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Challenging Academic Norms: An Epistemology for Feminist and Multicultural Classrooms

SHARI STONE-MEDIATORE

Even while progressive educators and feminist standpoint theorists defend the value of marginalized perspectives, many marginal-voice texts continue to be deprecated in more traditional academic contexts due to their seemingly "unprofessional," engaged, and creative styles. Thus, scholars who seek to defend a feminist and multicultural curriculum need a theory of knowledge that goes beyond current standpoint theory and accounts for the unorthodox format in which many marginal standpoints appear. In response to this challenge, this essay draws on feminist and postcolonial critics of objectivity, including Dorothy Smith, Chandra Mohanty, Barrios de Chungara, and Arundhati Roy to theorize the epistemic value of texts that respond with passion and creativity to marginalized people's struggles. In conclusion, I distinguish ethically oriented engagement with such texts from mere "politicized teaching," and I suggest ways to teach such texts that cultivate their critical potential.

Keywords: marginalized standpoint / feminist epistemology / multiculturalism / Chandra Mohanty / Dorothy Smith / Arundhati Roy / Barrios de Chungara / globalization

Multiculturalism seems finally to have gained a foothold in higher education. In recent years, women's and ethnic study programs as well as teacher-education programs with multicultural components have multiplied. Diversity requirements have become the norm, and literary canons have expanded to include representative "minority" authors. Yet, despite significant broadening of university curricula, subtle forms of censorship continue to silence and deprecate many texts written from marginalized standpoints. "Work by women of color and marginalized groups," says bell hooks, "especially if written in a manner that renders it accessible to a broad reading public, is often de-legitimized in academic settings" (1994, 63). Dorothy Smith likewise observes that academic norms deem only certain styles and topics "professional," such that when some brave writers try to recover alternative perspectives on the world by anchoring their analysis in the everyday lives of oppressed groups, their work falls outside the bounds of "proper professional performance" (1987, 60). In my own experience, when several years ago I joined an interdisciplinary faculty workshop on "globalization" and suggested for our common reading texts by Arundhati Roy, Eduardo Galeano, and other prominent third world and third-world feminist writers, my colleagues rejected each of my

suggested texts, regarding their engaged, socially situated, and sometimes literary styles as inimical to serious knowledge.

This essay addresses the dilemma raised by hooks, Smith, and my own encounter with exclusionary knowledge practices, namely, that texts that present alternatives to dominant worldviews also tend to defy scholarly norms. As a result, despite efforts by progressive educators to teach marginalized perspectives and by feminist standpoint theorists to justify the marginalized standpoint, marginal-voice texts continue to be devalued in more traditional academic contexts. Even those of us located in humanities departments more sympathetic to engaged and personal texts will likely confront biases against such texts when we pursue interdisciplinary work with (often better-funded) departments such as economics and political science, where feminist methodologies have had less influence. Thus, scholars who seek more feminist, less exclusionary knowledge practices need a theory of knowledge that goes beyond current standpoint theory and accounts for the unorthodox format in which many marginal-standpoints appear.

In response to this challenge, I draw on feminist and postcolonial critiques of objectivity, together with my own analysis of orthodox and alternative writings on transnational economic processes, to re-examine the division between "objective" knowledge and "subjective" story. My aim is not merely to invert this binary but to contribute to continuing feminist efforts to dismantle the binary, so that "objectivity" can no longer be invoked uncritically to authorize texts that conform to certain methodological and stylistic norms and to dismiss texts that, in attempt to convey the struggles of people marginalized both in social life and academic discourses, combine empirical rigor with passionate and creative writing. I argue that we can defend such writing without forgoing critical standards or embracing all stories, but we do need to rethink intellectual and pedagogical standards so as to account for the epistemic value of close and creative engagement with historical life.

The Myth of Objectivity

Continued appeals to objectivity as a touchstone of legitimacy in many academic and professional circles is curious, given that this concept has been largely discredited by Marxist, feminist, hermeneutic, postcolonial, and poststructuralist theorists. Certainly, calls for objectivity reflect legitimate concerns, such as the concern to make our knowledge claims accountable to a broad public and to test our claims against close empirical investigations. Unfortunately, however, these concerns were pursued by Enlightenment and many twentieth-century analytic philosophers in problematic attempts to use the natural sciences as models of methodological

certainty, and even the subtle and varied arguments of these philosophers have since been reduced to a simplistic notion of "objectivity": the idea that universal, bias-free knowledge can be attained by cleansing our knowledge practices of all emotional, social, and cultural factors.¹

Critics of objectivity argue that the demand to eradicate subjective influences from knowledge is incoherent because we cannot know our world *except* as fully engaged human beings who belong to the same world that we study and who make sense of that world through culturally given starting points. Arendt, for instance, defends what some have called her "subjective" account of Nazi death camps by explaining that, if she were to eliminate all of her morally and emotionally rich descriptions, this would not make her study more rigorous but only strip the death camps of their essence as human phenomena (1953, 78–9). Feminist standpoint theorists argue, furthermore, that we *always* view the world from our specific locations within it, such that even our society's most credible beliefs arise from socially situated, interest-driven inquiry.² Hermeneutic theorists add to this argument that our culturally given worldviews are a necessary starting point for making sense of the world. We should certainly test and revise our received beliefs as we study specific phenomena, but we cannot expect to avoid prejudices by assuming a transcendent "universal standpoint"; indeed, the naive idea that we have done so usually leaves our most entrenched prejudices intact.³

Objectivity and Violence

Even if objectivity is a myth, the valorization of traits associated with objectivity can have real—and dangerous—historical effects. In particular, an unqualified valorization of distance and detachment promotes the kind of moral numbness that facilitates institutionalized violence. Certainly, a theorist should have some degree of distance from her subject matter insofar as her knowledge claims should not be immediate personal reactions but well considered and publicly accountable reflections. However, when we confuse absolute emotional and geographic distance from one's subject matter with "objectivity," we forget that such distance is itself a social location, namely, one of isolation from social problems. As a result, when we sanctify sheltered social standpoints as "professional distance," we privilege the voices of those who can remove themselves from social ills while we undervalue the voices of those who experience social suffering more directly.⁴

Likewise, when we valorize detachment, we overlook the qualities of the world that are known through physical and emotional closeness. Dedicated forest defender Joan Norman indicated the importance of knowledge gained through closeness to phenomena when she attributed her appreciation for forests to her walks in the woods with her grandson. "You cannot

just read about wild places," she says, "you have to go there" (O'Shea 2005, 42). Social critics Arundhati Roy and Paul Farmer practice a similar creed when they travel, respectively, to Adivasi communities in India and to rural Latin America to walk among and offer support to people subjected to economic violence. Only "compassion and solidarity," says Farmer, allow a writer to break the conditioned silence of subjugated people and to hear expressions of pain and struggle that await sympathetic ears (2003, 27).⁵

Ultimately, when we confuse distance and detachment with rigor, we promote, under the guise of professional responsibility, an irresponsible inattention to living beings and a concomitant ethics of callousness and indifference. Nazi administrators exemplified such contradictions of objectivity when they assumed an "objective attitude" toward the death camps, attending to technicalities of mass execution as coolly as if they were managing a bank (Arendt 1992, 69). Although ordinary academics and bureaucrats are less directly involved in murder, our disciplined aloofness can similarly bury violence in technical abstractions while our conscience defers to "professionalism." For instance, purportedly objective French reporters and United Nations members refrained from taking a stand on French colonialism in Algeria, only to model apathy in the face of colonial violence, while today's "experts, from anthropologists to international health specialists choose to collude" with economic violence by ignoring it in the name of "neutrality" (Fanon 1963, 77-8; Farmer 2003, 10, 17). "Objective" discourses facilitate this charade, as when planners of India's big dams shield themselves from ethical questions raised by the displacement of hundreds of thousands of individuals by reducing these people to the category "Project Affected People," or simply "PAP," a term which conveniently "mutate[s] muscle and blood into cold statistics" (Roy 1999, 32). For Nazi bureaucrats, French colonial reporters, and contemporary analysts alike, objectivity provides a convenient alibi for turning our back to pain and suppressing compassionate impulses that would otherwise be troubled by violence.

The Persistence of Objectivity

Despite compelling arguments that objectivity is untenable and undesirable, this standard continues to police the boundaries of knowledge in many professional contexts.⁶ Norms of objectivity are particularly strong in the natural science-modeled disciplines, but recent attempts to prohibit classroom discussion of "controversial material" (e.g., as in proposed "Academic Freedom" bills) indicate that popular conflation of responsible inquiry with the eradication of perspective and passion can apply to all fields. The persistent cultural force of objectivity may be due, in part, to the interests served by this standard and, in part more

innocently, to the absence of a generally accepted alternative criterion for measuring intellectual rigor and accountability. Ultimately, however, objectivity can remain our basic standard, despite its epistemological and ethical dubiousness, only because philosophical critiques of the concept of objectivity have had little influence on everyday knowledge practices. Thus, while critiques of objectivity are not new, progressive educators who seek to disrupt the hegemony of dominant knowledges still must apply such critiques to the discursive and methodological practices that continue to command authority in the name of objectivity. I contribute to this project below, by showing how our unqualified valorization of such practices tends to insulate dominant views from criticism while devaluing knowledge from marginalized standpoints.

Abundant Empirical Data

Granted, accurate empirical analysis of the measurable dimensions of our world is a crucial component of credible knowledge. Thus, even critics of objectivity, including Fanon, Farmer, Arendt, Roy, and Galeano support their claims, insofar as possible, with carefully documented historical data. However, when we treat empirical data not merely as one element of knowledge but as the hallmark of objectivity, we favor the perspective of those groups who more often have their concerns documented in data and their worldviews institutionalized in the frameworks that structure data. Significantly, for instance, the U.S. government has ample data on economic growth rates but no central data on police violence, the human costs of war, the relation between health and poverty, or the destructive effects of industry waste products, with the latter having left their marks mainly in unofficial testimonies.⁷ When we consider a text replete with statistics to be objective and dismiss personal testimony, we not only silence perspectives unpopular with official record-keeping institutions but suppress questions about why some phenomena have been registered in data while others have not. The Bush administration's failure to record civilian casualties in the Iraq War⁸ attests to the urgency of looking beyond "hard data" to the politics that underlie data availability.

The confusion of ample data with objectivity also tends to privilege the perspective of dominant groups insofar as the latter have greater influence over the conceptual frameworks in which data are interpreted. For instance, French medical, psychiatric, and legal professionals in colonial Algeria viewed data on Algerian violent crime in terms of a worldview that abstracted social phenomena from history and naturalized social communities, thereby allowing them to regard the data as evidence "that the Algerian was a born criminal" (Fanon 1963, 296). When the same data were viewed by Algerians in the context of their resistance to colonialism, it could be seen as a symptom of colonial social relations. Nevertheless,

the interpretation of the French professionals (and not the Algerians) informed the seemingly objective medical societies and legal institutions. Furthermore, even before data are framed historically, they are structured by the categories and procedures by which "the raw material of the world" is "processed as data," and such research processes tend to be formulated by scholars and bureaucrats with a view to implementing policies and regulating people (Smith 1987, 161–4; 1990, 53–5, 85–92, 116–30). This dependence of hard data on ruling ways of dividing up and governing people is evident, for instance, when newscasters report on the number of "illegal aliens" crossing the border, working "American" jobs, and attending "American" schools, for these supposed "facts" are produced by agencies concerned to regulate the activities of Mexican immigrants and whose category "illegal alien" reflects the dominant culture's assumptions about the sanctity of national borders and the dependence of rights on national citizenship.

Neutrality

"Neutrality," another central mark of "objectivity," is also deceptive. For instance, the text my colleagues selected as the centerpiece for our university's globalization workshop, *A Future Perfect: The Challenge and Hidden Promise of Globalization* by John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge (2000), seemed to them "balanced" and "neutral." Such standards, however, measure "extremes" and "imbalances" against a taken-for-granted "center," which is constituted through the media as well as elite-dominated professional discourses.⁹ On account of their agreement with such a culturally constituted "center," Micklethwait and Wooldridge's laudatory account of transnational economic institutions can seem "balanced"—despite their failure to engage a single of the many serious critics of these institutions.

Similarly, due to the cultural contingency of what counts as the "center," authors from culturally dominant groups tend to seem neutral while writers whose identities deviate from the culturally constituted norm are considered biased.¹⁰ Like my colleagues, some of my students have unwittingly attested to this skewed character of "neutrality." When asked to compare two well-respected but quite different histories of U.S.-Latin American relations—one a standard college textbook that focuses on the concerns of U.S. policymakers and the other Galeano's extensively documented indictment of U.S. imperialism—several students responded that "Galeano is biased because he is Latin American." The same students did not attribute any bias to the other book's two authors, despite their North American education and identities.

No Personal Experience

Objectivity is also stacked against women and marginalized groups insofar as it demands an abstraction from personal experience and restriction to generalized and public-sphere analysis. Texts with such a focus may appear perspective-free, but they tend to reflect the perspective of people who have greater access to public institutions and who relate to the world through abstract analysis. At the same time, they overlook the perspective of those whose knowledge is based on direct experience, who endure the harms of public policies in their private lives, and who, when they protest such harms, are denied access to the public arena and can express their resistance only through "unofficial" channels, such as community speak-outs, hunger strikes, or even suicide.¹¹

When we mystify abstract discourses as objective, we not only privilege the detached standpoints of scholars and technocrats but also insulate their standpoints from critical feedback. For when abstract accounts of the social world are treated as reality, people who are positioned to test abstract theory against everyday experience, such as nurses, mothers, social workers, and research assistants, must fit the world they experience into received categories, with the result that "[e]verything going on in the everyday settings . . . that does not fit the prescribed frameworks of reporting is left unsaid" (Smith 1990, 100). Moreover, when the institutions that determine the "prescribed frameworks of reporting" regularly neglect the human costs of social policies, on the one hand, and the social causes of human ailments, on the other, social suffering and its systemic causes tend to be the "unsaid."¹²

The mystification of abstract, depersonalized analysis likewise allows scholars who use detached technical discourses to appear dignified and "self-confident" while writers who turn to more engaged and creative, nontechnical language to recover "unsaid" human aspects of the social world tend to have their work dismissed as "unprofessional" or even "an injury to human dignity" (Cohen 2003, 65; Marx 1997, 280, emphasis in original). For instance, World Bank economists David Dollar and Aart Kraay convey authority, in part, by virtue of their distance from the social processes they study and their reduction of the latter to abstract public indices. Granted, statements such as, "[t]he aggregate annual per capita growth rate of the globalizing group accelerated steadily from one percent in the 1960s to five percent in the 1990s" can offer relevant information about countries that have joined the global economy (Dollar and Kraay 2002, 121); however, when we mistake such technocratic statements for objective truth, we obscure the diverse and contested human implications of the global economy for specific communities, while we allow people who try to express those human meanings to be summarily dismissed—as Roy was, when the Supreme Court charged her with "pollut[ing] the

stream of justice," upon her attempt to express some of the human costs of India's "economic growth" (Roy 2001b, 97).

"Objective" scholarship does not always exclude personal stories entirely, for the latter often help to concretize and support analytic claims; however, the devaluation of experience allows scholars to invoke personal stories in merely instrumental ways to serve preconceived arguments, while ignoring the complexity and challenges that personal experience can present when approached as a source of fresh insight. For instance, Columbia University professor, Jagdish Bhagwati, states that the social merits of "globalization" are easy to see, "once one starts thinking about the matter deeply and empirically." His supposedly deep empirical investigations, however, refer only abstractly to "Japanese housewives" who came to "the West" with their husbands and who subsequently learned "how women could lead a better life," and to "[w]omen in poor countries" who work for transnational corporations and find that "work away from home can be liberating" (2002, 5). He does not cite any of the actual women for whom he is supposedly speaking and, as a result, can elide such women's ample (even if "unofficial") expressions of discontent with transnational corporations.¹³

Micklethwait and Wooldridge cite specific individuals, but only superficially to show their acknowledgment of poverty-related suffering, not to explore dimensions and mechanisms of poverty that they have not yet theorized. For instance, the authors offer a brief story of a young unemployed Brazilian couple whose odd jobs barely allow them to feed their child. This story and the accompanying statistics on poverty seem to provide balance to the authors' pro-globalization argument; however, the authors quickly reduce the Gobetti couple to an example of "nonstarters: woefully underequipped people living miserable lives" and then suggest that such misery arises from their country's "backwardness" (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2000, 255). They proceed to claim that "[o]nly the most idiotic critic would try to lay all these failings [i.e., poverty, unemployment] directly at the feet of globalization," and they illustrate their point by citing an unemployed Brazilian magician who attributes his ill fate to a Las Vegas performer who appeared on television and gave away his secrets (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2000, 258). This unemployed magician may be an easy-to-refute "idiotic critic," but as the only critic the authors cite here, his brief story (and that of the Gobetti's) merely substitute for genuine engagement with opposing views.

Certainly, personal experience does not always favor the underdog and even a sensitive integration of personal experience within an analysis of current trade institutions cannot settle definitively the question of those institutions' merits. Nevertheless, attentive engagement with historical experience opens up discussion to the rich and complex aspects of social phenomena, including aspects that contradict dominant worldviews,

while the practice of avoiding close engagement with experience ensures that ruling conceptual frameworks remain unchallenged.

Absence of Rhetoric

A particularly deceptive mark of "objectivity" is the seeming absence of rhetoric. As narrative theorists have argued, any coherent account of the world employs rhetorical work, including the work of dividing phenomena into discrete "units of content," qualifying such units through metaphor and relating the units together within a narrative frame. If a text appears to be rhetoric-free, this is only because certain rhetorical techniques conceal the author's hand while the narrative units, metaphors, and other discursive devices employed are so customary and so consonant with dominant worldviews that they appear to be mere reporting.¹⁴

Micklethwait and Wooldridge, for instance, promise in their preface to "disappear" from the book so that "the subject, the arguments" can speak "by themselves" (2000, viii); however, the arguments do not really form "by themselves" but merely appear to do so, in part, because the authors use rhetorical constructs common in the dominant culture. For instance, the authors refer to the current transnational economic order as "globalization," a seemingly uncontroversial term that accords with the evening news and with other scholars (including Bhagwati and Dollar and Kraay); however, the term conflates the general ideal of a global exchange of ideas and resources with current corporate-dominated trade and lending institutions that promote export-oriented, capital-intensive industry and restrict the ability of local communities to regulate corporations.¹⁵ Their slippery use of "globalization" allows the authors to sanctify prevailing economic institutions as "globalization" and to dismiss critics of these institutions (most of whom are against the undemocratic nature of current institutions, not global relations per se¹⁶) as "antiglobalists."

Micklethwait and Wooldridge also refer to "waves of globalization," another term that hardly raises eyebrows but that, in fact, is a metaphor. This metaphor presents current neoliberal institutions, including the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and neoliberal trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as if these were an effect of anonymous processes that flow naturally into place. It thereby obscures the social and political interests that have promoted these institutions as well as the often violent suppression of popular unrest needed to maintain them.¹⁷ Nonetheless, unlike Marx's vivid metaphor of "vampire capitalism" and Galeano's controversial image of Latin America's "open veins," the authors' term "waves of globalization" hardly disturbs their text's neutral appearance, for the comparison of historical processes to "waves" has become standard in our culture. It derives from the deeply ingrained Enlightenment paradigm

of "progress," which presents history as if it consisted of discrete nations riding flows of time that advance naturally, like waves in an ocean, toward their destination in Western liberal institutions.

The authors' "wave" metaphor and implicit "progress" paradigm play into ruling ideologies not only by naturalizing socio-historical processes but also by projecting a supposedly universal historical aim in terms of which to measure a nation's maturity level. This projected "end of history" dovetails with racism to provide a convenient ideological tool for imperialists, from British colonialists to current promoters of foreign-led "development," for it allows them to rationalize intervention in communities deemed "backward."¹⁸ This paradigm forms the backdrop, for instance, of Micklethwait's and Wooldridge's claim that statistics on African poverty and violence constitute evidence of "the backwardness of some countries" (2000, 256). In presenting the figures as evidence of African nations' "backwardness," the authors (not unlike the French psychiatrists cited by Fanon) presuppose that "backwardness" is an internal property of discrete nationalities whose group character can be reduced to statistical indices and located on a universal historical stream. The same paradigm enables the authors to call economically marginalized people "nonstarters," a metaphor that suggests unproductive people who have failed to catch the waves of history (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2000, 256). Continuing likewise, the authors claim that the entire African continent is resistant to historical advancement. "It is difficult to see," they say, "how [the poverty and violence in Africa] is likely to change, given the continent's neglect of education and penchant for incompetent governments" (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2000, 256).¹⁹

Anyone familiar with African history knows that African science and culture had, in fact, "started" quite well on their own prior to European interventions while contemporary African poverty is not innate to the continent's "penchant" for incompetency but is structured, rather, by transnational processes, including the same colonial and neocolonial processes which have subtended Europe's "progress."²⁰ Micklethwait and Wooldridge can allege to "disappear" from their text, even as they make outrageous claims about African "backwardness," only because their claims accord with a discourse of progress so ingrained in our culture that their racist rhetoric passes unnoticed.

The Epistemic Value of Stories and Testimony

When we specify the contradictions of the methodological and discursive practices that pass as "objective," we clear a space for more "subjective" marginal-standpoint texts; however, we still need to explain the epistemic value of the latter. Taking feminist standpoint theory a step further, I

examine below how texts that anchor their analysis in the lived experiences of people who have suffered and resisted oppression have value not only as alternative standpoints on the world but also as alternative *forms* of knowledge whose simultaneously empirically grounded, engaged, and creative formats play a unique intellectual role. My claim, which builds upon transnational feminist analysis of experience-oriented writing, is not that all stories enhance our thinking but that some engagement with experience-sensitive, passion-driven stories (just as some engagement with data and theory) is crucial to rigorous and responsible inquiry.

The Marginalized Standpoint as Story

Building on Hegel and Marx, feminist standpoint theorists argue that knowledge practices that begin from the standpoint of people living under conditions of oppression or exploitation can bring under scrutiny entrenched beliefs and institutions. The marginalized standpoint has this critical power because people in socially subordinate positions confront, in their daily lives, the contradictions of our social order while their resistance to oppression and exploitation can expose the power relations that maintain our seemingly "natural" ways of life. Thus, knowledge that begins from the standpoint of oppressed, exploited, and resisting lives can provide critical insight into ruling beliefs and practices, thereby helping us to confront more self-consciously and effectively the factors that shape our lives.²¹

However, while feminist standpoint theorists present a compelling case for knowledge that begins from the standpoint of marginalized lives, they leave largely unexamined the story-like, "unprofessional" format in which this knowledge often appears. Transnational feminist writers help to explain the need for unorthodox writing in responding to the struggles of marginalized groups. Critics such as Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty investigate the specific transnational institutions that govern our lives, including economic institutions such as the World Bank and World Trade Organization as well as gender and ethnic hierarchies, which economic institutions often exploit and reinforce. They point out that the contradictions between the claims of ruling institutions and their actual historical effects are most acute for third world women, for these women tend to remain the most oppressed within "free" and "democratic" societies. At the same time, their multi-pronged resistance to sexism, authoritarianism, and exploitation can indicate the complex character of contemporary power relations and the kind of work necessary to transform them. Thus, transnational feminist thinkers emphasize the particular importance of theorizing the social world from the standpoint of third world women and, most importantly, connecting these women's lived experiences of struggle to far-reaching relations of domination.²²

Alexander and Mohanty recognize, furthermore, that engaging third world women's experiences as a resource for critical insight and transformative politics is not a straightforward process. "[T]he point is not just 'to record' one's history of struggle" says Mohanty, but "the way we read, receive, and disseminate such imaginative records is immensely significant," that is, we need to address experiences of struggle in a way that does not simply treat them as evidence of oppression or "difference" but instead respects the complexity of the experiences, locates the experiences within transnational relations of domination in which all of us are situated, and identifies elements of resistance, even within the most marginalized communities (1991a, 34).²³ Such nuanced analysis demands empirical rigor as well as creative and engaged inquiry for, as Mohanty emphasizes and as the above texts on globalization illustrate, standard academic approaches to narrating others' lives tend merely to reduce those lives to preconceived theories and objectifying categories.²⁴ Thus, thinking that genuinely pursues the standpoint from others' lives cannot be expected to conform to "what counts as scholarly or academic ('real?') historiography" but will likely mix historical analysis with empathetic and creative narration in order to address experiences outside the public spotlight and irreducible to received theories (Mohanty 1991a, 36).

Emotionally sensitive and innovative narration is also crucial to the process of thinking from the standpoint of marginalized lives because, as some standpoint theorists have acknowledged, resistant experiences are rarely self-evident but tend to be "inchoate" and "a struggle to articulate" (Smith 1987, 58; Harding 1991, 282). This occurs, in part, because a person's experiences of frustration with or resistance to social norms can be overshadowed by her ideologically formed consciousness. Compounding this problem, the categories by which we interpret experience—categories of identity as well as categories such as "advanced" and "backward" or "home" and "work"—are formed from the standpoint of the dominant culture, so that experiences incongruent with white, upper middle-class, male-centered culture often cannot be articulated in straightforward prose.²⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, for instance, could turn her frustration with society's dichotomy between "American" and "Mexican" into critical insight only through soul searching and experimental writing, by which she sifted through painful memories and wove autobiography with history and poetry, so as to trace her "mixed breed" status to the history of U.S. exploitation of Mexican resources and to revise her seemingly schizophrenic identity in terms of new metaphors that embrace cultural intermingling and cross-border alliances (1990b). Other times, sentiments of resistance to ruling institutions defy easy articulation because people in marginalized positions are unable to act on their resistant impulses so that the latter emerge only in contradictory and incomplete gestures. Roy, for instance, recounts the story of a displaced indigenous man who protests

that his baby would be better off dead than living in the resettlement site, even while he rocks the baby gently in his arms (1999, 54).

Given the elusive, difficult to articulate character of many experiences of oppression and resistance, it is not surprising that (like Anzaldúa) some of the most powerful critics of the global economic order, including Roy, Galeano, Fanon,²⁶ and Farmer²⁷ forgo academic conventions to experiment with styles more responsive to the existential richness and ethical pull of marginalized people's experiences. Elsewhere, I have described such writing as "storytelling": writing that, whatever its particular content or style, begins from fully engaged reckoning with the complexities and contradictions of specific people's experiences and then uses this engagement with experience as a springboard for fresh perspectives on our shared world. Such nonfiction storytelling is accountable to rules of evidence and accuracy and thus often cites public records and reports; however, in "storytelling," emotionally close, attentive engagement with specific experiences overrides adherence to preconceived categories and disciplinary norms, rather than the other way around.²⁸

The above critics demonstrate the power of engaged and creative analysis to provide critical insight absent from conventional scholarship. For instance, in *Open Veins of Latin America*, one of the books rejected for our globalization workshop, Galeano writes as a nonspecialist who seeks "a talk with people" about their region's widespread poverty (1997, 265–6). Concerned to help his community understand their condition, he precisely documents the exploitation of Latin American resources by U.S. and European interests; however, he also makes clear that he writes from a standpoint of empathy with those who have been exploited by ruling institutions. For instance, he presents the Bolivian economy from the viewpoint of the miner he accompanied "from tropical heat to polar cold and back again to the heat, always—for hours—in the same poisoned air," who has lost his sense of taste and smell and who, if not crushed in a mining accident or shot with one of the army's bullets that greet striking workers, will likely begin to vomit blood and die of silicosis within a decade on the job (Galeano 1997, 150–1). Such people's stories turn economic statistics into "murder by poverty" (Galeano 1997, 5).

To help demystify social inequality, Galeano also invokes metaphors that throw a new light on the latter's historical significance. In place of the ruling metaphor of history as a Darwinian competition, in which winners and losers are inevitable and historical success is self-justifying, he elaborates upon Marx's metaphor of "vampire capitalism," describing Latin America as a region of "open veins" whose wealth is devoured by corrupt foreign interests. He supports this image of usurpation with well-documented analysis of the way that neoliberal trade and lending policies orient Latin American economies to the interests of foreign capital and thereby institutionalize inequality among and within nations, but he

makes no attempt to be neutral about the resulting "human blood offered on the altar of productivity" (Galeano 1997, 281). Invoking another metaphor from ancient Indian rituals, in which sacrificial victims were called "doors," he revisions those who have died in struggle, not as mere losers whose fate is their destiny, but as "fertile sacrifices" who mark the way to new possibilities within a history that is not predestined but "confronts the conscience of man with a burning challenge" (Galeano 1997, 8, 261). Thus, whereas Micklethwait and Wooldridge presuppose a concept of progress in which history sides with the successful and poverty arises from "the backwardness of some countries," Galeano, by directing his inquiry to the aim of helping his community regain control over the conditions of their lives, shows Latin American "backwardness" to be a function of U.S. and European "development" of an unjust and changeable system.

In "The Greater Common Good," another text rejected for the globalization workshop, Roy "tell[s] politics like a story" so as to recover details and meanings whitewashed by official reports on India's large dams (2001a, 36). Although her specific target is India's dam industry, her defiant integration of passion and poetry into social analysis also challenges the market-oriented discourses of value, which command authority in many contexts. Such authoritative discourses include, for instance, the assertions of Dollar and Kraay that "the best available evidence" shows that "the current wave of globalization . . . has actually promoted economic equality and reduced poverty" (2002, 120). The authors support their claim with reference to similar generalizations by like-minded economists, as well as "hard data," such as the fact that, upon having integrated into the world market, India's "per capita income growth now tops four percent" (2002, 125, 127).

Roy challenges the authority of such seemingly objective reports, not by replacing "serious inquiry" with personal stories, but by displacing the opposition between the two. She interweaves empirically grounded analysis and estimates of the total number of people displaced (no official figures are available) with tales of displaced individuals, poetic reflections on her findings, and wry humor that exposes the laughable side of "serious" institutions. For instance, tracing the history of displaced families, some of whom India's Supreme Court will offer a minimal cash compensation, she finds that many fishing and farming communities had, for generations, sustained themselves off the land and rivers independently of the money economy and with "as much use for money as a Supreme Court judge has for a bag of fertilizer" (Roy 1999, 20). Many such families have now joined the market economy, but this is only because, having been forced off their traditional lands, they have taken refuge in slums and joined the pools of cheap manual labor. Dollar and Kraay may register a rise in "per capita income" and the Indian government may manage "Project Affected People" with "resettlement," but no economic charts can make palpable

what it means, Roy suggests, for farmers who have cultivated the same land for generations to watch their homes dismantled and their standing crops bulldozed, for forest-dwellers who once found all they needed in the forest to be unable to afford a piece of fruit, or for people once self-sufficient and free to have to choose between starving to death or sitting on city streets "offering themselves as wage laborers like goods for sale" (1999, 53). When Roy asks the wife of the displaced man whether she agrees with her husband that their baby would be better off dead than living in the resettlement camp, and when she reports that the woman "didn't reply" but "just stared," she provokes us to consider "costs" of the dams, which cannot be articulated, let alone quantified (1999, 54).

Roy also indicates the limits of "expert" knowledge by pursuing stories of the dams across disciplinary and discursive boundaries. For instance, investigating the many facets of life in Madhya Pradesh that will be affected by its slated submergence, Roy highlights links between people, places, and rivers that the experts neglect: ancient ferry, fishing, and farming communities who are sustained by the river, forests that nourish a diverse wildlife and moderate river siltation, and tens of thousands of indigenous people who find all they need to survive in the forest. When planners are bent on rigid categories and mastery, they overlook the role that a river plays in such interconnected life-systems as well as our limited ability to master such interconnections. "Have engineers made the connection between forests, rivers, and rain?" asks Roy of the technocrats who presume to replace 50,000 hectares of submerged old-growth forest with a wildlife sanctuary and tribal museum. "Unlikely. It isn't part of their brief" (1999, 64).

When her subtle recounting of select details evokes the existential significance of displacement and when her sarcasm reveals the foolishness of "serious knowledge," Roy reminds us that, no matter how "objective" government and industry reports may appear, people cannot be reduced to fungible figures, and progress cannot be reduced to market calculations. In sensitizing us to value that confounds monetary measurement and identity that exceeds people's roles in the market, Roy not only undermines the authority of "objective" reports but also disrupts our own complacency with policies that destroy intricate communities. She provokes us (Indian and North American readers alike) to consider the living realities effaced by our categories and the ties that, however unmasterable, bind us to the rest of the living world.

Testimony also should be mentioned here, for this genre, by which ordinary people use their everyday struggles as a fulcrum for historical analysis, was revived by the Cuban revolution specifically in order to redefine "real" historiography. In *Let Me Speak!: Testimony of Domitilia, a Woman of the Bolivian Mines*, Domitila Barrios de Chungara demonstrates the power of testimony, not only to foreground people overlooked

in orthodox history, but also to recast history itself as a realm of concrete and open-ended struggles. In a section entitled, "How a Miner's Wife Spends Her Day," Barrios recounts her daily routine of waking at 4:00 A.M. to make biscuits to sell, cooking and caring for her children in a one-room, no-plumbing company shack, and worrying about eviction should her husband die of silicosis or a mining accident. She segues from "I" to "we," as she recognizes the same burdens shared by her neighbors, and when she traces the women's common hardships to their husbands' meager wages, her story raises probing questions about the system in which they live: "[E]ven if [the miner's wife is] only at home, she's part of the whole system of exploitation that her *compañero* lives in," says Barrios, "isn't that true?" (1978, 36). Her accusation is irreducible to a mere indictment of either women's oppression or Bolivian "backwardness," for, by anchoring her critique in her specific community's struggles, she also reveals that the women must work with their husbands, peasants, and sometimes even soldiers to fight the system that exploits all of them and that such popular struggles have been violently repressed, even under the U.S.-supported "democracy."

Through testimony, Barrios also highlights the agency of seemingly obscure communities. Recounting her activism with the local Housewives Committee, she foregrounds impoverished women who volunteer to assist other women with daily problems, who press demands such as better working conditions for the miners and better nutrition for the children, and who do so with the minimal resources available to them, namely a radio transmitter, hunger strikes, and dynamite whose use would kill them along with their antagonists. One of their hunger strikes catalyzed a successful nationwide strike, but the crucial role of the women was quickly forgotten by men while most of the women's activities have been too diffuse and their results too indeterminate to count as historical events. Nevertheless, if "housewives committees" rarely make history books, Barrios's testimony suggests that such anonymous and collective activism of ordinary people can address the most obscured forms of domination and can, in the process, nurture more cooperative forms of social relations that offer seeds for substantive social change.

Significantly, Barrios demands of her readers the same situated engagement as she herself practices. While Galeano leaves no neutral ground from which to approach a contested history and Roy challenges us to face the costs of our own comforts, Barrios often ends statements with questions, prompting us to consider for ourselves whether her claims ring true. She also stresses that "we all have our roles to play in history" and that everyone is needed, including peasants, housewives, "even the young people and the intellectuals who want to be with us" (Barrios 1978, 44). Her appeal to us to join her in struggle is compelling, in part, because it comes from a common person who has herself made a difference

in history and, in part, because in actualizing the connection between writer and activist, theorist and participant, she denies us the excuse of "professionalism" for avoiding political engagement.

Ultimately, by connecting her everyday life to public history, Barrios recasts the structure of history itself; historical identities, here, are not innate but built through shared struggle, actors are not political leaders but people whose labor supports the economy, and history is not about top-level diplomacy but about whether all people have safe working conditions and milk for their children. Among the wide-ranging implications of this paradigm shift, it presents those who remain destitute in the age of globalization not as mere victims or "nonstarters" but as historical activists whose projects challenge our own thinking and whose communities each of us can choose to join.

Rethinking Academic Norms

Writers such as Barrios, Roy, and Galeano offer illuminating perspectives on the historical world, yet these perspectives are neither certain, universal, nor objective. The conventional response toward the incongruence of such texts with academic norms has been to exclude such texts from rigorous inquiry; however, a more honest alternative (and one crucial to the defense of marginal-standpoint texts) is to rethink rigorous knowledge and responsible pedagogy in light of the vital contribution of "storytelling" to our thinking.

We might describe the intellectual contribution of texts like those described above as advancing the kind of mindfulness by which we orient ourselves reflectively and responsibly in the world. Engaged and innovative narration of historical experience can guide our thoughtful orientation in the world by prompting us to consider overlooked and inchoate phenomena, by destabilizing ossified categories and entrenched narrative paradigms so as to open up new ways of viewing familiar events, and by bridging emotional connections between ourselves and the characters narrated, so as to sensitize us to our place as beings living amongst others.

"Rigor," when viewed in light of this epistemic role of storytelling, calls for full-person attention to the nuances of specific phenomena—an effort that is thwarted when a writer erects emotional barriers between herself and those she studies. Certainly, careful inquiry demands moments of stepping back from one's immediate experience and considering one's subject matter from a broader standpoint; however, complete detachment from one's subject matter does not constitute rigor but, on the contrary, insensitivity to living realities. Likewise, "accountability," when viewed as a function of storytelling, does not demand universal and definitive conclusions but rather tentative and admittedly partial stories, which are

open to others' responses. Finally, when we confront the contribution of storytelling to human thinking, we see that intellectual aims are inseparable from ethical ones, for ethical values such as recognition of others as living persons, responsibility for the social effects of our actions, and participation in democratic communities are essential to a rich and rigorous understanding of our world as a world we share with others and a world in whose web of relationships historical phenomena have meaning. In effect, whereas "objectivity" endorses an ethics of indifference in the name of neutrality, an affirmation "storytelling" asserts that responsible knowledge practices demand ethical orientations, in particular sensitivity toward others and mindful participation in our communities.

To teach in a way that affirms the value of storytelling and its ethical aims is risky. It risks acknowledging that not only the texts but also we educators ourselves are situated in the world we study and motivated by ethical concerns. Nonetheless, we can distinguish an acknowledged social location and a general ethical orientation from dogmatism, if we recognize that perspective and ethical concern do not end debate but, on the contrary, open up new questions. For instance: If we study the world with the aim of orienting ourselves in our communities responsibly, then what light can the text throw on our own historical location and relationships? If we are related to the material we study, then how do our own lives look differently if we weave them into the text's narrative? And if we always read from particular social and cultural positions, then what aspects of our world are obscured and what aspects elucidated by the author's (and our own) standpoints? Upon reading Roy's essay, for instance, my Critical Thinking class explored how the marketed-oriented values that govern India's dam industry might influence our own lives, how we (not unlike middle-class Indians) might employ objectifying categories that distance us from our neighbors, and how the standpoint of India's Adivasi communities, seemingly so distant from us, can throw new light on our own lifestyle and values. We also thematized Roy's unorthodox writing style asking, for instance, whether the empirical claims that Roy presents are any more trustworthy than those she criticizes and whether her sarcasm and emotionally laden metaphors promote more critical or more ideological thinking. Such questions are vexing, but they impressed on students their responsibility as readers to evaluate the effects that each text has on us.

We also can distinguish ethically oriented engagement with marginal-standpoint texts from mere "politicized teaching" by comparing such texts to more conventional ones in order to force into the open questions about the politics of knowledge. For instance, students in my Global Ethics course initially responded to Galeano's *Open Veins* with indignance toward the unabashed anger that colors his writing. The text might serve as a supplement to regular history, students suggested, but it is not history

proper. When, however, we compared specific sections in Galeano's book to sections covering similar topics in a standard textbook, some students began to recognize how both texts were shaped by socially constituted perspectives and rhetorical devices, so that the question of what constitutes "real" history, what role interests and emotion play in historical analysis, and which text, if any, was central and which was "merely supplemental" became topics of lively debate.

An engaged reading of marginal-standpoint narratives also differs from dogmatic teaching insofar as it exposes the limitations of our own theories and standpoints. Such exposure denies us the pretense of objectivity but also demonstrates to students the intellectual value of self-awareness and humility. For instance, when my Feminist Philosophy students read Barrios's testimony, we discuss how her distrust of feminism challenges us to examine how our own feminist projects might be viewed by differently situated women. We also discuss how her stories move us personally, provoking us to view our own routines and comforts as part of a world in which others struggle to feed their children. When I share with students how Barrios' passionate dedication to her community leads me to question my own inability to act more fully on my moral passions, I forgo "expert" status, but I encourage students to risk self-examination and to face the tough questions about their own social locations that thinking from others lives ultimately demands.

Such unsettling questions about our own social identities and about the politics of different discursive strategies have no place in the "objective" classroom. Nevertheless, such self-reflective and explicitly political questions are integral to serious engagement with creatively written, passion-driven marginal-standpoint texts. Thus, securing a place in our classrooms for marginalized views demands no less than a rethinking of basic academic norms. Against those who valorize rhetoric- and emotion-free "objectivity," we must affirm that knowledge of our world is always already in narrative form, that our lives are already bound up with the web of life that we study, and that intellectual rigor, therefore, is achieved not by detached experts but by a community of storytellers who continually rethink our categories and reconsider our projects as we exchange stories with one another and let ourselves be moved by each other's struggles.

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Notes

1. See Antony (2006), Code (1991, 31–6, 46–67), Gadamer (1991, 265–85), Harding (1991, 77–163), and Horkheimer and Adorno (1998, 1–13).
2. See Code (1991, 46–70), Harding (1991, 58–9, 142–56), and Smith (1987, 49–143).
3. See Gadamer (1991, 265–85).
4. See Cohen (2003, 62–8), Fanon (1963, 7–78), and Smith (1987, 81–8; 1990, 89–102).
5. See also Arendt (1953, 77–8), Farmer (2003, 25–8), and Kheel (1985, 144–8).
6. See Antony (2006), Code (1991, 33–70, 175), and Smith (1987, 1990).
7. For instance, the U.S. government has no central data on police violence (Butterfield 2001), no data on mortality rates sorted by economic class (Farmer 2003, 45), no data on Iraqi civilian deaths or on the arms and legs lost by American soldiers in Iraq (Elizabeth Cohen 2004; Morley 2004), and no regular records on the health effects of industry waste (Di Chiro 1996; Lydersen 1998).
8. See Morley (2004).
9. See Antony (2006) and Smith (1987, 22–34, 52–8, 109–17, 161–4).
10. See Anzaldúa (1990a xxi) and Code (1991, 8).
11. See Code (1991, 241–50), Cohen (2003, 62–8), Fanon (1963, 187–9), Mohanty (1991a 33–5; 1991b, 56–71), Smith (1987, 57–60; 1990, 89–104, 123–38), and Stone-Mediatore (2003, 138–42).
12. See Farmer (2003, 11–7), Marcuse (1991, 109–14), Roy (1999, 16–20), and Smith (1990, 83–173).
13. See Kamel and Hoffman (1999, 26, 40, 45–6, 89–94).
14. See Barthes (1989, 127–48) and White (1975, 53–64).
15. On these effects of current global institutions, see Fanon (1963, 102–74), Galeano (1997, 173–261), Hart-Landsberg (2006), and Shiva (1997).

16. See International Forum on Globalization (2002), Kamel and Hoffman (1999, 111–5), and Shiva (2006).
17. See Aristide (2002), Galeano (1997), Farmer (2003), and Fanon (1963).
18. Similar descriptions of the supposed backwardness and slothfulness of non-European people appear throughout colonialist and imperialist discourses. For instance, Locke claimed that God gave land to “the industrious and rational” (1980, 21) and not to people like the Native Americans who “for want of improving [their land] by labour, have not one hundredth part of the conveniences we enjoy” (1980, 25–6, his emphasis). A conquering U.S. naval officer in the Mexican-American War told Indian chiefs whose villages he had raided, “you are indolent. I hope you will alter your habits, and become industrious and frugal” (cited in Zinn 1999, 163–4). French colonial psychiatrists attributed to the native Algerian “[in]ental puerility, without the spirit of curiosity found in the Western child” (cited in Fanon 1963, 300). Even today, Joseph Joffe (2005) describes Arabs as unproductive and their land as barren while Micklethwait and Wooldridge celebrate a supposedly inherent “superior productivity” of American workers (2000, 111).
19. Here, too, the authors’ claim is typical of colonial and neocolonial ideologies insofar as they rationalize intervention in third world countries by pointing to those countries’ social disorders, which they have abstracted from the transnational processes that have generated those disorders. For instance, in a similar manner, French reporters presented their photographs of destitution and violence in post-independence Algiers as “verification” of Africans’ inability to rule themselves (Fanon 1963, 77).
20. See Fanon (1963, 95–105, 153–78) and Harding (1991, 235–8).
21. See Collins (1986), Harding (1991), Hartsock (1983), and Smith (1987).
22. See Alexander and Mohanty (1997), Mohanty (1991a), and Panjabi (1997).
23. See also Alexander and Mohanty (1997, xxxvii–xl) and Panjabi (1997, 153–6).
24. See Mohanty (1991b).
25. See Smith (1987, 19–36, 49–78, 161–75).
26. Fanon’s classic study of colonialism (1963) draws on his psychiatric work with individuals suffering from mental disorders. Although case studies of mental patients seem “out of place” in a book of social analysis, they are nevertheless integral to the book; for when Fanon contextualizes the cases politically, they belie myriad and profoundly violent relations of domination that subtend the colonial social order while they animate Fanon’s call to resist this order (1963, 249).

27. Farmer, too, begins his analysis of social suffering by tracing stories of individuals with whom he has become personally acquainted and whose tales adumbrate connections between illness, poverty, human rights abuses, and gender and race hierarchies, which are obscured by theories that compartmentalize social life along disciplinary lines (2003).
28. See Stone-Mediatore (2003, 31–45, 50–6, 101–23).

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