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# **Disrupting Privileged and Oppressed Spaces: Reflecting Ethically on my Arabness through Feminist Autoethnography**

Haneen Shafeeq Ghabra

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*This essay urges for the need to explore one's privileges and oppressions through Feminist Arabness. Through intersectionality, the author brings forth various experiences as a woman of color. By exploring privileges and oppressions, the goal is to bring contestations of domination into conversation with neoliberalism, reflexivity and ethical communication. Thus, this study is a call to highlight the need for an integrated approach that combines theory, and Autoethnography in order to reflect a richer intersectional analysis that combines both privileges and oppressions as identities. It is also a call towards an intersectional feminist ethic that can in turn identify the connections between one's privileges and disadvantages and how it relates to ethics and reflexivity.*

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*I dream...*

*Of a world where I can lay the ghosts of my privileges to rest*

*Of a world with no oppression...*

*Where the Palestinians are free and the wounds that we carry in our souls have healed*

*Where the marginalized communities live without microaggressions and move with ease*

*Where more places become my homeplace and where more spaces become interlaced*

*Tonight my heart is racing... I'm tossing and turning... The privileged*

*ghosts haunt me in my sleep... I'm stuck in whirlpools of Whiteness and  
Neoliberalism*

*But... I am not dreaming... This is Reality...*

*Broken Dreams... Wounded Souls... We are always just broken from hegemonic  
structures*

*Nowhere to go... Nowhere to turn... I turn to this piece of paper...*

I constantly find myself in a space where I ask myself: What is the fate of women of color in the midst of a hegemonic world in which oppression will continue to sustain itself? As we move forward through spaces of resistance how can we create camaraderie among our distinct but divergent communities? Gloria Anzaldúa states that we face dangers as women of color, which are in direct con-

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I thank Dr. Bernadette Calafell for her limitless time and guidance while I was writing this piece. I also thank the editorial team at *Kaleidoscope* for their hard work in making this essay possible.

trast to those faced by white women (*Anzaldúa Reader* 27). By exploring our struggles and our oppressions we can create spaces to build alliances, as many people of color have eloquently done (Alcoff; Anzaldúa; Calafell; Collins; Flores; Hasian Mohanty; Moraga; Nakayama; Said). It is also fundamental that we bring our privileges to the forefront. These privileges provide us with advantages and benefits in the systems that we may or may not be aware of (Martin and Nakayama 17). I have an ethical obligation as a writer to put my privileges into conversation with my oppressions in order to deconstruct harmful ideologies. These ethical obligations should equally apply to individuals in predominately majority and dominant articulated identities.

Like Martin and Nakayama, I believe what is needed is a dialectical perspective that emphasizes the ethics in a relationship that extend beyond the individuals involved in a given communicative exchange (14). They state that intercultural communication research avoids issues of privileges and oppressions (18). The recent turn in critical intercultural communication research challenges this avoidance by actively engaging issues of privilege and oppression. Here I echo Moon in stating that the move from intercultural communication being “stable” and “unproblematic” to the view that it needs to be critiqued and interrogated opens up possibilities for the field (38). Other scholars have reimagined and argued for the need for intercultural communication to focus on the international by relating culture, power, and geopolitical relations to international histories (Shome 150) and to neocolonial and hegemonic interests (Sorrells 172). Similarly, with Hegde, the field of communication can turn to a diasporic criticism in order to historicize the cultural (60). Therefore, I wonder, what do I have to bring to the table? Isn’t this study simply another discussion of oppressions and privileges? Taken together with intersectionality, autoethnography brings various perspectives to the very same table. My experience will always be dissimilar to another woman of color’s experience. Thus, the goal of this study is to highlight the need for an integrated approach that combines autoethnography through an intersectional analysis of privileges and oppressions. It is also a need to relate systems of the micro and everyday privileges and oppressions that we experience to neoliberalism and hegemonic structures. By looking at the micro and the macro we can arrive at a more holistic representation of power structures.

Therefore this essay explores my oppressions through my diasporic and racial background, as I bring this into conversation with diasporic theory. I shadow this oppression with how I deal with both Arab and white masculinity through a critical intersectional feminist standpoint. I then bring this into conversation with my class privilege. I conclude with how I envision intersectionality reconciling systems of privileges and oppression through critical reflexivity and a feminist ethic.

## **Autoethnographic Interventions**

The need to be reflexive of one’s self is best understood through the performative. As “I” become the subject under deep observation, I engage in methodologies that will place embodiment at the core of my research. Through

performative writing, we can enter sites of contestation where we affectively try to resolve the every day that has been perpetuated by larger structures. With Pollock, I yearn for the need to break up bland text through the performative (77) as the performative is an embodiment of our multiracial experiences (Spry 272) and our pain (Madison 108).

More specifically, autoethnography allows us to write and reflect on our pain within connections and disconnections (Spry 125). Thus, agency is gained through critical reflection and our goal remains to engage in patterns of meaning with our audience (Spry 126). Vulnerability is agency and agency is needed to further resist dominant structures and move within scholarship. What is at stake in both autoethnography and performative writing is the production of culture—how identities and culture are produced through representation (Berry, and Warren 603).

When “I” tell my story it is a reflection of my pain and of the truth of my reality. Autoethnography allows this connection to occur and speaks back to the system. It allows for a critical cultural disruption that could in turn be a site of resistance, reflexivity, representation, and voice. *As I perform my words out onto this paper, I am revealing to you, the wounds, the pain and the privileges that I have been carrying on my shoulders for years.*

## **The Intersections of Me, Myself and I**

*Impoverished...*

*Between two bodies*

*Multiple identities*

*I ache for the land I lost      I yearn for Falasteen (Palestine)*

*I mourn in the land that I have become.*

*I move forward as a proud Kuwaiti*

*But my wounds are not healing*

*Distressed*

*Back Aching      Heart Aching*

*Carrying heavy wounds onto my body*

*Down from generations*

*Ana mar'a Arabiya fee Mujtamaa ubawi (I am an Arab woman of color living in a patriarchal society)*

*Fastened to my class      My class is my lifeline      My class is my privilege*

*My class will tear me*

*Down*

## **Discovering Palestine through Theories of the Flesh: Is MESA Palestine?**

*As I attended MESA (Middle East Studies Association Conference) and went from session to session, I met a Palestinian PhD student who lived in New York. A Palestinian Citizen of Israel living in Occupied Palestine and a Palestinian who became a Bahraini Citizen. For the very first time I was in a liberatory space where I belonged. I sought refuge in my mind by asking myself, is this how it feels to be appropriated to a cultural space?*

*Suddenly I felt embodied painful surges rushing through me like currents. Currents reclaimed through these Palestinians at the conference. Currents turning into whirlpools, leaving me in diasporic grievance as if I had felt the loss of my country for the very first time. When the storm was over, I felt a serene sense of belonging: My genealogy was right here at the conference. The memories of Palestine and my ancestors were at this conference.*

*My last day at MESA created spaces of painful remembrances. The sessions on Palestinians in Kuwait, the numerous scholarly works describing the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians from Palestine and the state of the Diasporic Palestinians today all opened up suppressed wounds. Another set of tautological affective pains rushed through my body. It was an influx of emotivity that hurried through my body seeking refuge in my chest. My chest felt heavy, I felt my body tremble as the affect overwhelmed me. I sought relief as I broke down in front of my father. I was in mourning. I was grieving the death of a lost one. A lost country. A lost race in the making. My father looked at me and smiled, and said: "You finally have felt what it means to be a Palestinian. I have been waiting for years for you to experience this." In turn, he was trying to protect me as a woman from a younger generation. By not transmitting the pain of the conflict while we were growing up, he still could not protect us from the larger ideological forces that would force me to face the grievance of Palestine as I became older.*

*MESA is the closest thing I will ever experience to feeling whole with my origins. It never occurred to me that a conference visit would allow me to embody such a painful experience. MESA is a cultural space that opens up possibilities and modes of belonging for identity and existence, but closes them again when the conference is over. But ... I was born as a Kuwaiti. How could I betray my country by examining the affect of my Palestinian losses? Kuwait is my home; it is where I became and where I was provided with an upper-middle class upbringing. It is where my grandfather built his family from scratch after becoming a refugee overnight in 1948 when the Israelis displaced millions of Palestinians from their homeland. It is also a space where I was constantly reminded that I was originally Palestinian. It is a place that breeds ethnic discrimination, a side effect of previous British colonialism. It is also a fostering ground of class privilege. My love for Kuwait is incommensurable, but if I don't examine my affective hybridity I will remain stuck in a binary that will never move me forward, like many women of color.*

*Delving into a more complex realm of oppressions, my racial identities are continuously in motion as I navigate in the United States. As an international student,*

*I adapt like a chameleon, depending on what will suit my agenda in disrupting master narratives. I am Palestinian to those who are pro-Israeli, I am Kuwaiti to those who are Kuwaiti and I am a Kuwaiti-Palestinian to those who I can't figure out. Nothing is constant, nothing is temporal, we are always in a constant juggernaut.*

*The stamp of history has created a space where we can all come together because we suffer the same losses, the loss of land, of our people and our heritage. We are fragmented all over the world. We have become a body of suffering diasporas. We have no home. We only have pain and grief.*

*It is through the agony that we experience, that we can carry our discomforts and transform them into spaces of resistance and change.*

With Calafell we come to an awareness that borders are in constant mutability in confluence with identities ("Love, Loss, and Immigration" 151). In her article, "Pro (re-) claiming Loss: A Performance Pilgrimage in Search of Malintzin Tenepal", Calafell describes exile as a painful process of discovering herself by going back to Mexico (44). Edward Said also brings forth his losses as an American-Palestinian in his book, *Out Of Place*. He describes his experience of attending Gezira Preparatory School in Cairo as the first time he experienced an organized but colonial British system. Vital here is the connection between being out of place and larger neoliberal and colonialist structures that perpetuate feelings of loss and place. In this instance we also witness how the macro level structures directly affects the everyday. For this reason I echo Ong in stating that exceptions to neoliberalism can both exclude and include citizens from the benefits of capitalist development. She states that the conditions of diaspora have transformed with the rise of technology and capitalism (4). Even further, with Hasian and Flores we learn that dialogues in the postcolonial world need to take into account the Palestinian voices that were silenced (103).

Anzaldúa brings forward the term *Mestiza* as a convergence of two races. It is a mixture of racial, ideological, cultural, and biological consciousness (*Borderlands* 99). Thus, a *Mestiza* sifts through history, ruptures oppressive ideologies, documents each struggle, and uses new interpretations.

*As I navigate, I do so as an Arab Mestiza. In my own language,  
I will forever be a Muhajana woman*

But... How does my identity as an Arab Mestiza shift when I am faced with Arab masculinity? Does it still rupture and sift through history?

*This brown-eyed culture*

*I would give my life for*

*Discriminating against me in incursion*

*Breaking me when I'm down.*

*They keep disciplining me*

*I'm drowning*

*I'm hurting*

*I'm mourning*

*But I would still choose the brown eyes over whiteness*

## **Struggling with Arab and White Masculinity: Disciplining my Body**

*As a young girl, my one-of-a-kind feminist Arab father told me that there was no difference between how he would raise my sister and I in comparison to my brother. There would be no set masculinity or femininity boxes for us to be placed into. Instead, I played sports from the age of three and wrestled with my father because it was more interesting than playing with Barbie. I shopped with my mother as a capitalist endeavor, not as a means to prove my femininity. It was only by chance that I happened to be heterosexually privileged and that I fell within society's norms of "looking feminine." Simultaneously, I enjoyed so-called "masculine" activities such as sports and video games.<sup>1</sup> The masculine community wasn't always welcoming but it was through these spaces of painful exclusion and discipline that today I strive to find a space to deconstruct the patriarchal notions I encounter. Male privilege tears us apart from the things we most enjoy.*

*Weekly, we would go to Washington Park to play volleyball. I was the only woman out of a group of Qatari men but was quite used to participating in activities that included mostly men. I naturally learned to perform masculinity with my male acquaintances. Unfortunately, my performances of masculinity also became spaces where I was oppressed and disciplined. I always strived to be the best, but when I did I was restricted and punished. I would set the volleyball in a perfect and timely manner, and then hear comments such as "You're a girl, you can't set," "Haneen, go to the back you missed a ball," "Why are you playing, you're a girl," and the most frequent one, "Are you sure you're getting a doctorate degree?"*

*Overwhelmed by a sense of paranoia, I started to retreat into my mind. Maybe I was one of those people that was bad at volleyball and didn't know it. Maybe I was too aggressive. Maybe I needed to tone it down and be submissive while playing. I frantically started to tabulate points in my head whenever I was watching the game from the sideline. Mohammed<sup>2</sup> missed 6 points during the first game; no one said anything. Hamad missed 9 points and one of the guys commented once. I started to create a mental scoring sheet of my own performance. I missed the ball twice and both times I was disciplined. I found a great sense of relief that my problem was not a paranoid venture. However, I was infinitely let down and worried that the forces I was up against were far greater than a simple volleyball game. It is in these moments where I am disciplined for being a woman that I find a space to deconstruct these patriarchal ideologies. These spaces of discipline become spaces of resistance. Spaces where we can engage in dialogue, about race, class, gender, and other forms of discrimination simultaneously.*

*Placing my experiences with Arab male privilege into discussion with experiences of white male privilege brings forth an even more complex analysis within oppressive moments. I was at a private U. S. American University, meeting up with one of my Kuwaiti undergraduate friends for a quick bite. I walked into a*

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<sup>1</sup> This piece originally included a discussion of heterosexual privilege that was omitted due to word limits. I do, however, find such discussions fundamental and will continue to work on being an ally to the LGBTQ community.

<sup>2</sup> All names are pseudonyms, which are used to ensure confidentiality.

small Italian restaurant where Abdulaziz (Aziz) was waiting for me. I immediately started to speak in Arabic so my voice naturally increased in volume, as our culture tends to speak much louder than many cultures. From the corner of my eye, I saw a white male waiter staring at me. He walked over and said to my friend, "Thank god I married a white American woman not a foreigner, she sounds scary speaking in that language. Be careful she might beat you up. Man, am I just thankful I married a white American gal." As he said this he rested his hand on my shoulder. I moved back abruptly and told Aziz in Arabic that he needed to tell him to step away from the table. Aziz tried to calm me down as I tried to grapple with affects of white and male oppression simultaneously. I looked at the waiter and said, "I never gave you permission to touch me, who do you think you are to ridicule my language and my culture?"

I write this story because I deliberately strive to disrupt spaces through my personal encounters. I recognize that I should have said more and I didn't, in fear of conflict and in fear of power structures. I acknowledge that this is a larger ideological manifestation that has permeated into our institutions, societies and interpersonal communication and has been internalized by those of marginalized identities. This ideological manifestation, a new form of white imperialism, is constantly inscribed over and over again onto my body. I was being disciplined for being a Muslim woman, an Arab woman. I was being oppressed because there was no reflexivity in our communication. I was being oppressed because white masculinity can't see its forcefulness under the reigns of neoliberalism.

White masculinity appears to be more progressive on the surface level, more accepting of minorities and marginalized groups, especially when appearing in pop culture and other communication mediums. However, I don't remember being treated any better when encountering white masculinity. Instead, I remember feeling threatened because of my gender, my race, and certainly my religion. This is why intersectionality is vital for women of color.

At any male-dominated activity, I have to be twice as good in order to deconstruct notions of "Masculinity"

However, I would still choose the brown eyes over whiteness

Intersectionality, as the experiences of women of color being the product of intersecting patterns of racism, classism, and sexism, is crucial in exploring systems of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw 1243). With Collins we come to the realization that in order to empower feminist knowledge, one must embrace multiple interlocking points of oppression (222). For example, the matrix of domination is a system that enables thinking about oppressions such as race, class, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, and so forth. Taking Collins's Black feminist thought even further, Griffin states that when merging Black feminist thought and autoethnography, women of color scholars can begin to connect to their lived experiences as being significant (144). Similarly Griffin and Chávez note that an intersectional approach allows scholars to locate the ways history and politics pave the way for discourse and the way identities influence the role communication plays (18). When I refer to feminism, I am denoting an

intersectional feminist critique of the interlocking positionalities of our race, gender, sexuality, and other cultural locations that allow us to ethically reflect upon our experiences with our privileges and oppressions. I imagine this as an intersectional feminist ethic that is grounded in both ethics and intersectionality.

However, of importance is locating these intersectional experiences and relating them to larger hegemonic structures. Intersectionality cannot be isolated from the concept of neoliberalism. Within the matrix of domination, neoliberalism has created fostering grounds where privileges and oppression can continue to succeed. In this context, neoliberalism is the exercise of political power on the principles of the market economy (Foucault 133). I echo Calafell and Jones in asserting that the disciplining nature of neoliberalism is that it relies on individualism and autonomy (964). This creates a solid framework for fostering discussions of post “isms” and of equality. In reality, it excludes others as certain bodies become privileged and others excluded or pathologized (969). Neoliberalism directly affects our everyday communication with those that are more or less disadvantaged. How we ethically navigate these spaces is crucial. Therefore, within neoliberalism and intersectionality lies the concepts of ethics and morality. This is due to neoliberalism excluding certain identities while including others, which creates an ethical dilemma. When powerful ideologies permeate exclusion down to the micro-level, it becomes vital to move back and forth between the micro and the macro in a critical manner. Here, ethics is a moral compass that guides our communication when interacting with those less privileged than us. I am also referring to the ethics of speaking “for” the other or “for” those that are less advantaged within the system (Alcoff 6).

Ideally an intersectional communication ethics would be a reciprocal relationship in which we listen, don't speak for the other, and become aware of cultural differences through identity, privileges, and oppressions. In the field of ethics and communication today, this ceases to exist. The complication that occurs between ethics and intersectionality is integral to communication. If we are not aware of our privileges and oppressions and how they are manifested structurally when communicating with others, then it will be difficult to reach an intersectional communication ethic. However, when becoming aware, an intersectional ethical communication could be transformed into a site of resistance and reflexivity. I refer to reflexivity as a need to be critical of one's self, especially when one is in a privileged positionality. And so I pour my privilege out onto this paper for you.

## **My Shameful Brown Eyes**

*Disparity*

*Her mourning brown eyes*

*My mourning brown eyes*

*A struggling woman*

*A Mexican woman*

*Like me*

*Loss of our lands*

*Suffocating under Patriarchy*

*In the midst of Whiteness*

*Like me*

*Epiphany*

*Oh Class Privilege*

*Not like me*

*Corruption*

*Shame*

*Tearing Me Down*

*Damn You*

*Capitalism*

## **Confessions of a Superwoman: Where's my Epiphany?**

*Being brought up in an upper-middle class family, I was always able to live an extremely comfortable life in Kuwait, with the exception of the Gulf War (1990-91), when we lost everything. Growing up with a father from an upper class family and a mother from a middle class family, I was able to experience the benefits, privileges and dynamics of both families. My parents taught every summer to be able to provide so that we would mesh subtly with the upper classes. Lower and middle class families would always strive to appear upper class in the midst of a materialistic, oil rich country. Taking a loan from the bank was not to put a roof over your head but instead to buy a Mercedes. This was certainly a materialistic ideology that manifested itself to different degrees throughout the Middle Eastern region. In turn, neoliberalism has fostered class-privileged grounds that exclude those that make less money.*

*I came into my own shameful epiphany of class privilege at the Whole Foods down the street from my apartment building. As I walked into the store to order a sandwich, I was surprised to see an older Mexican lady behind the counter. I rarely see people of color working in Whole Foods except if they are cleaning or refilling the salad bar. I walked up to her and asked if I could have some gluten free bread for my sandwich. She looked confused and I immediately recognized it was a miscommunication due to language. I apologized and repeated the question while from the corner of my eye I glimpsed a white man hurrying towards us. He looked at her*

and said, "Gluten free bread, why can't you understand?" I started to feel my blood pressure rise and felt the need to defend Maria, as we were both women of color. I glanced towards him and lied, "She understood what I was saying, I think you are mistaken." He couldn't say anything in argument because I was a customer, so he stepped back. Over the weeks, I started to develop a connection with Maria that has left warm and sorrowful feelings that I constantly try to make sense of. I connected with her because we were both marginalized as women of color but soon I would learn that, even within communities of color, there are privileges that we fail to be cognizant of. Every Thursday I go to Whole Foods and wait patiently for her to make me my sandwich. She is a happy mother of two struggling to learn English. Maria spends most of her money on English courses because she is constantly ridiculed for speaking with an "accent." In other words, she spends her money on English classes because her accent is in conflict with the "norm." I related as a woman of color and as an international student. She has a son who can't come to the States because he does not have U.S. citizenship, and a daughter in the States who she supports. They barely make it and it's been a life long struggle for her. She claims that the white people at Whole Foods treat her fairly well. I walked to my privileged car that day and cried silently. I was mourning for this woman's losses. The loss of being away from her family. The loss that she was working so hard that she couldn't recognize the ascendancy of whiteness. A woman of color like me. I learned a lot from Maria about compassion and modesty. The sandwiches she makes are made of love, loss, pain, and struggles. Every week she updates me on her English course and her daughter's well-being and every week I ask her if there is anything I can do to support her. I had to have a conversation with a friend that was a person of color from a poor community to come to terms with how to offer help without being privileged. I had to call and ask questions and receive pushback from him. Recognizing my privileges, I cannot simply hand her a \$100 check because that would be privilege in itself. If I had not had this conversation with my colleague I probably would have swooped in there with that check. I am constantly in a space of navigation, trying to come to terms with how I can help other women of color that have different oppressions from me. How can we as women engage in alliance building in order to work within power differentials in a larger ideological system? While I recognize that we need to learn to be better allies, I also recognize that the most difficult thing about privilege is to work within a system in a way that doesn't reinscribe hierarchy.

It's through the eyes of those that we unintentionally oppress that we reach our epiphanies and our ethical moments. It is also through the eyes of Maria that we must bewail the fact that our advantages take away from her place as less advantaged. I recognize that we both have experienced the loss of land and the experiences of heteropatriarchy, but I am fortunate to have benefited from an oil-rich country. But doesn't class tear us apart, making us less ethical? Isn't that where corruption begins? I stare into Maria's eyes every Thursday and I feel so much pain, shame, and contestation.

One of the most difficult experiences to navigate as a woman of color is to have benefits. As people of color we have always been familiar with oppression

*but not with privilege. Privilege is more painful and we often tend to avoid it because privileged positionalities reinforce the role of the oppressor and the role of hegemony. We need to think closely about how we can help our less fortunate sisters without appearing like superwomen. If we deem it necessary to swoop down from our entitled land to save the proletariat then we have made no use of our privileges. Instead we need to create a web of interlocking spaces of trust and friendship. Being from the Gulf rich states (Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain), I am aware that I have advantages marked with indignity. I know what it means to experience racial and gender oppression, but don't know what it means to experience class, queer, trans or disabled subjugation. I get to choose when to bring forward my privilege. I can acknowledge my advantages but will never be able to know how it feels to be marginalized by class, queerness, or disability. As I walk through the world, I am deeply aware of what I bear onto my body. We must recognize that we all have benefits. Academia is in itself a space of class and educational privilege. We need to learn how to navigate within these entitlements, when to use them, and when not to. As privileged women of color we have an obligation to resist structures of domination in the midst of neoliberalism, even if we are part of the structure that subjects us. Privilege is shameful. We must be aware of our shame and constantly strive to disrupt and then communicate.*

*When I put my privilege on my arm for the world to see I am not reaching out to show it to you. I am reaching out in unity and solidarity.*

As Collins explains, the key to advancing Black feminist thought as critical social theory is including working class women and non-intellectuals in the equation (20). We must also recognize that privilege for white people looks different than privilege for people of color (Goodman 18). Women of color are at a loss in the high literary world because of white male mainstream education (Anzaldúa, *Anzaldúa Reader* 28). Our tongues place us in an adversarial relationship to the dominant ideologies and we remain stuck in a closed bubble. Anzaldúa calls for the need for women of color and Third World women to be a priority in our writing (29). In this instance ethics becomes the focal point in communication. We must always be aware of our privileged positionalities.

For this reason we cannot turn our backs on class because it is married to race. The same applies for other middle class women of color. Treading in dangerous waters, the most essential question that Collins raises is, "How will these working class women, many of whom feel stuck in the working poor, view their more privileged sisters" (74)? In my opinion, this is the "make it or break it" stage in forming alliances between privileged/less privileged women. As Collins says, we have a choice to either focus on our new positions as middle/upper class women or continue with solidarity with our working class sisters (75). I would add we need to continuously disrupt our benefits in order to stay connected to our sisters. We also need to continuously seek epiphanies when they do not find us. It is through the epiphanies that we can mourn with our less privileged sisters.

Anzaldúa demonstrates the experience of being colonized by being marginalized and being decolonized by being privileged into the mainstream

(*Anzaldúa Reader* 288). Thus, the more privileges we gain, the easier it is to numb the experience of our oppressions. As I discussed earlier, when we obsess in a charity-centered approach in which “we” want to help “them,” we are furthering the divide between us and them (Johnson 72). Instead, we need to own the problem and the path towards solutions and not the charity of giving to the less fortunate (75). One way is through communication and performative writing. Even more important is the mere fact that we cannot talk about class without talking about capitalism. It is capitalism that has provided a fostering ground for privileging certain races while oppressing others (Johnson 126). For this reason, we need to look at how and why we are participating in oppression, because this will lead us to paths of resistance (Johnson 127). I would add that because historically people of color are less privileged with economic status, it means that a privileged person of color has already escaped a small part of the system.

*Escaping the system creates a light at the end of the tunnel through which we, those of color, can run with more sporadic bursts of resistance*

### **Tying it all Together: Resisting Overarching Systems**

In my own words, resistance is connecting with people. I can unite with other allies from both my privileged and oppressed positions. I can strive to connect with those that differ from my own views and who are perpetrators of the system. I echo Sorrells in stating that we must challenge systemic and interpersonal levels by engaging in both a micro and macro level analysis (183). Through an intercultural praxis in which every decision in our day is carefully thought through we can enter spaces of resistance and opportunity for communication (184). Intercultural praxis thus allows us to shift positionalities and develop our allies through social justice (184). For this reason, constructive conversations have made a change. Small bursts of resistance within interpersonal communication are vital. I could have not said anything to the white man at Whole Foods, but I would be missing an opportunity for resistance. With the white male waiter at the Italian restaurant I missed an opportunity to resist, but my fear held me back. The word “fear,” for example, which is most often coupled with “anxiety,” ironically hinders women of color from speaking back to those that are more privileged. Paradoxically, throughout history it is those who are more privileged than us that fear the “other.” This might be a reminder to ourselves that the “other” fears us, so we shouldn’t relapse into distress upon encountering uncomfortable events where we can turn them into positive resistance.

Without an intersectional ethical feminist analysis from women of color, we will never move forward. Marx or Foucault might help us understand power structures, but they will never assist in understanding the real interlocking struggles and the real place from which resistance can grow and materialize into an actual ideology. An intersectional ethical feminist analysis preludes to an intersectional moral system in which we are fully present in theory and in embodiment when communicating with others. For example, we must be fully reflexive and aware of our privileges when speaking to someone in a less advantaged positionality. This awareness is crucial in locating areas where communication is impeded because of advantages that we may

have over other individuals inside the system. By always being grounded in our isms when communicating with others we might be able to create more sporadic outbursts in the current system. For this reason we must begin at the micro-level in hope that it will infiltrate upward into the system.

Thus, “through intersectional reflexivity we hold our bodies accountable to the ways we might also be complicit in neoliberal ideologies” (Jones and Calafell 963). As I engage in reflexivity I realize that writing this essay was a struggle. It was a tension between inviting you, the reader, to join me in exploring our privileges and the fear of reinstating my own privileges by speaking about those that are less privileged than me. My anxieties around the essay are bred from my privileges, not my oppressions. I could have written my reflections on being oppressed as a woman of color but where would that take me? It certainly is important and would require you to understand the pain of my subjugation but reflecting on privilege is harder because we occupy the role of the oppressor. Writing is a process in which the writer must carefully scrutinize each word and each moment that could be a poor reflection of privilege. Writing in itself can reinstate privilege. Writing in academia is reinstating neoliberalism and privilege. Have I reinstated my own privilege by being able to write about them in an academic journal? Who will I reach and how will we carry this forward?

*As I type my words onto this line I fear the privilege that I am pushing forth onto this paper. But isn't this a risk well-worth taking?*

This essay is a call toward a more awakened reflexivity when communicating with others because of what the system has perpetuated. It is an urge to put forth an intersectional feminist ethic and a beginning step to building a moral foundation of ethics and reflexivity. It is a desire for us to dig deeper and to improve our communication by consistently being present in our multifaceted positionalities. When I as a writer engage in painful writing, I am inviting you to engage in your own painful privileged reflections. Together let us eliminate our oppressive elements by first being aware of the systems that are creating them and by recognizing our own privileges as direct manifestations. It is always more agonizing to be aware of our privileges than our oppressions. Let us at least start to incorporate this into our daily communication with others. We can at least begin here.

*As I write down my thoughts, sometimes they don't seem so real after all. I have always dreamt of a utopian world where the combination of all our forces will come together and disrupt this ghost-like neoliberalistic power. A hurricane will scurry through while people try to grab on to whatever they have. The storm will subside and suddenly there will be a new world. A new world in which half of the upper class's wealth will have shifted down to the lower classes, lifting them up to the middle classes. The upper classes, having lost half of their wealth, will also be pulled down to the middle classes. Everyone will be of the middle class; everyone will be in a state of serenity. Race, gender, sexuality, class, religion and ability won't matter anymore. However, if the dissolution of difference was that easy, then our duties in re-evaluating our privileges and oppressions as women of color would cease to exist.*

*If only we can find the center of neoliberalism then we can extinguish the center  
But neoliberalism has no center*

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