

Questioning the Fantasy of Difference

HELEN JOHNSON

The field of postcolonial feminism is marked by an ongoing tension between the particular and the universal, between the “thick description” of specific cultural practices and the macrosystemic analysis of transnational structures of inequality.

RITA FELSKI, “The Doxa of Difference” (11)

IN VAO, THE village of the Isle of Pines, the small southernmost island of the New Caledonian group in the South Pacific, many evenings are spent talking at the table after the last meal of the day. Children run off to play in the compound or to harass the family’s dogs. Teenagers saunter to cousins’ houses to watch television or listen to cassettes on someone’s recorder. Older people, however, often sit and talk. This article examines one of their stories to explore the ways in which elderly Kunié people can use narratives of the “fabulous” both to entertain and to situate themselves in their sense of the past. It also examines a written narrative by Déwé Gorodé, a Kanak/New Caledonian writer. From a short discussion of how the authors’ creative fantasy is exhibited through both stories, it turns to an investigation of how ethnographers may have contributed to the construction of a “fantasy of difference” through field research as a primary anthropological experience, and it considers how theoretical interpretations of field research may not give adequate space to the imaginative capacities of informants. Consequently, the paper exploits a cross-cultural interest in the conceptualization of “narrative” practice.

I. A Story From The Field

During my last period of field research in June - July 1998, I fell ill with a severe stomach infection. After I had rested, received a healing massage with coconut oil, and tried to take some black tea, I realized that my condition was a little more serious than I had previously experienced. I telephoned some European friends who

lived some distance away to advise them of my health concerns. They told me they would collect me in their car later in the day so that I could recuperate for a short while in their home. Marie-Jo, an elderly woman who was one of my primary informants, learnt that I was leaving her home earlier than we had planned. She then sat down to keep me company and to tell me the stories she had been saving for the last few days of my stay. Marie-Jo's passion for story-telling, and her sense of duty that ensured I understood them to the best of my ability, alerted me to a number of other Kanak women who were telling stories in written form, and thereby constructing their own fictionalized images, imagery, and representations of New Caledonia and its many peoples. I address this aspect of New Caledonian story-telling shortly, but first let me recount one of Marie-Jo's stories — *les filles de Comagna*:

Two women from the Comagna tribe were regularly seen in the old days [the 1950s and 1960s] after dark on the road from Kuto Beach to the village. The women were well known amongst all the community. The two women, traditionally dressed in missionary-style Mother Hubbard dresses, would be waiting at a turn in the coastal road in order to flag down a lift back to the village. In that time of few vehicles, most islanders would stop for people on the road. The Catholic priest was returning one evening. He stopped for the women, and they climbed into the back of his utility truck. When he arrived some minutes later at the village, they had disappeared. When walking back to the village one evening, I encountered them also. I realized who they were. I shoed them from me, saying *chaa!!* [go away!!] upon which they promptly disappeared.

"Were they still there?" I asked. She told me, "there are too many cars on the road now. That was a long time ago, so they don't visit anymore."

I enjoyed Marie-Jo's tale as an example of the "ghost story" genre that is relished in many societies' oral traditions. However, on reviewing my material upon my return to Australia some weeks later her story prompted me to revisit my understanding of "otherness," "fantasy," and "difference." In the West, fabulist tales have often been reviled for their lack of intellectual gravitas, but admired for their imaginative artistry. Warner notes that "Rousseau recommended banning fairy tales from his model pupil Emile's curriculum," and that John Updike considered Italo Calvino's folk tales to

be “the life-lightening trash of preliterate peoples” (xiv). Warner’s observation illuminates one of the major challenges entailed in the ethnographic process: how do researchers negotiate the tension between how others think and speak about their real and imagined worlds and the ways that we interpret their “narratives”? From a disciplinary perspective I found helpful Henrietta Moore’s admission that “as a feminist anthropologist engaged in dialogue with persons who have very different ideas . . . from my own, I have to wonder about the origins of my models, the nature of the influences working upon me, the stuff of my imagination” (149). Her thoughts resonated with mine as I laboured with some of the interpretive dilemmas generated by shaping stories brought back as “data” from the field. Indeed, how could someone with Marie-Jo’s vivacity and warmth be reduced to a consideration of how “data” is fabricated locally, circulated, and used?

Like many Kunié women Marie-Jo delighted in conversing with fellow villagers, and she was scrupulous in her courtesy and attention to me as a “special visitor.” Sitting on the slatted wooden benches that surrounded her meal table in the timbered cooking and eating shelter in the family compound, Marie-Jo welcomed visitors and family members alike, offered them tea ready-made from a large pot, and bade them sit and chat with her. Although continuously busy with household and family chores and many religious duties, she always made time for those people who dropped by, and she provided food for their appetite for story.

Marie-Jo also occupied an influential position within her clan grouping as the eldest female in the household’s compound. When installed in the Vao compound she cooked, cleaned, chastised noisy children, and shopped for food. Then, every fortnight she returned regularly to the northern tip of the island to tend the yam, taro, and vegetable crops of her clan land. She occupied also a particular position in relation to the rapid social changes that were shaping daily activities, beliefs, and behaviours on the island. New Caledonia’s moderate yet nonetheless substantive participation in the global political economy has meant that new ideas, images, and modes of being have created a need for fresh ways of perceiving the world and of adapting to the consequences of swift social transformation. Despite the allure and prestige that Kunié

people often associated with the use of consumer goods generated through television images every evening, it seemed to me that Marie-Jo was using community-sanctioned “fantasy” to describe and mitigate some of the social changes in their community. For media images generated by the French-administered television channels also customarily identified rural, islander, and horticultural dwellers as located on the territory’s social, cultural, and economic margins. I propose that Marie-Jo’s tale can be understood as an acknowledgment and a subtle reworking of the relative terms of centre and margin, to refigure the Isle of Pines community as imagined centre: “the women were well known amongst all the community.” At the same time her tale can be seen to portray the disappearance of some modes of being due to changes wrought through modernization processes and practices: “there are too many cars on the road now.” I suggest that she also worked to create presence in absence through the invocation of the conditions in which *les filles* used to appear. She was, in terms of my attempt to understand the creative potential of others, fashioning a “fantasy of difference” — through time and space, presence and absence, and by accessing widespread cultural discourses about who the Kunié used to be rather than what they may be in the ethnographic present. It was Marie-Jo’s ability to create fantasy and to use fantasy, and to acknowledge difference, that is important to my assertions here.

II. Fashioning Fantasy and Difference

Concepts of “difference” have been constitutive of anthropological endeavours to make sense of stories brought back from the field. Ethnographers have used self-reflection, participant observation, feminist theories, and descriptive interpretation to create detailed images and understandings of the people who “promenade” with us through our research projects. Indeed, in anthropology, as Felski has suggested for feminism, “difference has become doxa, a magic word of theory and politics radiant with redemptive meanings” (1). Yet she also astutely observes that “the political interests and needs of the world’s women do not necessarily move in step with the various phases of academic feminist theory” (2). Nor, I would argue, with anthropological theory.

From my own movement between and within theory and practice, home and the field, teaching and research, I have noted there is much anthropological writing that fantasizes others as “different” (see Keesing, Sillitoe) and much scholarship that generates a more critical description and imaginative understanding of others as complex and situationally inscribed social beings (Sunder Rajan). The latter approach is encapsulated in Wazir Jahan Karim’s description of bilateralism in South-East Asia in which the “self” is pitted against the “other” by “a multiplicity of role behaviours which give the individual the chance to adjust situationally and contextually to the preferred pattern of relationship required at any time” (38). These differing modes of analysis and constructions of understanding generate a number of complicated and important questions that are not susceptible to glib answers. For example, is the transformation of site into insight helped by a critical questioning of anthropological concepts of “difference”? Should anthropologists be creating methodologies that examine “similarity” rather than or as well as “difference”? Should a *de rigueur* discussion of the fantasies brought to the field be included, as in Kulick and Willson’s edited collection, or should anthropologists take up Rey Chow’s suggestion that literary theorists elucidate the ways in which other people’s stories can be seen as fantasy? In analyzing Western perceptions and analyses of Chinese literature, Chow speaks of the necessity to read non-Western texts with a “deliberate and ‘impractical’ sense of complexity” (xiii). She perceives the West to own “not only the components but also the codes of fantasy, [hence] the non-West is deprived not only of the control of industrial and commercial productions, but of imaginary productions as well” (xiii). Chow has added complexity to the quest for intercultural understanding and intellectual debates about the relations of power implicit in much Western scholarship of other cultures. She has chastised Western scholars for not recognizing that our discourses construct a non-West that is frequently deprived of fantasy, desire, and contradictory emotions. She has proposed that researchers consider “the primary role played by what can be loosely generalized as ‘fantasy’ or ‘illusion’” and has recommended that scholars problematize

the dichotomy between the “realpolitical” non-West and the “imaginative” West. When it is not the site of warfare and bloodshed, when it is not what compels humanistic sympathies and charities, the non-West commands solemn, humorless reverence as the Other that we cannot hope to know. (xiii)

In understanding that Western scholarship can often code the creative productions of people from other sociocultural arenas in frighteningly reductive ways, anthropologists may well ask: What happens when non-Westerners are recognized as producers of “verbal, literary, and fantastic productions”? This is not to suggest that anthropologists should engage in a “new” orientalism that characterizes others as childishly imaginative, nor, as Rajeswari Sunder Rajan writes, “legitimizes the more regressive aspects of state and culture” (7). Rather, it is an appeal to question fantasy and difference in ways that actively promote the evolution of alternative ways of thinking about categories, concepts, and processes. In Western anthropology James Clifford and George Marcus contributed to this process. Feminist anthropologists in particular have, since then, added their own critical standpoints, which I address shortly. When linked to non-Western perceptions of the limitations of much ethnographic writing, there has been a lively critique and destabilization of Western models, challenging scholars to expand intellectual horizons, as Moore proposes, to recognize the fantasy, creativity, and desires of those we deem other. If we are to take up Moore’s challenge I propose that Déwé Gorodé’s fiction could provide an opportunity to rework “Western academic” notions of cultural appropriation and representation. In this way I am following Sunder Rajan’s explanation of her preferred intellectual approach, in which she enacts “a less than rigorous allegiance to ‘theory’ from the west, whose limits are betrayed — rather than systematically explored — at the points where they break down as explanatory models” (8). Hence, “cultural appropriation” also has the potential to connote a contribution/bestowal/grant/gift. And “representation” can connote a portrait/likeness/image. Recognizing the inspirational connotations of these terms enables them to be used as conceptual tools that image, imagine, and create imagery about others as similar, different, capable of creativity and, at times, desirous of exploring the “fabulous.” When located within a questioning of the “stuff of our imagination,”

anthropological writing has the potential, as Moore suggests (149), to provide researchers with a set of intellectual co-ordinates that can be used as a launching pad to debate the comparative materials we use.

The caveat to this suggestion is, however, that terms such as “cultural appropriation” and “representation” may not always inform debate about how “others” imagine, nor how researchers imagine that others do. Indeed, in writing about the loss of intellectual and political potential that was generated by grounding feminism in a single philosophical idea (1), Sandra Harding has cautioned against Western scholarship’s drive for simplification and stability. Her proposal that we learn to regard political-philosophical instabilities “as valuable resources” (664) can also frame Marie-Jo’s oral tales and Gorodé’s written fictions. They can be seen as a valuable resource by showing how a journey can be made *with* the creative intelligence of other women, to intersubjectively theorize understandings of how Pacific women may compose their world.

Gorodé is a well-known New Caledonian fiction writer. Published in New Caledonia by *Editions Grain de Sable*, she has written poems that have been published in French in Paris, in English through Zed Books in London, and in Fiji. She has also been translated into German. Her subject matter ranges from the Kanak movement to achieve New Caledonian independence from their status as a territory of France to a fine detailing of young women’s lives. She traces the close family and kin connections of Kanak people both within the “real” world and across spiritual boundaries, and she portrays the hardships, yet emotional warmth, of clan life *en tribu*. Gorodé also has a history of political activism in the cause of Kanak independence. In 1969, she was one of many Kanak women who worked to form three groups of “*Les Foulards Rouges*” — the Red Scarves — labouring to reclaim Kanak identity for women as well as men (Ounei 84). During imprisonment in 1974 following a protest in Nouméa, the capital, Gorodé was beaten by the French authorities. Sentenced to six months imprisonment, she was released after two, following a campaign to raise money to hire appeal lawyers from France. She used her detention to consider the racialized and sexualized problems of Kanak women in great detail.

A productive example of intersubjectively theorizing Pacific women's imaginative compositions may be made by an elucidation of my interpretation of Gorodé's story entitled "Rencontres" ["Encounters"]. The protagonist in Gorodé's tale, a ten-year-old girl, returns by bus from her boarding school in Nouméa, to her tribe in the mountains. She is traveling on Friday 13 October and her bus is running late as it deposits her at the edge of the main road, from where she is to take the pathway to her village. When she leaves the bus she must walk through the dense forest that covers most of the mountain chain and the east coast of La Grande Terre, the main island of the New Caledonian archipelago. The narrative unfurls a profound knowledge of and feeling for the natural environment in which the young girl finds herself. Eventually, after hearing the cries of infants at a distance and scenting the odor of woodsmoke, the girl arrives at her maternal uncle's clan, to be greeted warmly by her grandmother. She is pampered, cared for, and given food. Then, towards dusk, she is hurried on her way to her parents' village further along the mountain track. The following Sunday, her mother shows the girl photographs of her maternal grandparents. She recognizes her grandmother, who had died 20 years earlier. Her mother explains how and where her grandparents died, coterminously enabling the young girl to discern the importance of time/space/place amongst her people, through an understanding of lineage, non-linear "fabulous" spatial perception, and the cross-generational exchange of stories that anchor whom one is within a community.

The overall impact of both stories is, I propose, a narrative and dramatic engagement with notions of difference and identity: Kunié (in the case of Marie-Jo) and Kanak (in the case of Gorodé). The stories can be read as "fantasy" in terms of an established genre that is recognised within certain kinds of Western scholarship. Equally, it is important to consider the particularity of social context. In placing the Kunié *filles* in their context, i.e. walking when the priest uses a utility truck, and the young girl in hers, i.e. walking from the bus as public motorised transport into the forest by way of a path, the stories also shape and inscribe class and race-based symbols and practices in ways that accent, yet also imply a challenge to, Kunié and Kanak people's daily marginalisation within the predominant French administrative culture.

At the same time, I suggest that the stories clearly manifest the underlying similarities that frame each author's specific narrative because they examine and portray some of the constituent features of Kunié and Kanak ways of being as women. Although Felski has proposed that "the recent trajectory of mainstream feminist theory in the humanities [has been] feminism's evolution from identity to difference" (2), both Marie-Jo and Gorodé's narratives suggest to me that "who one is" can be simultaneously linked to discourses about "how one is." Discussions about identity as a concept of "self-in-community" shape and are shaped by continuously constructed notions of "femaleness" that lingers within and through time. Their narrative practices can act to create an ontological sense of "being Kunié or Kanak" at the same time as they produce a metaphysical sense of "femininity." Both *les filles* and the grandmother of Gorodé's heroine continue to live in the imaginative fantasies of their clan members and storytellers.

Significantly, Marie-Jo and Gorodé's fabulous creations can contest restricted Western notions of gender difference which tend to gloss hierarchic difference between women. Whilst Marie-Jo was a village woman of minimal literacy and a pragmatic French primary education, Gorodé is a published author now lecturing at the French University of the Pacific in Nouméa. The privileged structural position of Gorodé is unquestionable. However, both women work to express their narrative sense, to entertain, to educate, and to elucidate Kunié and Kanak ways of being. Equally, through their agency and fantasy, each woman is "gifting" something of herself to researchers and scholars. Not only does their creativity bestow insights into their humour and their imaginative view of their world, it also has the capacity to rework restricted academic notions of one-way cultural appropriation and representation. The fictions created by others, whether oral or written, can, as Clifford and Marcus and Michael Taussig have argued, equal the academic fictions created through traditional ethnographic practices by acknowledging the likenesses, the images, and the portraits that they create of, and for, themselves.

As narrative practices the tales also elucidate how fantasy can operate as an element of the imagination of Pacific Island women to the same extent that fantasy can operate as an element of field

researchers' imaginings of others. In showing how Western scholars continue to "other" other peoples, Chow alleges that Westerners often theorize about others in ways that construct notions of absolute difference in which others are, once again, made inhuman. Her assertion that Western scholars have denied imagination, fantasy and creativity to their imagined "others" suggests a need to work through the power relations, and the impasse, created by attempts to theorize and fantasize difference.

III. How Have Some Female Anthropologists Questioned Difference?

But have female anthropologists questioned "the fantasy of difference" any differently from male ethnographers? Meyda Yegenoglu's recent work *Colonial Fantasies* argues that the unconscious desires and fantasies of the "other" and "otherness" are powerful constituents of the putatively autonomous and rational Western subject. Yegenoglu exposes the subject as structurally male. Because Lacanian psychoanalysis proposes that the object causing desire "does not exist objectively, in itself, but is constructed retroactively by the subject" (46), she asserts that Lacanian notions of fantasy construct "others" as fantasies built upon sexual difference. However, as Felski contends, "the Lacanian view of history and culture as fundamentally phallogocentric homogenises important differences within that history, including the diverse positions and social practices of women" (6).

The assertion that the "fantasy of difference" is implicitly coded female through unconscious notions of sexual difference suggests that female ethnographers are symbolically and subconsciously constrained in their ability to create intersubjective interactions with "other" women. However, Western feminism's often inflexible psycho-philosophical frameworks may themselves limit complex analyses of women's relations to axes and positions of power, as well as "the unconscious." In unpacking the dual though entwining concepts of fantasy and difference, my work with "other" peoples in different societies has been profoundly shaped by Chandra Mohanty's critique of the power relations of fantasy in anthropology. Her contention that crucial forms of anthropological knowledge have been "produced by, indeed born of, colonial

rule" (31) couples with Yegenoglu's claim that the colonial imperative required the construction of the "other" to the white, colonial, male "self." Mohanty extends her contention to include the need to analyze the diversity of women's social positions and practices, both locally and globally. The legitimization of colonial rule was grounded in discursive constructions of race and gender that often defined colonized peoples as "effeminate" males, incapable of self-government and inherently predisposed towards wantonness and irresponsibility. Furthermore, as Rana Kabbani has argued, colonized men were emasculated yet conceived of as wild, and women were eroticised, but also imagined as dangerous. The complexity of the social relations that constituted concepts of "colonized peoples" support Mohanty's assertion that researchers need to use conceptual and analytical tools that recognize the specific contexts in which "women" are constituted as distinctive sociocultural and political groups located in particular histories, in order to eliminate negative, demeaning, and sterile fantasies of others.

Lila Abu-Lughod, an Arab-American anthropologist, has taken a different approach to (re)presenting her informants' inner horizons and their constitution within a particular social context. In *Writing Women's Worlds*, Abu-Lughod uses the Western construct of narrative and the composition of what might be described as an ethnography of the particular to write against the grain of Western neo-colonial knowledge production about others. Traditionally, ethnographies have presented an authoritative voice, pontificating upon the meanings and structures which construct a generalized subject peoples' lived experience. Drawing upon insights into method and voice developed by academic feminists in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Abu-Lughod decided to explore "how the wonderfully complex stories of the individuals I had come to know in this community in Egypt might challenge the capacity of anthropological generalizations to render lives, theirs or others, adequately" (xvi). By so doing, she developed "a new ethnographic style" (xvi) — "narrative ethnography" — that weaves women's stories and conversations into a general critique of ethnographic typification. Abu-Lughod preceded each narrative chapter with an introduction written in the conventional form of the academic

essay that served to locate the chapter in its “appropriate theoretical and political contexts”; yet the narrative chapters were also designed to work as “critical commentaries on anthropological modes of understanding human existence” (xvii). She expected her readers to adopt a questioning approach informed by an understanding of the politics of ethnographic representation and sociological description, the problematic character of feminist methodologies and aspirations, and received presumptions about the subject matter (the Muslim Middle East). Another stylistic strategy was to reject the need to provide a conclusion. Abu-Lughod tried to avoid the closure that scholars often pursue, the authorial provision of the meaning of the stories about people, relationships, and emotions observed in the field, arguing that such a stylistic device would have “restored the superiority of the interpretive/analytical mode” that was being put into play by the construction of the narratives (xvii). Clearly, using accepted academic narrative styles would have made data presentation easier, but the use of a familiar pattern would have contained, and thus constrained, the intrinsic power of the stories.

In addition to examining the ways in which narratives of others are fashioned, it is helpful to consider Uma Kothari’s politicization of the uncritical use of analysis and academia’s preference for “abstract theory” as privileged method and practice. Kothari questions how a scholar’s position in the academy may force us to arm ourselves with “abstract” theory, leaving undisclosed the personal space of emotion and imagination. A scholar’s personal space can then be less vulnerable to attack by those in more powerful academic positions. Kothari argues that many researchers must engage in this tactic to survive the political depredations of the academy. Indeed, because some ways of posing theoretical questions and analysing issues may be more accessible and acceptable than others, depending on a scholar’s institutional position, researchers should also acknowledge how theoretical and analytical approaches may problematize the construction of others as different.

Abu-Lughod’s theory, representation, and execution have become sophisticated tools for researchers searching for alternative ways of describing the knowledge they have derived from empirical observations. She elucidates how, as Felski terms it, “a vision

of femininity as pure otherness cannot speak to [the] messy blend of tradition and innovation, of recuperation and recreation, of borrowing from the past and imagining the future, that shapes [female] practice" (7). A similar process of self-reflection about (re)presenting interpreted narratives and behaviour has impelled Kamala Visweswaran, a South Asian-American feminist anthropologist, to use analysis in a more overt way in order to question how writing shapes knowledge production. Like Abu-Lughod, she pivots her focus to the reader, reminding researchers that emphasizing the mutually constitutive aspect of the reading/writing/reading enterprise can help to unpack the relationship between ethnography and literature. Because ethnography "sets out to build a believable world, [and] one the reader will accept as factual" (1), she argues that a recognition of the conjunctural nature of essay writing can subvert the impositions of objective knowledge-making. Her essays question the relationship between fiction and ethnography, particularly as each category conjoins to shape and inscribe marginal peoples. As she contends, "with the loss of ethnographic authority, the subjects about whom we write now write back, and in so doing pose *us* as anthropological fictions" (9). Implicit to her contention is the suggestion that for anthropology's former subjects "writing back" can be an act that decolonizes *their* mind and, I suggest, also manifests their imaginative capacity for fantasy.

IV. Alternative Ways of Thinking?

Henrietta Moore's work *A Passion for Difference* helps to theoretically frame my suggestion. She proposes that "intellectual models depend for their impetus on imaginative possibilities they themselves cannot provide" (149). Moore argues for the creative use of the ethnographic imagination to promote and provoke alternative ways of thinking, interpreting, and understanding the complex and diverse peoples who share our world. She posits that an exploration of the explanatory power of "fantasy" can be useful in contesting accepted notions of how difference is conceptualized and therefore politically negotiated.

Marie-Jo's narrative skills made her a consummate story-teller, and alerted me to the underlying similarity of "otherness." That is,

our similarity as ethnographer and story-teller was expressed in our particularity *and* through intersubjective cross-cultural interactions. She related the life histories of her “self,” her family and clan members, her fellow villagers and her island, as well as religious and ghost stories. At the same time, her delight in ensuring that I learnt her stories was manifest in her laughter, her enthusiasm, and her desire that I “take down” her narratives so that I could pass them on to my friends and students *en Australie*. Gorodé’s fiction also resonated with me in creative empathy because she works against imaginatively restrained anthropological writings that provide researchers solely with “can-do” approaches, mind-sets or intellectual coordinates, and arguments with which to debate. As Moore cautions, these approaches tend to focus upon what the researchers must “do” and “analyze” rather than generate ideas about *how* other peoples are imagined, and *how* they creatively imagine themselves.

My labour to understand both authors’ narrative practices enabled me to take the potential of recognizing and examining “fantasy” and link it as a philosophical lever to creative analysis. This action involves a questioning and acknowledgement of the plurality of “difference” and “authorship.” In order to create a critical conceptual tool I then link “difference” to “fantasy” as a double reflection, which recognizes that fantasies create differences that, in turn, create fantasies. When allied with Chow’s proposal that the scholar should consider “the primary role played by what can be loosely generalized as ‘fantasy’ or ‘illusion’ in [her] readings” (xiii), this conceptual tool offers the potential for a different reading of “others,” a different reading of “fantasy,” and a different reading of “difference.”

It seems to me then that female ethnographers are in a distinctive position to theoretically evolve in ways that enable the recognition of other people’s creative endeavours, their capacities for fantasy, and their location of self-in-community within processes of rapid social change. Intellectually and through intersubjective interactions, they may better understand the fantasies that anthropologists interwove in writing about field research, and the recognition of similarities within differences that can work towards cross-cultural interactions that are based on mutual respect and dignity. Indeed, weaving the cultural productions of non-Western

peoples into teaching, researching and writing practices may be one avenue towards a political and imaginative awareness that elucidates the processes by which Western scholars mutually (re)constitute descriptions of others. Such a creative scholarly and pedagogic activity may add detail and complexity to popular and academic understandings of the many peoples who enrich our global environment.

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