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Teaching the Politics of Transnational Motherhood

This paper describes my development of an undergraduate course, “The Politics of Motherhood in Global Contexts.” I share my process for creating the course and discuss some of the challenges encountered with developing curriculum on transnational motherhood, using feminist, maternal pedagogies. I discuss various methodological approaches to teaching about motherhood globally, and suggest the importance of examining constructions of motherhood and mothering in relation to global political economies, to help students understand the effects of neocolonialism and globalization on almost all aspects of our daily, lived realities. To this end, the content of my course revolves around several themes including the gendered, racialized, globalized division of reproductive labor; transnational adoption, particularly in relation to questions of citizenship and national belonging; biotechnologies, medicalization, and new reproductive technologies; and twenty-first century motherhood movements. I discuss the course’s emphasis on global learning to enhance students’ understanding of the politics of motherhood internationally and cross-culturally. Students were asked to consider how motherhood is understood in various social, political, and geographical contexts, and to analyze variations in the treatment of mothers according to race, class, sexuality, culture, nation, age, and immigration status, among other factors. I also consider the need for students to explore the changing landscape of motherhood studies, moving beyond the boundaries and assumptions of the global North and western feminist paradigms.

In “Cartographies of Knowledge and Power: Transnational Feminism as Radical Praxis,” M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty ask, “When is the transnational a normativizing gesture—and when does it perform a radical, decolonizing function?” (24). In other words, when does the category of the

transnational, particularly transnational feminist analysis, illuminate histories and processes of colonialism, neocolonialism, and globalization? And when does it simply obscure or replicate them? In Alexander and Mohanty's theorization, the transnational draws attention to the specificity of women's experiences in different cultural, geographical spaces, as well as critical analysis of unequal relations among groups of people in various parts of the world, structured by economic, political, and other systems. Their discussion informs my own work, as I reflect on my recent experience teaching a course about motherhood within global, transnational contexts.

Last year at my institution, a large land-grant state university in the U.S. Pacific northwest, I participated in a faculty seminar focused on "internationalizing the curriculum." This learning community, part of a larger set of initiatives on my campus and across the U.S. system of higher education, provided small grants to a select group of faculty across the disciplines, which enabled us to meet regularly to explore a variety of themes related to the possibilities and challenges of teaching about global and international issues. To meet the requirements of the learning community, each of us designed a new undergraduate course on a topic related to our research, focused on learning within a global context. The outcome for me was a new course: "The Politics of Motherhood in Global Contexts," which I recently taught for the first time to a group of twenty-three undergraduate students within a Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program. In this essay I reflect on my process for creating the course and discuss some of the challenges encountered with developing curriculum and teaching about transnational motherhood. I also provide some details of the readings and assignments for the course, as well as a discussion of my pedagogy, hoping to invite dialogue and inspire others to engage and address studies of motherhood globally and transnationally. In doing so, I stress the importance of a radical, decolonizing approach as discussed by Alexander and Mohanty, critically engaged with critiques of capitalism and globalization, and with an awareness that the neoliberal university's recent interest in global curriculum is neither neutral nor benevolent. As Jigna Desai, Danielle Bouchard, and Diane Detournay argue, this call for inclusion of "global difference" within the U.S. system of higher education is actually "necessary to the expansion of its global purview and sovereignty," replicating global capital and aligned with other institutions of the nation-state (59). For those of us in the academy who are committed to radical transnational feminist and oppositional knowledge practices, the specifics of what we do and how we do this work are critical.

Motherhood studies, a term coined by Andrea O'Reilly in 2006, has emerged over the last twenty-five years as a serious interdisciplinary field of study among scholars and researchers and as an important topic in public discourse. During this time we have seen a proliferation of writings and studies on the topic as well

as greater media coverage on such themes as family leave, work-family balance, and the so-called “mommy wars.” As O’Reilly suggests, motherhood studies tends to be divided into at least four interconnected and overlapping areas of inquiry: motherhood as institution, motherhood as experience, motherhood as identity or subjectivity, and motherhood as agency (2-3). However, as O’Reilly, Amber Kinser, Michelle Walks, Patricia Hill Collins, and others have noted, much of this work initially focused on the experiences of white, middle-class women and mothering practices in North America, reflecting dominant cultural paradigms about mothers and children. More recent feminist analyses of mothering and motherhood interrogate the culturally constructed experiences of motherhood among women of color, poor and working-class women, queer and transgender women, disabled women, and women of the global South, but there continue to be exclusionary practices that structure the scholarly work on motherhood. To challenge such exclusionary practices, Kinser, in the first chapter of *Motherhood and Feminism*, asks: “Whose experience of mothering is being talked about? Whose interests does this idea about mothering serve? ...How might race, class, or sexuality play into what ‘gets to count’ in the story being told here? Who is being left out of this picture? And finally, how can we make positive changes that will improve the lives of all mothers?” (26)

Considering these questions in relation to transnational feminist theories and frameworks, I wrote in the course description for my class: “This course introduces students to the politics of motherhood in global contexts. We will explore mothering in various cultural contexts, focusing on themes including the politics of transnational adoption; motherhood, surrogacy, and biotechnologies; effects of globalization on mothering across borders; mothering in the global welfare state; movements for reproductive justice; and transnational representations of motherhood.” My course emphasizes transnational practices and solidarities to enhance our understanding of the politics of motherhood globally and cross-culturally. Using a feminist framework, I ask students to consider the following questions: How is motherhood understood in various social, political, and geographical contexts? How does the treatment of mothers vary according to race, class, sexuality, culture, nation, age, and immigration status, among other factors? What is the relationship between motherhood and the state? What specific challenges do mothers in various contexts experience, particularly as a result of neoliberalism and structures associated with globalization? How does motherhood, in some cases, legitimize certain forms of political organizing and recognition? And, what are the limits and possibilities of the politics of motherhood? In particular, I want us to explore various questions and contemporary themes that are changing the landscape of motherhood studies, pushing us to think beyond the boundaries and assumptions of the global North and western feminist paradigms.

I developed this course about motherhood in global contexts not only to increase the curricular offerings on motherhood studies at my university but specifically to create dialogue about doing this work with/in transnational and/or global frameworks. I had previously taught courses on women's movements in global contexts, and I regularly offer a graduate seminar on transnational feminisms. In addition, I recently collaborated with two colleagues to offer a service-learning course at my university on reproductive justice in Chicana/Latina communities, where we focused on local communities, engaging with students in organizing and activism. However, I recognize that students need more resources about the institution of motherhood as well as the social construction of both mothering and motherhood. Hence, I developed the course to enable them/us to think beyond the U.S. in order to understand the ways that experiences and meanings of motherhood may vary across communities and cultural contexts. I also feel a personal connection to the discourse about motherhood in global contexts, as the mixed-race daughter of an Asian immigrant woman and former U.S. serviceman, and as the mother of a preschool age son. To understand my mother's (and my own) relationships to both the institution of motherhood and the experience of mothering, it becomes increasingly necessary to examine these relationships within the context of the larger relationships between nation-states, engaging histories of war, militarism, colonialism and neocolonialism, and globalization. Thinking through the politics of motherhood in this way refutes the idea of a "global sisterhood"—or what Alexander and Mohanty refer to as "free market feminism" (23). Rather, it suggests specific contexts, marked by struggle, dissent, and unequal power relations, as well as the possibility of movements for solidarity.

I build on Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila's use of the term, "transnational motherhood" to describe the practice and experience of mothering across international borders, an arrangement they use specifically to refer to the experiences of Latina immigrant women who work and reside in the U.S. while their children remain in their countries of origin. The mothers they discuss are employed primarily in domestic work as housecleaners and nanny-housekeepers, separated from their own children "back home" but continuing to care for them through financial support, as well as phone calls, letters and occasional visits when possible. Transnational motherhood, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila argue, "contradicts both dominant U.S., white, middle-class models of motherhood and most Latina ideological notions of motherhood" (389). In "I'm Here, but I'm There': The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood," the authors contextualize such arrangements within gendered, racialized structures of global capitalism, civil war, and economic crises, suggesting that motherhood is not biologically predetermined but always socially and historically constructed. Defined as "the circuits of affection, caring, and financial support that tran-

scend national borders,” the framework of transnational motherhood enables us to analyze gendered constructions and experiences of transnationalism and immigration (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 390). It also suggests new and more elastic definitions of motherhood, shaped by economic insecurity and processes of racialized gender, in which some mothers may not have the option to be physically present with their own children but nevertheless are still actively engaged in the experience of motherhood and/or the process of mothering, through long-distance caregiving and at times also through care of their employers’ children (though this relationship is always already structured by unequal power relations between employer and caregiver).

Transnational motherhood implies other cross-border processes and experiences as well. For the purposes of my class, I move beyond simply exploring the experiences of motherhood in various cultural contexts to investigate the ways in which motherhood, and its social, cultural, political meanings and implications, are reconfigured when we consider the politics of the transnational. Hence, in a world increasingly structured by the global movement of capital, we must address the politics of motherhood and care-work in terms of social and economic inequities threaded through processes of migration, in this case for migrant women workers who are also mothers. An interrogation of the politics of motherhood under neoliberalism allows us to analyze ways in which the experiences of those who mother are negatively impacted on a global scale by increased privatization and deregulation. Examining the social, political, and economic processes underlying this experience of transnational motherhood enables students to recognize power inequities shaped by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression as well as women’s everyday acts of resistance.

While there are multiple potential ways to structure a course about motherhood in a global context, I opted to focus on specific themes and/or patterns associated with neoliberalism and global political economies in order to address contemporary effects of these patterns on our understandings of motherhood and mothering globally. A more traditional approach to a course on motherhood in global contexts might involve organizing course content around a specific discipline, e.g., history of motherhood in a global context, or anthropological approaches to motherhood in a global context. Or, one might consider the course content thematically, as in maternal health in cross-cultural context, or representations of mothers and motherhood in world cinema or literature. One could structure course materials and pedagogies around various motherhood movements globally, or even engage the material through a more regional/geographic approach, examining ideas and experiences of motherhood and mothering in specific nation-states or regions of the world. I recognize the value of all of these approaches, and see how students might benefit from each of them. However, I wanted to critically engage the notion of transnational

motherhood. As Alexander and Mohanty suggest, “[t]he way we construct curricula and the pedagogies we use to put such curricula into practice tell a story” (31), and these stories, they write, are simultaneously “‘maps’ in that they mobilize both histories and geographies of power” (31). What story(ies), then, did I want this course to tell about motherhood in global contexts? To challenge the idea of a universal mothering subject, as well as a preponderance of imperial, racialized, heterosexist assumptions and understandings of motherhood, kinship, and care-work, I focused the curriculum and pedagogies around the construction of mothering and motherhood in global contexts, attentive to histories of colonialism as well as the vast effects of globalization on almost all aspects of our daily lived realities.

In “The Globalization of Motherhood,” Wendy Chavkin discusses the convergence of the second demographic transition, in which more and more western women enter the workforce and delay childbirth due to economic and social insecurity, with the rise of globalization. From the “globalized motherhood vantage point,” she writes, “these ‘push’ factors result in the increased migration of women from the developing world seeking work as nannies, a shifting but ever-available pool of babies for adoption, and the recruitment of women into selling their gametes and bodies as surrogates” (6). At the institutional level, such trends result in increased consumerism in relation to reproductive technologies, as well as childcare providers and even children.

Politics of both reproductive justice and motherhood, in these instances, become entangled with capitalist endeavors as well as the deregulation of the global market. What does it mean when nation-states, with the power to regulate and define citizenship—and therefore ideas about families and belonging—occupy different statuses within the global marketplace? To Chavkin and others, these processes imply an exacerbation of social inequities as well as the commodification of children and of multiple aspects of motherhood. Thus, in the course, I asked students to consider motherhood also within the context of the politics of transnational adoption, surrogacy, and biotechnologies that structure what some refer to as “reproductive tourism.” In addition, students were introduced to ideas and frameworks of global movements for reproductive justice, as well as mothers’ movements for social justice.

I structured the course around five units, beginning with an introduction to the course where students were exposed to some of the key ideas and theoretical frameworks of motherhood studies, including scholarly work by Sara Ruddick, Adrienne Rich, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, and Patricia Hill Collins. Through two required texts, O’Reilly’s *21st Century Motherhood: Experience, Identity, Policy, Agency*, and *An Anthropology of Mothering*, edited by Michelle Walks and Naomi McPherson, students were introduced to some of the foundational concepts of mothering and motherhood studies within a global context, particularly

the distinction between *motherhood* (as institution) and *mothering* (to refer to women's lived experiences of raising children), to recognize motherhood as socially and culturally constructed. And, employing a transnational feminist analysis, students developed critical skills to question certain taken-for-granted (western) assumptions about motherhood, mothering, and mother-work, recognizing them as rooted in ethnocentrism. For example, as Michelle Walks points out, "certain characteristics that rate as important to mothering in one culture may not even be recognized as an aspect of mothering in a different culture" (4). Hence, there is no universal motherhood experience. In this first unit, students explored various experiences and practices of motherhood and mothering, including those of Chicana mothers in the U.S., Muslim mothers, queer and/or LGBTQ-identified mothers, and mothers of children with autism-spectrum disorder. While not intended to be comprehensive, these introductory readings enable students to deepen their understanding of the ways in which motherhood is socially constructed, while also helping them begin to understand it as an institution with varied, deeply embedded meanings across time and cultural context.

In the second unit, "Mothering Across Borders: Gender, Migration, and Motherwork," students considered the processes of migration and movement in/with mothering. In this part of the class, students began to understand the social and economic forces underlying the movement of vast numbers of women of the global South away from their homes (and often children), to the North, where they engage in reproductive labor within the service sector. As Grace Chang suggests, these processes of migration are often the result of First World imperialism, economic and military interventions, and/or the extraction of their nations' resources by First World nations. The women who perform this transnational care-work often experience deep exploitation and vulnerability, demonstrating not only the increasingly globalized division of reproductive labor, but also the ways that, within the global economy, a consideration of this international (gendered, racialized) division of labor is critical to our understandings of concepts including work, family, and citizenship. For example, Charlene Tung describes the case of Filipina migrant women workers in the United States, a result of a growing demand for home care workers in the U.S. as well as U.S.-Philippine neocolonial relations. She discusses the negotiations these women workers must make between the demands of caring for their employers' families while also sending remittances home to support their children in the Philippines. Such experiences demonstrate the shifting meanings of transnational motherhood within an increasingly globalized transnational context. The readings and discussions in this unit helped students trace a complex and uneven relationship of accountability between "here" and "there," destabilizing a more conventional "local"/"global" binary.

The third unit of the class engaged ideas about biotechnologies, medicalization, and surrogacy. Readings for this part of the course addressed issues and politics of breastfeeding, particularly in relation to women's labor, mothering in the context of HIV and AIDS, and the medicalization of motherhood. In what many of the students considered the most exciting unit of the class, they were also introduced to ideas about new reproductive technologies, cross-racial surrogacy, as well as critiques of reproductive tourism. By reading analyses of these themes and practices situated within an Aboriginal community in Australia; among Arab Muslim immigrant mothers living in Canada; for low-income women in Sao Paulo, Brazil; among mothers of children affected by HIV/AIDS in South Africa; and for breastfeeding mothers in rural Guatemala, students learned to appreciate the complexities as well as the breadth of experiences and cultural perceptions of motherhood and mothering.

The politics of transnational adoption comprised the theme of our fourth unit in this course. In this part of the course, students considered not only the ways in which mothering and mother-work may be performed by both biological and non-biological mothers, but also the gendered, racialized politics of transnational adoption in relation to ideas about motherhood and mothering, children, citizenship, and national belonging. To contextualize transnational adoption, we considered its history in relation to wars and western empire building. As I have discussed elsewhere, the processes associated with transnational adoption make explicit the power differences between nation-states as well as a global militarized economy that enables the flow of children from disempowered, occupied nations of the global South to wealthy, dominant western nations. Such processes, Laura Briggs suggests, are "invested with colonial legacies and can be allied with U.S. state power and other kinds of violence" (2006, 348). Similarly, Karen Dubinsky argues that in Latin America, for example, transnational adoption is often characterized as an extension of U.S. military and economic power, and hence U.S. foreign policy. In this section, students read Briggs' *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption*, as well as an article by Kim Park Nelson, "Shopping for Children in the International Marketplace," and a chapter from Dubinsky's *Babies Without Borders: Adoption and Migration Across the Americas*. They also screened documentary films, including Deann Borshay Liem's *First Person Plural*, and the somewhat more problematic representation, *Daughter from Danang*, directed by Vicente Franco and Gail Dolgin. Both films explore transracial, transnational adoption through subjects adopted *from* the global South *to* the U.S. (South Korea and Vietnam, respectively), and highlight the unidirectional process of transnational adoption as well as the neocolonial relations that continue to structure such practices, impacted by U.S. militarism, war, and foreign policy. My objective in this unit was not necessarily a critique of the act of adoption

as much as a critical perspective on the processes associated with transracial and transnational adoption in today's global economy, and the impact of such processes on our understandings of motherhood and mothering. Briggs' text helped us to explore these processes and asked us to consider the stories that circulate in the U.S. and other western contexts about transracial and transnational adoption, particularly about women of color and poor women.

In conclusion, we considered twenty-first century motherhood movements within a global framework and context. We drew on a history of international motherhood movements in which mothering has been perceived as a site of collective resistance, including examples such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, CoMadres in El Salvador, and U.S. anti-war activist mothers. Students read articles framing mothers' movements of this century, addressing coalition building, maternal activism, and antimilitarism. In addition, I asked them to consider the effects of both militarization and the prison industrial complex as significant contemporary issues and problems affecting discourses about motherhood and mothering globally, and constructing and shaping ideas about "good" and "bad" mothers. We also discussed multiple forms of state violence and U.S. empire in relation to global capital, to develop greater understanding of indigenous women's experiences of mothering, incarcerated women's frequent loss of custody of their children, and the targeting of women in the global sex industry and women of color as "unfit mothers" in the U.S. and globally.

My learning objectives for this course were many. I hoped students would emerge from this course able to assess and describe the experience of motherhood in transnational contexts, distinguishing between the act of mothering and the subject position—and institution—of motherhood. I wanted them to be able to synthesize general concepts and themes in the growing field of motherhood studies within a global context to evaluate the ways in which motherhood around the world has been configured in distinct ways, shaped by specific cultural contexts and international relations. I hoped they'd be able to recognize the interconnectedness of U.S.-based movements for reproductive justice and movements for social justice and human rights in other parts of the world. I also wanted them be able to interpret and analyze the gendered, racialized dynamics of motherhood, especially in relation to colonialism, globalization, migration, and militarism. To meet these objectives, I designed assignments to help students make critical connections.

One assignment was what I refer to as a contemporary issues discussion, to explicitly connect the themes of the course to the world around us. Each student was asked to identify a contemporary social issue or event to share and discuss with the rest of the class in relation to the politics of motherhood globally. They shared these ideas through a class blog, a format I chose not only because many

of our undergraduate students seem quite comfortable in the blogosphere, but also because it would provide a lasting electronic document of our dialogue, enabling students to return to the themes and questions, offering comments and building on one another's work in a way that is collaborative and also creative. In particular, they were asked to identify an issue or event that would help us to evaluate the ways in which motherhood and/or mothering have been configured in distinct ways, shaped by specific cultural contexts and international relations. Each student's blog entry represented an informed discussion about their chosen topic, applying a feminist framework and analysis. They were not expected to be "experts" on their chosen issues or events; however, they were required to ask questions, reflecting their understanding of theories and frameworks about motherhood in global contexts. This assignment not only generated discussion among students about a variety of significant themes and issues in global and/or transnational motherhood studies; it also helped them to recognize the ways in which they can apply a feminist analysis to many different kinds of issues and topics with regard to mothers, motherhood, and the process of mothering. Some of the most interesting blog entries centered around maternal health care, reproductive technologies, single mothers, queer and LGBTQ or same-sex mothering, and mothering with disabilities.

Students in the class were also required to complete a collaborative research project in which they worked in pairs or small groups to develop a research-based presentation focused on a specific theme regarding motherhood in a global context. The focus was demonstrate the interconnectedness of U.S.-based conceptualizations or experiences of motherhood and understandings or experiences of motherhood in other parts of the world. All topics were to address some aspect of the politics of motherhood in a global, transnational, or cross-cultural context. With this assignment, I asked students to consider the politics of motherhood within a global/transnational context in order to understand the ways in which the politics of the "local" affect processes of the "global," and vice versa, transformed by relationships between and among nation-states, and transforming experiences of motherhood. Again, students expressed their interests by choosing a wide range of topics, including same-sex mothering practices, media representations, birthing practices, new reproductive technologies, and mothering and migration. Many of them approached their topics creatively, relying on interviews, images, discourse analysis, and even family histories. On the last day of our class, each collaborative research group shared their project with the entire class, enabling all students to learn from one another's processes.

This collaborative research project and the acknowledgement of our shared learning process reflect my commitment to feminist pedagogies as well as maternal pedagogies, a concept discussed by Deborah Lea Byrd and Fiona Joy

Green, in their collection *Maternal Pedagogies: In and Outside the Classroom*. I frequently make my commitment to feminist and antiracist pedagogies explicit in my teaching, centering a collaborative learning process that recognizes lived experience, actively engaging the relationship between theory and practice (and attempting to destabilize the way theory and practice are often presented in binary terms), and stating a clear commitment to social justice, as all of my courses highlight social inequities, systems of oppression, and resistance to oppression. In all of my teaching, I apply intersectional frameworks to demonstrate the relationships between and among gender, race, class, sexuality, national belonging, ability, and other social categories. I also rely on Alexander and Mohanty's notion of "a radical nonnormative transnational feminist solidarity pedagogy that is attentive to the genealogies and spatializations of power across multiple borders" (41), moving away from a liberal "neutral" academic stance to "actively developing a radical ethic that challenges power and global hegemonies" (41). The use of maternal pedagogies, I believe, builds on these commitments, recognizing the ways in which mainstream educational institutions "often promulgate the cult of individualism, legitimize oppressive norms, pressure students to dismiss the dominant teachings of their community or indigenous culture, and produce citizens who for the most part are unaware of or indifferent to the systemic oppression of various marginalized groups" (Byrd and Green, 4). For many of us in the academy, maternal pedagogies offer an effective way to resist oppressive paradigms, and promote activism and social justice.

Byrd and Green suggest that there is nothing "natural" about the maternal, and the authors in their collection "reject all totalizing, essentializing definitions of 'good' or 'normal'—whether these adjectives are applied to mothers and mothering, to children and students, or to teachers and the processes of teaching and learning" (3). In fact, they suggest a distinction between mothering and the female body and/or reproductive process. Rather, they describe maternal pedagogies as "always in flux, always performative, always processes embedded in specific contexts and employed by individuals and groups whose positionality, values, goals, and strategies are ever-shifting..." (2). Maternal pedagogies are not rooted in biological motherhood or reproduction. They can be practiced by anyone, whether they are mothers or not. They vary widely from context to context. At their best, the use of such pedagogies suggests a resistance to oppressive ideologies and practices surrounding motherhood and mothering, as well as a belief in the importance of an ethics of care.

What distinguishes maternal pedagogies from other critical perspectives is not only this critical, reflective focus on motherhood/mothering, but also the reclamation of the label "maternal," often dismissed within western patriarchal contexts despite "Sara Ruddick's conviction that mothering is important and

empowering intellectual work” (Byrd and Green, 3). Also, maternal pedagogies explicitly integrate experiences of teaching and scholarship with those of mother-work, creating the transformative possibility for what Jennifer Watt calls “empowering feminist mothering praxis” (64). I employed maternal pedagogies in this course with the hope that such an approach would enable students to make meaningful, critical connections between the course content and the process through which we engaged such content, as well as between the theoretical discussions of mothering and motherhood and their own lived experiences of such processes. Thus, some of the assignments encouraged collaboration, as discussed above. Students were asked to think of their research projects as works in progress, about which we checked in regularly throughout the term. They discussed their projects not only with their research partners but also in small groups of other students, and with me and the teaching assistants for the class, in order to seek advice, share resources, and gain from multiple perspectives. Also, in course readings and discussions, I emphasized social justice and activism. Students were offered information about local grassroots organizations as well as transnational feminist movements working to effect change, with regard to the prison industrial complex, queer and LGBTQ families, anti-violence movements, and many other issues. Finally, we all worked to bring our whole selves to the class, resisting the impulse—and pressure—within the academy to compartmentalize our scholarly, intellectual work from our “personal,” “private,” or “emotional” experiences of self, family, community, and culture. By explicitly addressing and interrogating this divide, I hoped students would develop a greater awareness of and sense of accountability to one another and to the varied, complex experiences of those who participate in mother-work in global, transnational contexts.

In the end, I realize I may have been overly ambitious, both with the course content and pedagogies. Sometimes students resisted; other times they seemed overwhelmed. However, there were days when their active engagement was apparent, and I felt the potential for an “ethics of cross-cultural knowledge production” (Alexander and Mohanty 35). Perhaps this was best illustrated by students’ responses to Kelly Dombroski’s “Awkward Engagements in Mothering,” a reflexive autoethnographic work in which she explores encounters rife with “cultural friction” on mothering practices in China. In Dombroski’s narrative of conducting scholarly research as a western woman in northwest China, she explores what happens when the translation of a popular U.S. baby-care manual finds its way into the hands of her research participant, Xiao Shi. Almost none of the advice in the manual makes sense within the local context, and certain tenets are exposed as ridiculous (e.g., encouraging independence by putting the baby to sleep in his/her own room), given the spatial arrangements of Xiao Shi’s work, home, and childcare options. For students

in the class, some of whom identified with Dombroski's reference to (cultural) "edgewalking," our discussion of these themes lay bare the unequal power relations and processes associated with globalization, and their impact on the day-to-day experiences of motherhood and mothering. It also demonstrated the fluid, sometimes blurry, yet constantly policed borders of insider/outsider and local/global, as well as the gendered, racial, and cultural spatialization of power within global, transnational contexts.

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