextualization’ without situating knowledge production within a frame attuned to the logics of the ideologies which craft scholars as subjects, globality, and neocolonial and transnational complicities, may be occluded once again. By ‘globality’ I simply mean the heterogeneous enabling conditions which constitute the possibility of feminist epistemologists’ knowledge production practices. I am suggesting that calls for ‘positioning,’ ‘localizing,’ ‘situating,’ or ‘embodying’ knowledge production practices can often perform the very move that they so often critique: the gesture of ahistoricism, universalization, and decontextualization. Blindly invoking some vague object called ‘context’—be it in the form of positionality, locality, situatedness, or embodiment—without attending the singularity and historicity of subjects of knowledge, serves not only to misconstrue the enabling conditions which are the conditions of possibility for the production of knowledge; it, also, in Tani E. Barlow’s words, “blunts the promise of criticism more generally.”

This is not to say that ‘positionality,’ ‘locality,’ ‘situatedness,’ and ‘embodiment’ are not useful categories for the scholar concerned with interrogating knowledge production practices in globality; but as the work of Caren Kaplan, Tani E. Barlow, and Judith Butler suggests, these terms have themselves been historically produced through highly specific, discretely singular practices and events, and as such they must be treated with the utmost careful consideration and critical scrutiny, lest they turn into ahistorical qualifiers for abstract, essentialized, homogeneous geographies of identity.

57 Ibid., 110.
58 Barlow, “green blade in the act of being grazed”, 119.
59 See Kaplan, Questions of travel; See also Barlow, “Theorizing Woman : Funü, Guojia, Jiating”; and Judith Butler, Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex" (New York: London, 1992).
It is against such practices of reductionism that Arjun Appadurai, putting the question of knowledge production through locality into the heart of globalization discourse, contends that, because “locality is itself a historical product,” it seems important to identify the knowledge forms through which…locality emerges in a globalized world.” This analysis holds, I believe, for any critical concept intended to make intelligible the always specific and singular production of knowledge: ‘positionality,’ ‘locality,’ ‘situatedness,’ and ‘embodiment’ are just a few concepts whose complex genealogies have yet to be written. One place to begin tracking the genealogies of these concepts would be within the discourse known as ‘feminist epistemology,’ wherein these terms have circulated with great frequency for a number of years. The writing of such genealogies is not, as I remarked above, the labor that I want to undertake here, and I will leave that task for future scholarship to attend to.

Having so far argued that feminist epistemology requires a global frame if it is to attend to its own enabling conditions, I want to continue this line of argument by attempting outline what would be minimally necessary for any attempt at ‘situating’ feminist epistemology within transnationalism. I will then examine how thinking knowledge production though what is known as “transnational feminist cultural studies,” via the work of Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, Gayatri Spivak, and Tani Barlow, opens up possibilities for theorizing the production of knowledge that can work against neocolonial logics of reductionist, ahistorical, universalizing epistemic projects by pointing to transnational and neocolonial feminist complicities.

Situating Feminist Epistemology in the Age of Transnationalism

In various philosophy departments and certain academic feminist departments, a sub-disciplinary ghetto that falls under the name ‘feminist epistemology’—and between the disciplines of feminism and philosophy—has recently gained some notoriety. For Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, this sub-field is an (inter)disciplinary site in tension, and this tension “marks the uneasy alliance of feminism and philosophy.” Alcoff and Potter’s characterization reflects their general understanding that feminism has a relationship, however tenuous it has

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60 Appadurai, Modernity at large, 18.
61 Ibid., 18.
62 By ‘situate,’ I mean place within what I am calling globality.
been at certain historical moments, to the history of philosophy. The relationship of feminist epistemology to the history of philosophy is worth noting once more because, as Alcoff and Potter put it, “those working in feminist epistemology are engaged in a dialogue with one or more traditions in the history of epistemology.” Which is also to say, feminist epistemology is produced through history; it is both a product of and is itself a kind of specific historical practice that is, in William Haver’s words, “an effect of, and subject to, the vicissitudes of history.”

Since the field’s inception roughly twenty years ago, a large body of extraordinary work has been produced. Although classes taught on a regular basis on feminist epistemology are still rare at most institutions, an ever-expanding body of scholarly literature which ‘substantiates’ feminist epistemology as a ‘proper’ area of study is quickly amassing, and not only on university book store shelves, but also on the bookshelves of such large chain-stores as Barns and Noble, Borders, and the online bookseller Amazon.com. This empirical fact should alert scholars and students alike that feminist epistemology does not only have its place among the ranks of those within the confines of the ivory tower who want to inspect the mechanics of the workings of knowledge, gender, and epistemic justification, but that feminist epistemology also has a place, however small or large, in late-capitalist postmodernity. This location has possible relationships to: 1) academic institutions as institutions (of nation-states) that employ people, that have divisions of labor, that produce subjects, that fund research, publishing, and teaching (and that subsequently have made and continue to make possible the discursive production of feminist epistemology); 2) the international division of labor insofar as it is connected to, a product of, or perhaps even partially sustaining of academic institutions (and the divisions of labor in academic institutions); 3) transnational flows of scholarly knowledge production circulating between and through the conduits of educational institutions of the world via the late-capitalist global telecommunications apparatus of transnational publishing, scholarly conferences, and information-transfer technologies; 4) global economic relations; 5) histories of imperialism, colonialism, decolonization, postcoloniality, and neocolonialism.

The question of how feminist epistemology finds itself now situated within some of what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan call the “scattered hegemonies” that

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65 Ibid., 2. Emphasis mine.
66 Haver, The body of this death, 47.
make up late-capitalist postmodernity, the international division of labor, and
global economic relations—the complex geopolitical matrix Donna Haraway
calls “technoscience”—is a question that would require the specific and detailed
consideration of feminist epistemology historically. And this point, remarked
upon above, is also a comment about how the political economic leads towards
the historical, for economies of value-coding can only be produced within
specific historical conditions. I will return to this issue near the end of this paper.

Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies

If feminist political practices do not acknowledge transnational cultural flows, feminist
movements will fail to understand the material conditions that structure women’s lives
in diverse locations. If feminist movements cannot understand the dynamics of these
material conditions, they will be unable to construct an effective opposition to current
economic and cultural hegemonies that are taking new global forms. Without an
analysis of transnational scattered hegemonies that reveal themselves in gender
relations, feminist movements will remain isolated and prone to reproducing the
universalizing gestures of dominant Western cultures.

Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan

As scholars located within the interdisciplinary contexts of women’s studies,
cultural studies, and literary criticism, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan,
editors of the groundbreaking collection Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and
Transnational Feminist Practices, are concerned primarily with theorizing feminist
practices in their heterogeneity. For Grewal and Kaplan, this means that
feminisms must be understood as historical, and that feminist travels are
‘transnational’ in the sense that they have historically crisscrossed, conjoined,
consolidated, and disrupted the boundaries of diverse nations and states, cultures
and economies, and borders of social and political spaces. Grewal and Kaplan
prefer the term ‘transnational’ over the term ‘international’ because the latter
implies staying within the parameters of the nation, while the former implies, at
least at certain times, challenging them. In their words, Grewal and Kaplan use
the term ‘transnational’ “to problematize a purely locational politics of global-
local or center-periphery in favor of…the lines cutting across them.” Their
deconstructive bent is telling here, for it stresses the articulation of relationality
as opposed to static notions of unchanging difference or essential identity.

68 Haraway, Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium, 3.
70 Ibid., 13.
Working within the interstices of international feminist theory, Marxism, postcolonial studies, and poststructuralism, Grewal and Kaplan’s is a theoretical practice that seeks to negotiate between these discourses without reducing them to a coherent master theory.\(^71\) Undertaking projects that situate feminism in relation to the postmodern, the postcolonial, the neocolonial, and the geopolitical, these scholars refuse to “choose among economic, cultural, and political concerns.”\(^72\) Consistently challenging the “inadequate and inaccurate binary divisions”\(^73\) that characterize much of the scholarship within the humanities and social sciences, they articulate a feminist framework that takes seriously “the methodological imperative that brings together gender, political economy, the international division of labor, and, crucially because of where we are located, a critical understanding of the role of academic institutional production.”\(^74\) Their task is, as they put it, to make visible “the conflicts and dependencies that structure a multinational world of neo- and postcolonialisms,” while at the same time confronting the various roles of feminisms in the management and containment of diversity.\(^75\) Grewal and Kaplan continuously ask poststructuralist questions such as “What is being consolidated [in a given practice], and who is being served though such retrenchments?”\(^76\) That is, their concern is with the heterogeneous relations of power and knowledge that constitute the contemporary historical moment I have been thus far been calling globality.\(^77\)

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 359.
\(^{74}\) Grewal and Kaplan, “Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies”, 357.
\(^{75}\) Ibid., 349.
\(^{76}\) Ibid., 355.
\(^{77}\) It might not be inappropriate to note, even though it is well known, that the term ‘power-knowledge’ comes originally from Michel Foucault, Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977). In brief, for Foucault, “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (27). Power-knowledge thus conceived functions both specifically and strategically in different ways in different (con)texts. See also Michel Foucault, Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980); The history of sexuality (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews (Ithaca, N. Y., Cornell University Press, 1977). If the task of the feminist epistemologists is to identify the “faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers [of power-knowledge] that threaten the fragile inheritor” of history, and to underscore the complexity of “the subtle, singular, and subindividual marks that might possibly intersect in them [the faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers of history] to form a network that is difficult to unravel” (Language, counter-memory, practice, 81–82), then an awareness of the radical nature of historical heterogeneity is necessary. In terms a strict discursive frame, the point is that, in Thomas Keenan’s words, “As much as one might like to ignore this linguistic moment, it cannot be evaded: the differential relations of power-knowledge are entangled within, not without, discourse, made possible by linguistic structures and events.” See Keenan, Fables of responsibility: aberrations and predicaments in ethics and politics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 151.
What they name “transnational feminist cultural studies” can be understood as a methodology or a practice of scholarship: what Foucault would have called an ethos perhaps. It is not characterized by any set of foundational claims, nor by any unitary grand theory of the social or the political, yet it takes, as its point of departure, the problematic of feminist epistemic production in its historical specificity. Transnational feminist cultural studies “recognize[s] that practices are always negotiated in both a connected and a specific field of conflict and contradiction and that feminist agendas must be viewed as a formulation and reformulation that is contingent on historically specific conditions.”

Pinpointing the importance of poststructuralism in transnational feminist cultural studies, Grewal and Kaplan argue that “Theories of opposition that rely on unified subjects of difference and metaphysics of presence and voice cannot create alliances across differences and conflicts within a context of imperialism and decolonization.” Here, stressing that a more complex set of feminist analytical strategies and critical practices is needed—one that does not assimilate heterogeneity to an essential, ahistorical sameness—Grewal and Kaplan underscore the manners in which theory is itself a practice, the ways that practice is theoretical, and the irreducible inseparability of theory and practice as the constitutive condition of any ontology or epistemology. In their words, “What we need are critical practices that link our understanding of postmodernity, global economic structures, problematics of nationalism, issues of race and imperialism, critiques of global feminism, and emergent patriarchies.”

Creating such linkages, as Grewal and Kaplan contend, makes feminism, Marxism, and poststructuralism the most adequate discourses to use as theoretical resources, so long as, that is, no discourse is allowed to become a master theory that dominates the others. Mediating between diverse discourses requires relentlessly putting into question the basic categories through which we understand the world. It is a practice of persistent resistance against any attempts to naturalize the knowledge field. Transnational feminist cultural studies is therefore a mode of analysis that questions:

any emphasis on similarities, universalisms, or essentialisms in favor of articulating links among the diverse, unequal, and uneven relations of historically constituted subjects. Within humanist paradigms, similarities imply bonding between full subjects. Linkages suggest networks of economic and
social relations that occur within postmodernity vis-a-vis global capital and its effects. Linkage does not require reciprocity or sameness or commonality. It can and must acknowledge differentials of power and participation in cultural production, but it also can and must trace the connections among seemingly disparate elements such as various religious fundamentalisms, patriarchies, and nationalisms.82

What Grewal and Kaplan articulate in the above passage is what I think Tani E. Barlow would call “a feminist politics rooted in difference without identity.”83 It is a kind of politics, heavily influenced by both Foucauldian and Derridian strains of poststructuralism, that understands the production of historical subjects through what is by definition a field mediated by difference, that is, historical heterogeneity as *différance.*84 As T. Minh-Ha Trinh so eloquently put it quite some time ago, “Difference undermines the very idea of identity.”85 This is not to say that Grewal and Kaplan simply renounce the categorical imperative the discursive imposes upon us; discursivity is what enables them, therefore they must negotiate with it.86 But they retain a radical skepticism against reductionist, homogenizing gestures or modes of analysis, be they feminist or otherwise, because such analytical methods have proven inadequate to the task of theorizing feminism transnationally.87

According to Grewal and Kaplan, we must also retain an insurgent distrust of theories of the transnational which do not attend to how gendering logics operate

82 Ibid., 359.
84 For an explication of *différance*, see Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of philosophy.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); also see Spivak, “Feminism and Deconstruction Again: Negotiations” in *Outside the teaching machine* (especially pp. 132-33) for a thought-provoking discussion of this concept in relation to feminism as displacement. Briefly, for Derrida, ‘*différer*’ means both ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer’ (7). On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernability; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporizing that puts off until ‘later’ what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible (8). When I refer to the ‘heterogeneity as *différance,*’ I mean to indicate the epistemological impossibility of there ever being a ‘closure’ of history. History, in this sense, is thought of in terms of an open, unpredictable, unstable horizon. In terms of how I understand history as discursive and discourse as historical, heterogeneity should be thought in terms of radically incalculable, but not wholly untraceable, movements of difference—what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have called “lines of articulation” and “lines of flight” (*A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987], 3)—and these movements make history/history writing that seeks to follow non-reductionist logics a difficult, complex, and urgent undertaking. See Barlow’s “Theorizing Woman: Funu, Guojia, Jiating” on this issue.
85 Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other,* 93.
86 I take this argument from Spivak, *The postcolonial critic,* 101. In Spivak’s terms, “feminism must negotiate with phallocentrism because it is what enables us” (147).
87 See Barlow, “Theorizing woman: funu, guojia, jiating”, on this point.
in their historical specificity. Arguing for “an international frame that addresses asymmetries of power and complex constructions of agency,” Grewal and Kaplan call for a methodology that neither reduces the subjects in a given study to objects, nor takes the knowledge field created with these subjects to be unmediated or nonideological. Scholarly practices are in every way ideological. This is because scholars, like anyone else, have vested interests tangled up in their epistemic and ontological practices.

Grewal and Kaplan read Gayatri Spivak’s work as exemplary of the kind of analysis they advocate. As they note, “By bringing together Marxism, poststructuralism, and feminist perspectives within a comparative study of the first and third worlds, Spivak radically rewrites the paradigms of modernity and postmodernity.” They continue, “Rather than follow the path of retrenchment and consolidation, Spivak has used moments of crisis and contradiction to theorize the relationships between cultural and economic value systems.”

Taking up the topic of this relationality between cultural and economic value systems and structures, I read Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* as an example of a kind of thinking of the politics of knowledge production in globality that displaces easy binary oppositions between the cultural and the economic.

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89 Ibid., 356.
90 Ibid.
Gayatri Spivak and the Question of Globality

Persistently to critique a structure that one cannot not (wish to) inhabit is the deconstructive stance. Transnational feminism is neither revolutionary tourism, nor mere celebration of testimony. It is rather through the route of feminism that economic theories of social choice and philosophical theories of ethical preference can be complicated by cultural material.\(^91\)

Gayatri Spivak

For those readers familiar with Spivak, it will be no surprise if I suggest that a plausible gesture would be to begin with a consideration of “the question of the text.”\(^92\) Spivak is by most disciplinary standards classified (and self-identified) as a literary critic. In Spivak’s first publication, a translation of Derrida’s *Of grammatology* that includes a long introductory essay, Spivak tells us that “text[s] have no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end. Each act of reading the “text” is a preface to the next.”\(^93\) Spivak goes on, “if the assumption of responsibility for one’s discourse leads to the conclusion that all conclusions are genuinely provisional and therefore inconclusive, that all origins are similarly unoriginal, that responsibility itself must cohabit with frivolity, this need not be cause for gloom.”\(^94\) This remark may sound familiar to readers of Spivak’s more recent work, whom will know all too well that “the question of the text” has been one of the central concerns of Spivak’s illustrious career. How should one responsibly read texts? What defines a text, anyway? And what conditions enable the reading of texts? These questions may well be the driving force behind the practically endless list of essays, books, papers, talks, speeches, and interviews that have been published under Spivak’s name. Spivak reports again and again from the front lines of the wars waged over the politics of reading (which are, in a certain way, also the politics of what Spivak calls “worlding”\(^95\) that the responsible critic can learn much from deconstructive, Marxist, and feminist

\(^91\) Spivak, *Outside in the teaching machine*, 284.

\(^92\) I am here paraphrasing the first sentence of Spivak’s famous introduction to Derrida’s *Of grammatology* (ix). See Spivak, “Translators Introduction,” in Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). I should note that Spivak’s original sentence concerns the relationship between Derrida and “the question of the preface” (ix), not “the question of the text.” It would seem to be more than a coincidence that the preface to *A critique of postcolonial reason* contains, in a certain way, the entirety of the book.

\(^93\) Ibid., xii.

\(^94\) Ibid., xiii.

\(^95\) Spivak defines “worlding” geographically, as in “the worlding of a world on uninscribed earth...a violent concept metaphor of violation” (*A critique of postcolonial reason*, 211-12). This concept is particularly useful for understanding the axiomatics of imperialism. Both hermeneutic and epistemological, it also alludes to an interpretive model of for understanding the production of knowledge as a process of inscription.
strategies of analysis and practice. Spivak’s latest book brings together these various strategies of reading in the service of examining “the structures of the production of postcolonial reason”. 96

These structures are, as Spivak tells us, “of heterogeneous provenance”. 97 It is in examining these structures that, in a nuanced and meticulously rigorous manner, this text traces Spivak’s “practitioner’s progress from colonial discourse studies to transnational cultural studies”. 98 This journey takes Spivak through, across, and in between the vast discursive terrains of philosophy, literature, history, and culture. By intervening in current debates over feminism, deconstruction, Marxism, globalization, transnationalism, postcoloniality, ethicopolitics, cultural studies, and neo-colonialism, Spivak argues for a different reading of “the vanishing present”. 99 The question which preoccupies Spivak during these travels is: “what subaltern is strategically excluded from organized resistance”? 100 Spivak’s answer to this question comes in heavily coded language by way of a peculiar term: the ‘native informant.’ Spivak articulates the figure Spivak calls the “Native Informant” 101 as the stage for the irreducible difféance that is the playing out of what Spivak calls the “axiomatics of imperialism”. 102 As Spivak’s book teaches us, these axiomatics are also of heterogeneous provenance. (Before I proceed with my consideration of how Spivak situates knowledge production in globality, I should note, from the start, the arguments put forward, theses advanced, and narratives stitched within this vast textual labyrinth are, like what Spivak calls “networks of power/desire/interest,” “so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counter-productive—a persistent critique is needed”. 103 In this spirit, to attempt do justice to A critique of postcolonial reason (an (im)possible task) would be, I believe, to persistently rethink the complex web of textual threads that constitute the book’s four hundred and thirty one pages in a manner that is attendant to the lessons that are housed within its pages, but that also subjects them to rigorous and concomitant critique; it would be to practice what Spivak calls, in a word, autocritique. As I can only begin to barely approach this task in the space that follows, I must admit up front that this analysis will by necessity be inadequate to the task at hand.)

96 Ibid., xii.
97 Ibid., x.
98 Ibid., ix-x.
99 Ibid., x.
100 Ibid., xi.
101 Ibid., x.
102 Ibid., 340.
103 Ibid., 249.
It might not be all that off the mark to say that Spivak is concerned with relationality in the most fundamental sense, how relationships between, for example, objects and subjects of knowledge are constituted, how relationships between flows of capital and the manipulation of classes are produced, how universalist feminism relationally substantiates neocolonialism, how the ethics of alterity can stand in as a politics of identity through the reinscription of the Self/Other structure, how binary oppositions substantiate each other. In the first chapter, “Philosophy,” Spivak lays out the figure, impossible perspective, or “unacknowledgeable moment” called “the native informant” in its relation to the axiomatics of imperialism as a necessary foreclosure. Spivak’s understanding of foreclosure comes from Lacanian psychoanalysis. Foreclosure is understood as “the rejection of an affect”. Psychoanalysis here is grasped as a method of “reading the pre-emergence (Raymond Williams term) of narrative as ethical instantiation”. In other words, Spivak is fundamentally concerned with the production of the Self and the Other and this production’s (constitutive?) relation to “ethical responsibility”. With this in mind, Spivak dockets “the encrypting of the name of the “native informant” as the name of Man—a name that carries the inauguring affect of being human.”

Decoding Spivak’s complex language into my own, Spivak’s argument concerns what we might call the ‘becoming human’ or anthropomorphic moment of the instantiation of ethical responsibility. Spivak is therefore attempting to highlight the traces of exclusion that inhibit (inhibit) the production of humanity through ethical relationality. The term ‘Man’ is not insignificant in this light, and it serves to point toward the feminist direction that Spivak’s arguments will take in later chapters. For now, suffice it to say that Spivak’s small foray into psychoanalysis hints at the claim advanced in the fourth chapter that “the ‘truth of culture’…is the battle for the production of legitimizing cultural explanations”. Put differently, this is to say that Spivak, following Lacan, conceives of foreclosure as an expulsion from the Symbolic that reappears in the Real. But of course, as Lacan patiently insisted, the Real is forever inaccessible to us. Spivak’s book then, should not be taken as making claims upon the Real, upon the ‘truth of culture,’ but should be understood as a meditation on the impossibility of making claims about the Real ‘truth of culture.’

104 Ibid., 4.
105 Ibid., 5.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., 340
108 Ibid., 5.
The native informant is foreclosed by the axiomatics of imperialism because it is both needed and rejected, or, rather, it is both disclosed and effaced by the logics of “colonialism proper as it displaces itself into neocolonialism”. The thrust of Spivak’s argument comes from the fact that, in tracing how the native informant forms part of the textual weave “for a narrative of crisis management”, Spivak is able to chart the narrative of (neo)imperialism as the history of the vanishing present. It is worth pointing out here that Spivak also focuses on the appropriation of the position of the native informant by the emergent migrant or postcolonial. This masquerade is a further example of how “third-worldist /colonial-discursivist criticism unwittingly “(con)states,” in the form of an alibi, what neo-colonialism is performing and has already performed”. This masquerade is also a form of the sanctioned ignorance that Spivak’s ceaselessly warns against ignoring. But instead of just slinging mud, to use Spivak’s term, Spivak urges us to attempt to “discover a constructive rather than disabling complicity” between our own positionality (whatever that may be?) and the foreclosure of the native informant.

Throughout the first chapter, then, Spivak continually redraws attention to how, particularly within the new North/South divide, the native informant, and specifically “the poorest woman of the South”, is foreclosed through the establishment and (re)inscription of normative (Eurocentric, patriarchal, universalist feminist, or otherwise) conditions of being human (the production of humanness that Pheng Cheah describes by his use of the term ‘anthropomorphism’). I will not here go into Spivak’s dense reading of Kant, Hegel, and Marx, but it is not of the last importance that I take the time to point out that Spivak’s analyses of their texts exemplify a modulation between making visible the disclosure and effacement, the foreclosure, of the native informant, and, therefore, the production and “formation of the European ethico-political subject”. That is, Spivak demonstrates how the axiomatics of imperialism are at work both in the deepest nooks and crannies of the ‘great texts’ of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also in the taken for granted schema that divides or “worlds” the world into three worlds, or, now, more precisely, the North and

109 Ibid., 3.
110 Ibid., 7.
111 Ibid., 2, note 1.
112 Ibid., 4.
113 Ibid., 3-4.
114 Ibid., 6.
116 Spivak, A critique of postcolonial reason, 9.
the South as the constitutive geography (both tropological and literal, ultimately catachrestic though) of globality.

In Chapter two, “Literature,” Spivak looks at “the vicissitudes of the native informant as a figure in literary representation.” This chapter brings feminist issues to the forefront of thinking narrativity, marginality, culture, and globality, as do the remaining two chapters. In an outstanding investigation of the figuration of women in the literary enclave, Spivak argues that “when publishing women are from the dominant “culture,” they sometimes share, with male authors, the tendency to create an inchoate “other” (often female), who is not even a native informant but a piece of material evidence once again establishing the Northwestern European subject as ‘the same’.” In this light, the continuing current of Spivak’s critique of universalist feminism, offered most strongly in the final chapter, can be comprehended by way of its disclosure of the foreclosure and (partial) erasure of the native informant in different (con)texts. For example, when reading Bronte, Spivak tells us that “what is at stake, for feminist individualism in the age of imperialism, is precisely the making of human beings, the constitution and “interpellation” of the subject not only as individual but also as ‘individualist’.” Invoking the production of normative subjects under the reign of the axiomatics of imperialism, Spivak once again returns us to the (im)possible perspective of the native informant so as to make visible (an)other narrative of the production of the vanishing present.

Reading Bronte, Mary Shelley, Baudelaire, Kipling, Rhys, Mahasweta, and Cotzee figuring coloniality and postcoloniality, Spivak underscores the “epistemic violence of imperialism,” as well as the epistemic violence of Eurocentric universalist feminism, not to mention that of third worldist feminism, as complicit with neocolonialism today through the invocation and uncritical celebration of globality and hybridity without the force of a political economic perspective. "If Feminism takes its place with ethnic studies as American studies, or postcolonialism as migrant hybridism, the South is once again in the shadow, the diasporic stands in for the native informant.” Stressing that “literature remains singular and unverifiable”, Spivak interrogates the politics

117 Ibid., 112.
118 Ibid., 113.
119 Ibid., 116.
120 Ibid., 129.
121 Ibid., 147
122 Ibid., 164
123 Ibid., 169.
124 Ibid., 175.

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of marginality studies as they intersect with multiculturalist and postcolonialist struggles, and, once again, directs our attention towards the margin, a move that has a long history in Spivak’s career.¹²⁵ Spivak’s innovative reading of Mahasweta and Cotzee are particularly moving in their attention to the ways in which different types of institutionality figure in the production of subjects. This, I believe, encapsulates Spivak’s relentless attention to the enabling conditions which produce the contexts in which literature (as well as philosophy, history, culture, and feminism for that matter) is made.

This attention to enabling conditions surfaces again in the third chapter entitled “History.” Here, Spivak faces the subject of ethics again by arguing “a critical intimacy with deconstruction might help metropolitan feminist celebration of the female to acknowledge a responsibility toward the trace of the other, not to mention toward other struggles.”¹²⁶ Spivak urges “people of our disciplinary outlines or decoupages [to concentrate] on documenting and theorizing the itinerary of the consolidation of Europe as sovereign subject, indeed sovereign and Subject, [so that] we would [be able to] point at an alternative geography of the “worlding” of today’s global South”.¹²⁷ Reading Hayden White and Dominique LaCapra on the philosophy of history, Spivak attends to the relation between literature and the archive as “a crosshatching of condensations, a traffic in telescoped symbols”,¹²⁸ suggesting that the historian and the literary critic can indeed learn from each other, particularly if they are attentive to the strategies of deconstructive reading, as long as they don’t uncritically valorize the vocation of the other. Taking this strategy to a reading of two different historical cases, the Rani of Simur and that of Sati, Spivak once more locates the foreclosure of the sexed subaltern as strategically necessary to the mechanics of the imperialist project. Included in this section is a heavily revised version of “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

I do not wish to go into a detailed consideration of Spivak’s critique of Foucault and Deleuze here for reasons of time and economy, but a few words are certainly necessary. I should note that Spivak’s reinscribing of the importance of the concept of ideology is useful for situating political economy and cultural critique within each other’s domains, not merely side by side (this is recurrent Spivakian move). I should like to add that Spivak’s reading of “the track of ideology” in the Foucault-Deleuze conversation lays out many lessons for intellectuals to take

¹²⁶ Spivak, A critique of postcolonial reason, 198.
¹²⁷ Ibid., 200.
¹²⁸ Ibid., 205.
note of, among them, the importance of closely tracking the mediated nature of knowledge production, the non-transparency of discourse, and the role that the international division of labor plays in intellectual production. This last issue brings us to Spivak’s repeated insistence that the position of the intellectual as investigating subject be made subject to autocritique in a way that does not consolidate the project of (neo)imperialism through the reproduction of the self-sameness of the investigating subject or the investigating subject’s construction of the Other. In other words, Spivak’s argument is for changing the politics of scholarship, and is still, alas, much needed today. In Spivak’s much more nuanced summary of what is at stake here: “In the face of the possibility that the intellectual is complicity in the persistent constitution of the Other as the Self’s shadow, a possibility of political practice for the intellectual would be to put the economic “under erasure,” to see the economic factor as irreducible as it reinscribes the social text, even as it is erased, however imperfectly, when it claims to be the final determinant or the transcendental signified.”

This brings us to the subaltern. Spivak advances the thesis that “If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow”. Taking this argument to the theatre of globality proper, Spivak writes “in contemporary globalization, the mechanism of “aid” is supported by the poorest women of the south, who form the base of what I have elsewhere called globe-girdling struggles (ecology, resistance to “population control”), where the boundary between global and local becomes indeterminate. This is the ground of the emergence of the new subaltern…To confront this group is not only to represent (vertreten) them globally in the absence of infrastructural support, but also to learn to represent (darstellen) ourselves”. I cannot comment here on the importance of this passage for an integral reading of Spivakian politics. However, what this means in the face of Spivak’s contention that “knowledge of the other subjects is theoretically impossible” is an issue that cannot be left unremarked upon. Is Spivak purposely contradicting the earlier contention? While Spivak cautions that “to ignore or invade the subaltern today is, willy-nilly, to continue the imperialist project; in the name of modernization; in the interest of globalization”, perhaps the stakes of Spivak’s argument are not only those of ethics. That is, Spivak argues that “it is important to acknowledge our complicity in the

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129 Ibid., 266.
130 Ibid., 274.
131 Ibid., 276.
132 Ibid., 282
133 Ibid., 290.
mutiong”\textsuperscript{134} of the subaltern precisely because that is the only way to even entertain the (persistently deferred) (im)possibility of a future dialogue with the subaltern. Here we must be wary of making the subaltern speak as a way of silencing the subaltern yet again.

In the final chapter, “Culture,” Spivak examines the structures of the production of ‘postmodernism’ by way of reading Fredric Jameson. Reading the postmodern against the modern (and against the grain), Spivak tells us that “One of the…imperatives of deconstructive practice is to fix the critical glance not specifically at the putative identity of the two poles in a binary opposition, but at the hidden ethico-political agenda that drives the differentiation between the two”.\textsuperscript{135} Keeping this in mind, let us look at the following passage on “the axiomatics of imperialism”\textsuperscript{136}; “Why are they operative? Because the lines of contact between imperialism and de-colonization on the one hand, and the march of world capitalism on the other, constitute the most encompassing crisis of narrative today, the problem of producing plausible stories so business can go on as usual”.\textsuperscript{137} Here, tackling what Spivak has elsewhere called the ‘financialization of the globe’ head on, Spivak returns us to what is by now a familiar argument: “Even if history is a grand narrative, my point is that the subject position of the native informant, crucial yet foreclosed, is also historically and therefore geopolitically inscribed”.\textsuperscript{138} In this light, the general subject matter this chapter is also well-known to those engaged in the current debates of globalization, transnationality, and international feminism, that of thinking the politics of globality.

In this contested arena of cultural, historical, economic, and political inquiry, Spivak raises the seemingly simple but deceptively complex question: “In what interest are differences defined?”\textsuperscript{139} More specifically, Spivak asks: “In what interest, to regulate what sort of relationships, is the globe evoked?”.\textsuperscript{140} Pointing our attention to the politics of the setting of agendas—be they local, global, national, or transnational—Spivak implicitly broaches the question of role of ideology in shaping the politics of globality. This is another way of asking how the borders, limits, and frontiers of globality get demarcated, how they get

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 309.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 332.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 340.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 344.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 357.
\textsuperscript{140} Spivak, “Cultural Talks in the Hot Peace”, 329.
constituted, how they are regulated, by whom and in whose interests, and how they may be rearticulated—all the while keeping in mind the costs and benefits, and the necessity and usefulness, of “taxonomies of culture”. As Spivak points out, Development has increasingly become a very peculiar kind of a taxonomy of the mechanics and politics of globality. Spivak is worth quoting at length:

The general ideology of global Development is racist paternalism (and alas, increasingly, sororalism); its general economics capital-intensive investment; its broad politics the silencing or resistance and of the subaltern as the rhetoric of their protest is constantly appropriated.  

Spivak’s taxonomy of thinking the politics of globality proposes the thesis that “globality is invoked in the interest of the financialization of the globe, or globalization”. In order to plausibly argue for this, Spivak presents a critical reading of Marshall McLuhan and Jean-Francois Lyotard that locates their own politics of thinking globality as “provid[ing] the narrative of development (globalization)-democratization (U.S. mission) an alibi”. Attentive to the uneven effects of neocolonial globalization, Spivak’s argument is both a critique of such alibis and is also an account of contemporary globe-girdling movements that can work in the service of refuting and destabilizing the crude cultural relativism of the received narrative of Development. Underscoring the possibilities of resistance to “the financialization of the globe” fostered by these globe-girdling movements, movements for ecological, environmental, and reproductive justice, Spivak cautions us against forgetting the place of “ethical singularity” in the complex and sensitive task of persistently (re)thinking the politics globality. In Spivak’s words:

Ethical singularity is approached when responses flow from both sides. Otherwise, the idea that if the person I am doing good to resembles me and has my rights, he or she will be better off, does not begin to approach an ethical relation (nor, of course, does an attitude of unqualified admiration for the person as an example of his or her culture).
In this sense, thinking globality (or transnationality for that matter) means, for Spivak, recognizing that as “the barriers between fragile national economies and international capital are being removed, the possibility of social redistribution in the so-called developing states, uncertain at best, is disappearing even further.”\(^{149}\)

Speaking of globality in terms of the links between the power lines of local developers with the forces of global capital and the common thread of profound ecological loss, the loss of forest and river as foundation of life, Spivak highlights the neocolonial complicity generated by the all too common interests of development agencies and divergent nation-states in global financialization no matter what the (ecological, ethical, human, etc.) cost. This timely critique is all the more necessary during the current historical moment, wherein “The blame for the exhaustion of the world’s resources is placed on Southern population explosion, and hence upon the poorest women in the South. This in turn—making women an issue—is taken as a justification for so-called ‘aide’, and deflects attention from Northern overconsumption: the two faces of globalization.”\(^{150}\)

Spivak’s spirited feminist critique of the invocation of globality in the name of women and development is also two sided. It pinpoints the dangers of a metropolitan feminist universalism as well as deconstructs the breach between home and work in the homework economy. More broadly, Spivak’s point is that it can be productive to see “resistance to Development as a strategy of alternative development”\(^{151}\). This, then, is the strength of Spivak’s final chapter: Spivak persistently denies the foreclosure of reexamining, through rigorous critique, the politics of globality, all the while pointing to the limits of this very critique itself. In other words, Spivak situates the politics of development in globality (or globality in development) as the fast-paced financialization of the globe because this underscores the crucial role that political economy can play in a feminist deconstructive analysis. And it is at this point at which Spivak argues that “The village form that must teach us to make the globe a world. We must learn to learn. Cultural studies is otherwise only a symptom.”\(^{152}\) This not so simple point also reminds us that, in the house of cultural studies as in the house of geopolitics, taking globality for granted under the rubric of its supposed givenness, what we might call its own peculiar kind of ‘common sense,’ for example, the general will to sanctioned ignorance of the ethicopolitical stakes generally swept under the carpet by UN feminism and the World Bank alike in the interest of neocolonial development, can be akin to forgetting place of the

\(^{149}\) Ibid., 380
\(^{150}\) Ibid., 385
\(^{151}\) Ibid., 390.
\(^{152}\) Ibid., 343.
ethical in the economic. Which is also to say, such gestures can become the kind of alibis for development that Spivak so forcefully urges us critique and resist. A feminism that does not make room for a vision of the economic in the ethical (or cultural) and the ethical in the economic is, wittingly or unwittingly, part of the problem.

The Problems of History Writing and the (Re)turn of Marginality

the sort of critique that ignores the centrality of female production and the relation of the developed and developing worlds echoes through the mindless division of labor between cultural studies and economic studies. To build on [Spivak’s] point, a feminism that ignores contemporary history and the problems that the historiographic heritage imposes becomes, in the last instance, part of the problem.  

Tani E. Barlow

According to feminist historian/historiographer Tani E. Barlow, “What is useful in the Marxism of Gayatri Spivak is the confusion of subjects and objects, culture and economy: what gets to be a subject and how it gets that status is unclarified”. Barlow continues, “The question of indeterminacy requires that each subject be specified as a subject of something and, furthermore, that the question of the production of human beings through the vaginas of women be moved to the center of any inquiry into global exploitation or gendered oppression”. The complexity of Barlow’s nuanced argument here should not be understated. Keeping in mind Barlow’s deconstructive feminist stance, it is important to emphasize that Barlow seeks to displace easy binary oppositions of culture and economy through tracking the historical singularity of subject predication. Barlow’s preoccupation with subject predication, therefore, allows her to extend Spivak’s point by arguing that feminism must be able to deconstruct the breach between culture and economy, and that it can do this through charting its own historical enabling conditions. Barlow thereby displaces common understandings of ‘history’ in order to argue for a richer, more complex form feminist theorizing. What makes this displacement so powerful is Barlow’s attention to three topics: late capital, flexible bodies, and critical intelligibility.

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154 Ibid., 142.  
155 Ibid.
In “green blade in the act of being grazed’: Late Capital, Flexible Bodies, Critical Intelligibility,” Barlow situates the divergent logics of national formation in late capital, bodies in political economy, and competing claims on Enlightenment heritage in relation to feminist history writing projects. As a historian of gender whose work focuses on East Asia, Barlow is simultaneously concerned with the economic, political, and cultural transformations that are now underway in contemporary “Asia.” By taking up questions of heterogeneity and anomaly, Barlow rewrites feminist historical practice as singularity, thereby challenging and disarming universalizing, neocolonizing moves written into much work on ‘globality’ and ‘development.’

Simultaneously intervening in debates over the nature of history as a discipline and the politics of feminist knowledge production, Barlow argues the thesis that “What constitutes history are singular subjects and irreducible, incongruent specificities that may neither be reduced to a common denominator nor excluded from consideration when uncritically mobilized into story form. History is never ‘just narrative’.” With this in mind, Barlow takes up the problematic of how to write histories of the relations between political economy, bodily materiality, and competing heritages of critical thought without reducing them to a common epistemic foundation. Also interested in displacing universalizations of gender, be they feminist or otherwise, Barlow suggests “that the political deconstruction of “women” (as “women” has been predicated at various sites in the globalizing economy) must be undertaken, but that this operation must be extended into the arena of historiography itself…critical histories must not repudiate heterogeneity or reduce to a commonality those singularities embedded in the empirical archives”.

This argument is illustrative for it demonstrates what nonreductionist gender history can look like. In “green blade in the act of being grazed’, ” we find a roadmap for what Barlow calls “thinking towards relational logics”. Relational logics “articulate rather than define geopolitical entities. They describe entities as these come into being—they operate a politics of predication—rather than positively fixing stable, substantial artifacts”. Relational logics “focus on how relational and provisional singular entities… operate in a field of unfathomable complexity”. Using relational logics, Barlow argues that “theoretical work is

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156 Ibid., 136.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid., 130.
159 Ibid., 132
160 Ibid.
historically explicable, which is to say it should be understood in terms of its presuppositions”.  

Thinking through knowledge production using relational logics thus can be a way of using nonreductionist logics to articulate how knowledge production practices are themselves singular and historical.

But such an analysis may sidestep a crucial issue Spivak raised some twenty years ago called the ‘irreducibility of the margins.’ What Spivak called “the irreducibility of the margin in all explanations” has to do with how explanation, as that process by which analytic concepts, conceptual schemas, and critical frames—in other words, theory—normalizes and polices the realms of the thinkable in domains of knowledge. That is to say, Spivak’s thesis is that “all explanations…claim their centrality in terms of an excluded margin”, and this excluded margin, Spivak insists, constitutes the possibility of a given knowledge-regime’s self-centralization. As such, the irreducibility of the margin marks, for Spivak, the decisive moment of strategy in the production of theory and practice (if that distinction is even useful any longer?) wherein, according to Chandra Mohanty, “the central issue, then, is not one of merely acknowledging difference; rather, the more difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged.”

The question that Mohanty raises for Spivak’s theory of irreducible marginality—the question of what kind of margins are excluded in a given (con)text—can be transposed for my purposes into the following question that I have been implicitly addressing throughout the body of this essay: How can feminist epistemologists think knowledge production practices in their heterogeneity in globality? In Spivak’s celebrated and controversial 1988 essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak argued that epistemic orders, as well as “networks of power/desire/interest,” “are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive—a persistent critique is needed.” Ten years later, in Barlow’s “green blade in the act of being grazed”, Barlow recapitulated this argument by contending that “it is still necessary, if perhaps

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161 Ibid., 129.
163 Ibid., 380.
166 Ibid., 272.
banal, to establish that no historian can reduce to a single epistemic order the
diverse experiences of colonial modernity or capitalist postmodernity”.¹⁶⁷ These
arguments should not be taken lightly, particularly if it is the case that they are
forgotten all too often inside the corridors of the teaching machine.¹⁶⁸ But what
specifically remains to be done once these arguments have been posed, however,
is not yet entirely clear. One strategy, proposed here, is to use transnational
feminist cultural studies as a methodology that situates knowledge production
within globality by paying critical attention to the specific historical processes
whereby knowledge is produced and (sometimes) becomes globalized. Both
Barlow and Spivak, in their respective ways, have suggested different scholarly
methodologies that address this question of strategy.

On the one hand, if history is fundamentally heterogeneous then historians
should take Barlow’s advice and “work with singularity… [without] leaving in
place reductionist explanatory frameworks”.¹⁶⁹ For Spivak however, an attention
to history will not save scholarship be it in feminist epistemology or elsewhere
from reductionism; for Spivak repeatedly insists, as we saw, that “all
explanations… claim their centrality in terms of an excluded margin”.¹⁷⁰ For
Barlow, conversely, not all history has to be either explanatory or exclusionary;
and furthermore, writing history as what Barlow calls “interrogative (as opposed
to narrative) histories”¹⁷¹ can be nonexclusinary insofar as it is nonreductive. In
Barlow’s conceptualization, interrogative history is a form of “history writing
that employs relational logics and foregrounds a politics of predication”.¹⁷² It asks
questions like, “What processes bring subjects into historical and political
predication?”¹⁷³ because such questions reveal “the historical possibilities that are
predicating subjects, the types of subjects that are surfacing to visibility in the
contemporary archive, [and] the ways these subjects behave”¹⁷⁴ without
“positively fixing stable, substantial artifacts like ‘woman,’ ‘individuals,’ [or]
’nations,’”¹⁷⁵ in any kind of universal, ahistorical, transcendental sameness. That
is, interrogative history is a way of writing histories of différence, a way of writing
history without foreclosing the possibility that the history of the future

¹⁶⁷ Barlow, “green blade in the act of being grazed”, 121.
¹⁶⁸ I am referencing the title of Spivak’s Outside in the teaching machine.
¹⁶⁹ Barlow, “green blade in the act of being grazed”, 119.
¹⁷¹ Ibid., 132.
¹⁷² Ibid., 134.
¹⁷³ Ibid., 143.
¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 132.
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anterior\textsuperscript{176} will have been both deferred and different indefinitely. Interrogative history is therefore by definition a provisional enterprise because it accounts for the extreme instability of historicity, historical consciousness, and history writing projects.\textsuperscript{177} History writing projects as such can be “incongruent, though not incommensurate”\textsuperscript{178} because they focus on “situated singularities”.\textsuperscript{179} The ‘situatedness’ of such singularities is entirely historical, which is to say, contingent upon specific conditions. In other words, interrogative history is “a way of retaining surrounding heterogeneity (insofar as this is thinkable) while fixing opportunity on a finite and singular project.”\textsuperscript{180}

This is to say that, in a certain sense, in Barlow’s formulation there are no irreducible margins as such because Barlow does not see history as a text in the narrative sense that Spivak alludes to when Spivak speaks of the “scripts of history.”\textsuperscript{181} That is, Spivak proposes that “history is the narrativizations of various kinds that are in a field of contention”.\textsuperscript{182} This view of history may be a product of Spivak’s disciplinary training as a literary critic. What is not of the least importance here is that, since Spivak sees texts as narratives and history as textual, as a field of narratives contesting for hegemonic reign, Spivak’s thesis of the irreducibility of the margin logically follows from Spivak’s own premises.

For Barlow, on the other hand, who, as we saw, argues that “History is never ‘just narrative’”,\textsuperscript{183} interrogative history need not be reduced to a zero-sum game of power. Just because interrogative history writing projects are theorized within finite conditions, and just because they are finite themselves—about some things and not others—this does not, I think, logically entail that they are a priori exclusionary or constituted on the basis of irreducible excluded margins.

\textsuperscript{176} Diane Elam proposes that:

any history of women should not be written in the past tense, or even in the present or simple future tenses—all of which necessarily ground themselves on the truth of woman—and should instead be written in the future anterior. The writing of history, that is, should expose itself to the political question of what women will have been and thus destabilize any claim to positive knowledge or restrictions on the non-category “women.”...history written in the future anterior doesn’t claim to know in advance what it is women can do and be: the radical potentiality of women does not result from a break with the past, nor is it to be found in any for of assurance provided by the past or the present. Instead, the future anterior emphasizes the radical uncertainty and looks to its own transformation. It would be a history that is a rewriting, yet is itself always already to be rewritten.

Feminism and deconstruction: ms. en abyme (New York: Routledge, 1994), 41.

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 120, 132.

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 132. Author’s emphasis

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{180} Barlow, personal conversation.

\textsuperscript{181} Spivak, The postcolonial critic, 114.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 54.

\textsuperscript{183} Barlow, “green blade in the act of being grazed”, 136.
Spivak’s charge that “The ways in which history has been narrativised always secures a certain kind of subject position which is predicated on marginalizing certain areas” is, I would like to propose, a kind of universalization that preempts the possibility that history will have been otherwise. But to stick with Spivak’s argument for the moment, when taken to the domain of scholarly production it is that the exclusion of certain margins constitutes any practice of scholarship because all scholarship is, in Spivak’s paradigm, a form of explanation and is therefore a kind of narrative. Barlow’s thesis on historicity, counter to Spivak’s position, suggests that it would be extremely historically reductive to see history as solely narrative.

But Spivak’s position is not without its advantages because it opens up the question of how exclusionary practices are built into the constitution of social, political, economic, philosophical, and psychodynamic structures. Spivak’s attention to the politics of inclusion and exclusion that produce subjects and their Others is useful in that it reminds us that, as Spivak puts it, “Theory always norms practice” and, perhaps more importantly, that “It is in the production of… [theory] that the great cultural explanations are produced that allow the entire capitalist caper to carry on the other side of the international division of labor”.

When Barlow’s and Spivak’s different arguments are taken to the purposes of my present endeavor, two different ways of analyzing knowledge production within globality take shape. On the one hand, putting epistemologies in a historical frame a la Barlow would be to interrogate heterogeneous knowledge production practices by focusing on the irreducibility of the singularities that constitute their historical articulations, focusing on the specific historicity of epistemologies. Spivak’s position, on the other hand, would position theoretical investigation into the constitution of knowledge production in globality on the basis of the production and exclusion of its alterities, its necessarily excluded irreducible

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184 Spivak, *The postcolonial critic*, 43.
185 The full citation:

Theory always norms practice. When you practice, as it were, you construct a theory and irreducibly the practice will norm the theory, rather than be an example of indirect theoretical application. What I’m more interested in now is the radical interruption of practice by theory, and of theory by practice, and to an extent my inability to produce a quick answer is because its a genuine interruption. (Spivak, ibid., 44)

186 Ibid., 44. See also Spivak, “Diasporas old and new: women in the transnational world” on the problems of recoding transnationality as labor migrancy and how this practice is complicit in what Spivak calls “the financialization of the globe” (263).

187 Ibid., 21. Alterity, in the sense that I am attempting to use it here, can be thought of, as Spivak states, “the trace of the historical other” (*Outside in the teaching machine*, 208). See the same volume (211-12,
margins. This latter option seems to me to rest on the presupposition that knowledge production practices are kinds of explanations, texts in the narrative sense, while the former presupposes, I think, that knowledge production practices are necessarily articulated in the form of irreducible singularities. So the question is: Are knowledge production practices in globality texts in the sense of explanatory narrative texts, or are they irreducible singularities in the sense of each having their own specific and singular histories? And does posing this question as a binary opposition even serve to clarify what is at stake here?

Instead of falling into what Barlow, after Spivak, calls “the binary trap”, 188 I want to suggest a different logic. The tension that I have drawn out between Barlow’s thesis on historicity and Spivak’s thesis on narrativity can remain, I want to contend, unresolved. At different moments, each theoretical position seems to have certain advantages over the other. In this sense, leaving the question of knowledge production practices’ historicity and/or narrativity open may well allow thinking through the historical and narrational possibilities that have inscribed the epistemics of globality into the empirical archive.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by briefly returning to the question with which I began—“In the face of persistent yet heterogeneous global injustice and inequality, what is the task of the feminist epistemologist in the era of globalization”? I have endeavored to suggest that feminist epistemology must, first of all, recognize that there are manifold and heterogeneous logics by which the production of knowledge takes place within and across the globe, and that this is one very good reason why heterogeneous analytic strategies and critical approaches are necessary. I have simultaneously tried to argue that transnational feminist cultural studies, and particularly Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, Gayatri Spivak, and Tani E. Barlow, help us to chart a path though the heterogeneity of globality. I have also attempted to suggest that the institutional domain of feminist epistemology, if it is to be able to responsibly attend to its enabling conditions—which is to say, to globality—must expand both its content and its methods to accommodate the numerous questions riding on the global epistemic

236) and A critique of postcolonial reason (424-426) on this concept. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Hellen Tiffin argue that this term highlights how “the ‘construction’ of the subject can be seen to be inseparable from the construction of its others.” Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, Key concepts in post-colonial studies. Key concepts series. (New York and London: Routledge., 1998), 11.

188 Barlow, “green blade in the act of being grazed”, 131.
horizon. If feminism is to challenge persistent but heterogeneous inequalities and injustices existing on a global scale, then part of its provocation must be to interrogate, in the most rigorous way possible, the epistemics of the practice of feminism itself, so that feminism may incessantly resist allowing itself not to question its own thinking, doing, or knowing, as well as its own complicities in the thinking, doing, or knowing of others and other struggles. An emphasis on continually putting into question its enabling conditions and its identity thus proves more than valuable because it forces feminist practice to, as Spivak and Trinh noted in the epigraphs which began this essay, theorize itself out of (into) the field of its production and to, therefore, take on the role of being a thoroughly demystifying force.