

You Are a Marked Body

Caught in the Fires of Racialization as an Arab Woman in the American Academy

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I remember playing with the kids in our neighborhood in Newcastle upon Tyne, who also happened to be my close friends at school. I imagine I was probably ten years old or so. It was a weekday. Three of my school friends rang the door, and my mother agreed to let me play with them with the caveat that we stay near our house. “Your mother is so overprotective!” they would tell me. This day, my mother answered the doors in jeans and a sleeveless crocheted white top. Her hair was short and dark, and her beautiful green eyes watchful as always. “Wow, she looks so normal!” one of my friends told me. It was the first time they had seen her without a headscarf. My mother, born and raised in Syria and who had moved to England when she married my father, wore the Islamic headscarf whenever out in public. My parents had raised us in the Islamic faith, and we would spend weekends with our Arab and Muslim friends, be it going to the movies, visiting the mosque, or sharing dinner together. I was jarred at the insinuation that she had somehow seemed abnormal all this time in my friends’ eyes. I was silent as it dawned on me that people did not always see us as we saw ourselves.

Hence began the practice of seeing myself in other people’s eyes, a “twoness” or double consciousness of sorts (Du Bois, 1903). I look back to that moment as

formative—forever seared in my consciousness. I have decided, some twenty years later, to respond to their oppositional and interrogational declarations of my mother’s normality. Today, I bring my own embodied experience as an “othered” being to consciousness by tracking and tracing “vignettes” from my academic journey. Using multiple layers of consciousness, I connect the personal to the cultural to the political. More specifically, I mark moments of otherization as a diasporic graduate student during my doctoral journey in the American academy.

Autoethnography is the “postcolonial turn” that ethnography has taken by recentering the researcher as integral to the field (Chawla & Rodriguez, 2008; Clair, 2003). The power of theorizing through experience cannot be undermined, permitting intricate understandings of cultural nuance and embodiment in hegemonic frameworks (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 2000). As such, I draw on my lived experience in a raced, gendered, and classed body not to generalize my voice to others but to open a dialogue on the positionalities we occupy within hegemonic systems. By theorizing experiences of the flesh, I join other critical cultural and feminist scholars who have located the personal within broader matrixes of domination (Ahmed, 2004; Anzaldúa, 1987; Calafell, 2013, 2014; Collins, 2000; Juárez, 2019). An autoethnographic performance paradigm privileges the body as a way of knowing (Anzaldúa, 1987), particularly in histories of colonialism that cannot be divorced from the body (Calafell, 2014). The body, as a set of signifiers, is prioritized as a text by which to read and theorize systems of oppression (Yep, 2013). As Chávez puts it, “bodies are not simply read, but rather in their construction as foreign, they are translated” (2009, p. 23). Such paradigms allow one to move from the theoretical study of flattened discourse to textual fragments rich with context (Mcgee, 1990). This rhetorical reflexivity “seek[s] out these sites of tension, displacement, and contradiction between the Being There of performed experience and the Being Here of written texts” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 193).

We must acknowledge the imperative to scrutinize the implications of the situatedness of our knowledge structures. Too often we have been divorced from how race is constructed “in situ” (Warren, 2001). Therefore, this chapter is a response to calls for rhetoricians to examine the everyday experiences of historically marginalized people (Ono & Sloop, 1995). The production of racial knowledge is “one of the least critiqued arenas in which ‘race’ is produced” (Crawford, 2007, p. 1). The academy is not merely a site of instruction but also

a political and cultural site of contestation over knowledge, canons, and voices that embody and transcribe race (Mohanty, 2003).

Though the way in which the academy produces, reproduces, and reinforces hierarchical norms has been explored at length in the literature, these accounts have come primarily from Latina/o/x, African American, and Asian perspectives (Calafell, 2013, 2014; Chawla & Rodriguez, 2008; Collins, 2000; Hendrix, 2011; Moore, 2017; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2006). There exists scant literature from the perspectives of postcolonial Arab and/or Muslim academics, though there have been a few noteworthy recent efforts in this regard (Ghabra, 2015; Ghabra & Calafell, 2018; Yousuf & Calafell, 2018). Therefore, this chapter addresses how racial hierarchical norms are produced, reproduced, and reinforced within pedagogical spaces focused on intersectionality and racial justice issues through examining the affect and effect on an Arab/Muslim diasporic graduate student in the United States.¹

The Academy as a Border Zone

In this chapter, I conceptualize the academy (and the attending spaces that taper from it) as a material border in which symbolic constructions that regulate and define others are legitimized and reproduced. I do so by homing in on the “border effects” of discourses that transcend the physical space of the academy, that is, the material consequences of knowledge production in the academy on bodies “of color.” Borders are not just “where oceans meet land, where rivers divide nations, and where fences stand” (Ono, 2012, p. 31). Instead, borders move with migrants into the social spaces in which they live, be it in the workplace, home, or otherwise (Ono, 2012). Anzaldúa theorizes borderlands as present “wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (1987, preface). These unnatural boundaries form a dividing line constructing identity intersections, embodiments, and coalitions (Johnson, 2012).

As such, the academy is conceived as a domestic border within the nation, where logics of internal colonialism—defined by Tuck and Yang (2012) as the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora, and fauna—are present. I argue that the academy, in the process of racialization, actively

otherizes diasporic students by casting them outside the border even when “located physically within the borders of the nation” (Flores, 2003, p. 380). Insofar as the academy is in the business of representing others through critical discussions of race, the degree to which these people appear as others becomes a function of how we detachedly constitute them under the academy’s terms. Though the pivotal work of the academy in the field of critical scholarship of race cannot be undermined, I argue there is an ambivalence and quiescence with which such knowledge must be accompanied.

Caught in the Crossfire

Autoethnographies are often perceived as nonnormative (Calafell & Moreman, 2009), standing out in predominantly “white” narratives of being. I proceed, acknowledging that spaces of privilege and disempowerment are consequential when coming to a research project such as this. I explore the details of the personal not only to show how fragments of identity exist simultaneously in disadvantaged and privileged positions (Collins, 2000), but to set the backdrop against which the “vignettes” of my time in the American academy can be read. Through a distillation of experience, and an intensification of the personal, I theorize how the personal links to global histories to explore how we might build solidarity across divisive boundaries (Ghazal Aswad, 2021). At this juncture, I reflect on the many subjectivities I embody: educated, financially comfortable, traveled, British, multilingual, white-skinned, and able-bodied. I also touch on my history of immigration, (lack of) American citizenship, and my “marked” presence as a Muslim woman, which potentially collide with these identities. I come from a relatively privileged background as the daughter of two educated parents. My father is a well-known and successful physician, one of a handful of surgeons in the United Arab Emirates specialized in cervical cancer. Though my grandfather was a pharmacist, four of his five children were doctors in what is considered the family’s profession. My grandmother came from the well-off Chamma family, known to own several villages, factories, and businesses, which left her personally wealthy and independent from a young age.

My father fled Syria during the uprisings of the 1980s, often referred to as “the events,” which culminated in the Hama massacre where over twenty thousand people were killed. He escaped in secret, on the hunch of being falsely

informed on by a colleague who had a vendetta against the family. He had just finished his final year of medical school, though he had not yet received his degree. My grandmother would recall the dramatic night in which the army came to their home searching for my father the day after he had left. He escaped to Austria with five hundred *liras*, selling newspapers on the street in Austria until he was able to arrive safely in England. He would not return to Syria for another fifteen years.

Though I was born and raised in England, we visited Aleppo in Syria at least twice a year, an ancient city from the second millennium BCE strategically located at the crossroads of several trade routes. We would spend summers at the Citadel, absorbing the hustle and bustle of the busy city, at the Old Souk, or drinking tea at my grandma's veranda with family and friends. Gold-domed mosques coexisted with Armenian cathedrals, Maronite Churches, and even synagogues. It was a miraculous place. At twelve years old, my parents uprooted the family to move to the United Arab Emirates. Although I continued my schooling there for many years, in a sense, we were all only temporary inhabitants. I would eventually migrate to the United States, pursuing my graduate education first in the Midwest and later in the mid-South.

The complexity of my group identification is at times complicated by my ethnicity. Though of Syrian descent, my family has origins in Turkey from the area of Mardin and Erzincan, and I often grew up hearing of my great-grandmother's great Turkish beauty. My hometown Aleppo borders Gaziantep in Turkey. As such, many northern Syrians share Turkish ancestry, which is unsurprising considering the whole region had once been under Ottoman rule. My history could be said to make me a person whose national or cultural identity is somehow miscellaneous, by virtue of birth, religion, language, migration, parentage, and overseas education (Clifford, 1986). My "membership" in many apparently conflicting groups may make my loyalties, and even my identity, seem arbitrary, if not always problematic. For this and other reasons, I have at all times been placeless, yet filled with belonging to various places, languages, and cultures. Despite the immense pride I have in my roots, it comes at the cost of a global unmooring and fluidity of identity that even I struggle to place. An identity that has never been perfectly acculturated but instead is in a "constant process of negotiation" (Bammer, 1994), infinitely dispersed and indefinitely displaced.

In what follows, I connect these narratives of ethnic and spatial belonging to my bordering experiences at the American academy. As pedagogical borders

shifted beneath my feet, I found my embodied history clashing with prescribed American racial hierarchies within a U.S. colonial imaginary, buckets of my “whiteness” or “color” into which I must fit. My diasporic attempts to place my “interstitial” positionality were made ever more challenging (Bhabha, 1996)—I was often caught in the crossfires, negotiating the counternarratives of a hegemonic “common-sense” identity placed upon me in pedagogical spaces.

Innocence and Rose-Colored Glasses

Coterminous with the rise of the unabashedly racist and sexist era of president Donald Trump, there were rising concerns about the whiteness of the communication discipline. Chakravartty and colleagues’ (2018) watershed essay “#CommunicationSoWhite” highlighted ongoing racial inequality and colonial legacies in terms of the production of disciplinary knowledge in the field. For all intents and purposes, the communication discipline has been at a crossroads, wrestling with its pedagogical, research, and public commitments. With this in mind, in this chapter I juxtapose my embodied reality within the pedagogical discussions of the discipline to explicate how racial hierarchies reify and perpetuate limited categories of race through praxis emanating from academic spaces.

I was not introduced to “whiteness” as an academic concept until my doctoral studies at the University of Memphis. Doctoral programs are not often academic microcosms of the cities they exist in, but Memphis was certainly different. Our program was noticeably more diverse than other departments, and the campus as a whole was of a majority-minority composition (Office of Institutional Research, 2019). As such, discussions surrounding race, class, gender, and identity were rampant in every class, in stark opposition to my time in the Midwest, where such awareness had been nonexistent.

My time in Memphis became crucial to my exploration of critical race theory. I soon found the inventory of related terms accumulate in my consciousness. Intellectual exchanges on race began infiltrating even my most intimate friendships. I was lucky to find myself amid a particularly diverse and strongly outspoken cohort. One colleague in particular was far more tuned

in to these conversations than I. She was powerful in expressing her ideas, and I was in awe of her. We would lingeringly mull over class discussions as we walked to our car after evening classes, engaging in hours of unfiltered conversations where we would flesh out things we would not have dared to in class. We turned to the topic of our intersectional embodiments and our place in the academy. Our conversations become struggles, where we both were still uncertain of our relationality to all of this. One time, I exclaimed, “But I am White!”

All my life, out of necessity, that was the box I had ticked. I was not alone in this. Most Arab Americans, in the absence of a Middle Eastern or North African category, identify themselves as white (Rojas, 2019).² The U.S. census continues to define white as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). This is also a reflection of the extent to which Arab Americans see themselves as part of dominant group in a global context, rather than a minority group (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007). Further, a semiotics of whiteness among some Arabs, such as Lebanese/Syrians, allow for some to be white-passing, though in my case my hijab was a marker of difference (Ahmed, 2011; Ghazal Aswad, 2020).³ In these discourses, the hijab becomes not only a visual marker of religion but an emblematic marker of racial difference (Yousef, 2020).

My colleague told me, “Hey, I don’t want to take that away from you, but you are not white.” She insisted my hijab, as well as my name, were “telling.” Her characterization of my comments stung, as if I had been coveting something that was not mine. I explained Arabs were Caucasian, the definition of white. She was surprised at this, but maintained I was of the “Black and brown folk.”

No doubt intended as an acknowledgment of shared experiences (Vega & Chávez, 2018), in that moment I was hurt. I felt as if I was being “put in my place.” For some reason, the neat categorization failed to capture the particularities of my diasporic experience. In an essentializing moment, the plethora of embodied experiences of women of various races, classes, identities, and sects became reducible to one knowable story: a single story of otherness. I laugh now looking back at this conversation, at how naïve I was. Though grateful for my more mature understanding of the complex nature of these discussions, I still yearn for the innocence I had then, for the time when I saw life with rose-colored glasses.

Bordering Declarations of Race in Embodied Spaces

In the third year of my doctoral studies, a friend of mine joined the doctoral program after many years of leaving academia. We became close, and I was relieved to have an ally whose positionality closely mirrored mine. Before long, we found ourselves sharing insights and comparing notes on our experiences in the department. At a departmental event that I was unable to attend, she told me one of the white male students in my cohort was debating the relative whiteness of various students. He offered himself up first, stating why for various reasons his whiteness might be questioned. He then proceeded to discuss the degrees of my whiteness. “Noor, on the other hand, though she speaks well, her hoojab and accent make her less white in the eyes of some.”

I was disturbed. I keenly felt the inquisitive surveillance of my diasporic body that these comments betrayed. I was unsure how I felt about the entitlement inherent in his analyzing the levels of my perceived whiteness, an immigrant in a space that was at times alienating and foreign. His location in the conversation was epistemically salient, considering that some privileged positionalities are discursively dangerous (Alcoff, 1991). I noticed the politics of declaration, in which enunciations of his own whiteness became good practice, reproducing white privilege in “unforeseen” ways (Ahmed, 2004). Indeed, though whiteness must “be seen” to resist the power of whiteness (Dyer, 1997, p. 45), this occurs at the risk of non-whiteness then being marked, defined, declared, and assigned as its counterpart. In these pedagogical spaces, race becomes not only a theoretical object of study but something to be tracked and assigned to others in a “neutral” manner.

Pedagogical spaces become border zones that “designate, produce, and/or regulate the space of difference” (DeChaine, 2009, p. 44). Despite the intentional politics of critical race studies as loyal to a politics of inclusion (Flores, 2016), pedagogical spaces in which critical race is discussed at times lend themselves to the further marginalization of immigrant scholars through the parceling out of whiteness to them. This is rooted in the assumption that racism is based in ignorance, and that through more knowledge, anti-racism is achieved (Hage, 2000). Moreover, I began to find problematic how the all-encompassing terms of “whiteness” and “people of color” were utilized, with little thought of the

doctrinal consequences of how these terms restrict conceptions of diasporic identity.

Simultaneously, I was reminded of the ever-present “gaze of the white male” and the historically constituted subject-position from which I was being studied (Morrison, 2012). While these pedagogical spaces intend to promote social change by challenging interlocking and distinct forms of oppression, inadvertently othered bodies are interpellated as “subjects” of analysis. The student’s cutting demarcation of my perceived whiteness seemed an authenticating announcement of my otherized place in society, empowered by his pedagogical sense of being “learned” on these issues. The academy became a border space, unintentionally legitimizing flawed racial categorizations and ahistorical ways of thinking about others. These norms are presented as clear-cut and readily identifiable, when they are not only imperfect but narrowly constructed within the culture of the United States (Keating, 1995). Here, I borrow Walter Mignolo’s words,

When you feel that you have been classified, that you are not what you think you are, you become part of the gaze of the classifier. The awareness of dwelling in the border brought immigrant consciousness and that affected my body. (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 251)

Though I am not suggesting that anti-racism must transcend race to avoid the reification of race (Gilroy, 2000), I advocate for a recognition of the material impacts of reductionist rhetorical conceptualizations of race in our embodied discourses with one another. The following questions arise: Where is the cognizance of our role in (in)advertently perpetuating the histories of these terms and using them with effect and affect against others? Has whiteness become an object to be determined and assigned according to various metrics or calculations? Is this the new whiteness that is “self-conscious and critical” (Cohen, 1997), or is the study of whiteness sanctioning an elitist and educated white normativity? Does being versed in critical race theory entitle one to place others as artifacts of discourse, to be analyzed socially, politically, ideologically, and religiously? Does it entitle us to make spectacles of their identities? Are attempts to classify others according to racial hierarchies perpetuating colonizing practices?

American Racial Hierarchies in the Colonial Imaginary and Skewed Paradigms of Intersectionality

“So Noor, in Syria, do y’all consider yourself White?” I paused, uncertain how to answer. Aside from a phenotypic preference for whiteness (a colorism of sorts), Syrians generally did not define themselves in those terms. “No, we consider ourselves Syrian,” I exclaimed.

The starting point of the conversation was not where I would have liked it: we were on different planes completely. The epistemological and ontological claims implicit in the articulation of the question shackled my agency in responding. On reflection, I realized that instead of a nuanced discussion on cultural and ethnic heritage, pedagogical discussions of race in the classroom were encouraging a recentering, rather than decentering, of American notions of identity with a U.S. colonial imaginary. As opposed to opening up spaces for agentic articulations of identity, race’s normativity was obscuring even the possibility of a world where my whiteness did not have to be pondered upon.

I was caught between structures, conscious of the tension between how I relate to myself and how my friend wanted to engage in solidarity with me. Was critical race theory as a pedagogical site of study causing us to “get stuck” on whiteness (Dyer, 1997) as opposed to an exploration of the distinct historical formations of other identities? In the words of Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the many overlapping stories of the diaspora are “reduced to a single narrative” (Adichie, 2009). Theories of race were abundant in the texts I read, but the apparent universalization with which they were presented troubled me. Race is a highly contingent and mutable social construction (Haney-López, 1994), but in pedagogical practice, these abstract concepts were being “copied and pasted” ahistorically contrary to the critical work intended to dismantle oppressive conditions of power. The presumed certainty and unquestioning nature in which they were consolidated and deployed transcendentally echoed the hierarchization of particular knowledges, cultures, and histories (Dei et al., 2006). More specifically, stagnant U.S. racial hierarchies are reductively applied to others naturalizing the self-proclaimed supremacy of American racial norms, the host nation-state.

“So, would you consider yourself White?” I ask my cerebral brother, a third-year medical student residing in London who spends his weekends reading the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in addition to other historical antiquities. He visits us annually

in Memphis, and I cherish our discussions. I have been living insularly in the United States and in my own mind for so long that I am eager to see how my brother identifies. He responds:

No, absolutely not. I am Arab. The slight paleness of my skin has nothing to do with whiteness. But, I think whiteness is different things in different countries. In Switzerland for example, you don't call Swiss people white. Because Swiss people, though they are white, are not American white people, are they? I think the idea of whiteness is an American thing. Or at least, something in American scholarly circles. (personal communication, June 22, 2019)

My brother's words echo in my mind for weeks. The impulse to place immigrants within the larger cultural narrative of the United States appears unavoidable (Ghazal Aswad, 2019, 2020; Ghazal Aswad & de Velasco, 2020), and the academy is certainly not immune to these forces. The particularity of American society is habitually "imposed, in apparently de-historicized form, upon the whole planet" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1999, p. 41). The practice of mapping the geography, race, and culture of one place on to another is a well-documented Orientalist tendency (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1999). However, these tendencies are interrupted when immigrants resist their placement in a U.S.-centric worldview that discounts the historical singularities of their existence. The *comfortable* reinforcement of my "place" in monolithic racial categories belied the fact that "race" is a sociohistorical trope not to be inscribed across all cultures or geographies. The placement of whiteness atop U.S. racial hierarchies, while ignoring the specificities of other social markers, is another symptom of the sweep of U.S. colonialism oblivious to the agency and privilege of those originating from outside of the United States.

These racial placements fell into what I term "skewed paradigms of intersectionality" oblivious to other intersecting axes of my diasporic body, the material effects of which I felt every day. Recently, academics have called for an examination of the consequences of an isolationist attention to race (Vega & Chávez, 2018). Indeed, the microscopic concentration on race in these pedagogical spaces obscures other facets of my intersectionality, such as my lack of American citizenship. I was regularly confronted with precarity as a result of it, be it when considering how to maintain legal status in the country or when traveling within the nation's borders or abroad. Being an immigrant

lends a clandestine element to all aspects of one's life, and I often feel the threat of control and surveillance. Noncitizenship had cast a long shadow over every detail of my life in the United States, though it continued to be an ancillary concern within discussions of intersectionality.

For all the grand narratives of U.S. individualism, characterizations of my racial status flattened any consideration of the multiplicity of my identity, placing me within predetermined constructions of American racial identity and minority canon formation. The academy became a border zone of cultural negotiation and contestation, regulating belonging within the national U.S. imaginary. The treatment of these racial hierarchical norms as sacrosanct betrayed a blind spot that obfuscates other realities of existence outside the United States. It relays diasporic identities as naturally falling into immutable racial categories applicable to all bodies. As such, pedagogical discussions of race in the academy bind diasporic students within preprepared racial molds, without concern for *their* histories. After all, whose histories were being centered in these categorizations?

Invisibility and Selective Solidarity

I recall my professor casually stating in class one day, “Noor, you are a marked body.” I took pause, shuddering at the implicit meaning of the words. Though pedagogical discussions of my marked body were likely intended as an intellectual exercise recognizing my marginalized positionality within the academic canon and in society, they were stifling in their limitedness in capturing the realities of my life. The majority of the time, pedagogical spaces completely neglected the place of Arab-Muslims in American society, or interpellated them into alien spaces with which I did not identify under “other racialized immigrant groups.” The storied and historied bodies of Muslims were rarely theorized within rhetorical studies, or even within discussions of intersectionality (Yousuf & Calafell, 2018). Moreover, few discussions directly attended to the structural violence against Muslims as a mode of white supremacy. While these topics may have been touched on, they exist only at the periphery of these conversations. Though I felt an affective connection with these discourses of otherness, I also felt an outsider to them. As put by Brah, “each border embodies a unique narrative, even while it resonates with common themes with other borders”

(1996, p. 203). As such, I frequently was a spectator to other prominent players as they worked out how they would coexist with one another.

The sense of invisibility culminated when I shared with a white female colleague of mine that I was thinking of writing an autoethnography regarding my experience as an Arab-Muslim woman in the academy. Instead of encouraging words, she looked at me quizzically, stating, “I would advise you to avoid getting into a competition with the African American community on those kinds of issues. I do not mean to preach, but anti-Blackness really is the axis around which all these discussions should revolve.” The insinuation was that I was engaging in a power struggle and that doing so would insert myself in a diabolical “oppression” competition with others. I was acquainted with the essentialist Black/white paradigm and its pervasive impact on racial discourse (Alcoff, 2003; Delgado, 1996; Perea, 1997), but I had not expected to suddenly be “in” it. I was unnerved that the specificities of my experience were not worthy of examination, and of how my voice was being constituted a priori.

I reminded myself that solidarity with the Arab American community was not to be taken for granted. Upon reflection, I noted how again, a well-intentioned “white” body was positioning itself as a gatekeeper intellectualizing how my opinions as a diasporic student should take form. I decided to persevere even more strongly to delegitimize intellectualizations of what diasporic experiences should look like. Omitting the postcolonial experiences of Arab American immigrants contributes to marginalization of these communities (Naber, 2000). And so, through this chapter, I have begun the tensive process of bringing “double consciousness” to term, placing myself at the front of the “gaze,” rather than as the recipient of its hegemonic force.

Conclusion

This chapter was written in the summer of 2019 amid growing awareness of the colonial legacies of our academic spaces. As I wrote in an apartment in Istanbul over the Bosphorus, a pivotal “political moment” reverberated across the field, namely the publication of a statement by the editor of the respected disciplinary journal *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, Professor Martin J. Medhurst, a distinguished scholar of the discipline, calling out the threat of identity to the “scholarly merit” of the discipline in response to concerns about the racial homogeneity of the

Distinguished Scholars (Dutta, 2019). In the aftermath of the editorial, a huge backlash erupted, aptly described as a “bleeding” of the communication discipline (Tracy, 2019). At the time, an essay of mine, submitted to the same journal a few months prior, had received a coveted response: “revise and resubmit.”⁴ I was in a state of both personal and professional uncertainty, unsure how to act as prominent academics began withdrawing their work from the journal. And so, this chapter became imbued with a renewed urgency, situated as it is from the perspective of a diasporic student “caught in the crossfires” of the “going-ons” in the academy in its search for a racial utopia.

As an immanent critique, this chapter illustrates how pedagogical spaces valorize American notions of identity within a U.S. colonial imaginary, “muddling” the borders at which racial hierarchies are drawn. The academy actively imposes, in interstitial moments, U.S. racial hierarchies in a manner so easy, so settled, as to be diminutive of diasporic students. Critical discourses of race, though aiming to alleviate oppressions, at times operate oppressively toward diasporic identities by drawing on and sustaining discourses of race. In doing so, the academy is complicit in the material production and reproduction of hegemonic racial classifications, at the cost of a contemplation of the dynamic and layered histories of others.

In conclusion, I implore scholars to be mindful of the importance of engagement with the material effects and affects of how racial constructions are deployed toward others to avoid the reproduction of alienating colonial logics. This chapter is not in any way a disauthorization of the study of critical race theory, which is essential to combating racism, but rather an injunction toward greater “inter-rhetorical” reflexivity (Lee, 1998) to inculcate an alertness to our own parochial priorities and the geopolitical and sociocultural subjectivities of others.

NOTES

1. The term “pedagogical spaces” is used several times in this chapter. With this term, I am referring specifically to pedagogical spaces informed by intersectionality, critical race, social justice, and anticolonialist theories.
2. Though this may be the case for Arab Americans residing in the United States, it is important to note this does not (necessarily) apply to Arabs living in the Middle East,

as will be discussed later in this chapter.

3. Ajrouch and Jamal's (2007) study on Arab Americans found that Lebanese and Syrians were more likely to identify as white than other Arabs, such as Iraqis or Yemenis.
4. The essay was eventually accepted for publication after intense discussions around the best course of action (see Ghazal Aswad & de Velasco, 2020).

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