

# Learning Exchanges: Searching Global Feminist Possibilities for “Real Reciprocity” in Study Away Opportunities for Students

**K.J. Verwaayen**

*Department of Women’s Studies and Feminist Research,  
The University of Western Ontario, London Canada*

*Email: [kjverwaa@uwo.ca](mailto:kjverwaa@uwo.ca)*

**Erica Lawson**

*Department of Women’s Studies and Feminist Research,  
The University of Western Ontario, London Canada*

*Email: [elawso3@uwo.ca](mailto:elawso3@uwo.ca)*

**Charmaine Crawford**

*Institute for Gender and Development Studies, Nita Barrow Unit,  
The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Barbados*

*Email: [charmaine.crawford@cavehill.uwi.edu](mailto:charmaine.crawford@cavehill.uwi.edu)*

## Abstract

In an age where pressure to “internationalize” increasingly permeates all segments of society and the exhortation to produce the “global citizen” is embedded in market ideologies, a critical question insistently returns: how can global feminism work against the worst of globalization forces to help foster genuine knowledge exchange and other forms of mutual trans-cultural reciprocities, while still acknowledging and actively working against uneven structures of power? This paper offers a metacritical epistemological engagement with the pedagogy of internationalization – that is, we endeavour to learn from learning initiatives through study abroad opportunities for under/graduate students. We use, in particular, the case study of an international collaboration between two women’s and gender studies units (the Institute for Gender and Development Studies:NBU, Cave Hill, Barbados, and the Department of Women’s Studies and Feminist Research in London, Canada) to examine the functions of community and belongingness and both hegemonic and resistant knowledge practices for establishing “real reciprocity” in student exchanges.

**Keywords:** student exchange programs; internationalization; global feminism; collaboration; community; cultural assumptions

## **I. Introduction: Un/Mapping the Knowledge Terrain of Globalization: Global Feminism**

As Myra Ferree and Aili Tripp (2006) note, “Feminism in the twenty-first century has unmistakably global dimensions” (p. vii). Indeed, arguably the most significant contemporary development in feminism as a theoretical and political engagement, and in Women’s Studies as an academic and activist discipline, global feminism is committed to understanding the interrelations among our local and worldwide experiences, and to the mutuality of international work of scholars and activists. In an age where pressure to “internationalize” increasingly permeates all segments of society and the exhortation to produce the “global citizen” is embedded in market ideologies, a critical question insistently returns: how can global feminism work against the worst of globalization forces, with its universalist appeal, to help foster genuine knowledge exchange and other forms of mutual trans-cultural reciprocities, while still acknowledging and actively working against uneven structures of power? As Gabrielle Jamela Hosein reminds us (2011), “First World texts travel across different historical and political contexts through uneven, global circuits of theory and pedagogy” (p. 1) and through different access to, and ownership of, wealth, resources, technology and communication. Hosein argues that, because of this, it is critical to demonstrate “why ideas, critiques and preoccupations, even feminist ones, can not simply ‘go global’” (p. 1). The particular focus for this paper, then, is a metacritical epistemological engagement with the pedagogy of internationalization – that is, we endeavour to learn from learning initiatives through study abroad opportunities for under/graduate students. Certainly, as more and more universities press faculty and students to pursue international opportunities, with funding and support service initiatives, we ask: who is actually monitoring the effects of these programs on those who undertake them? For academics (located in post-industrialized nations), does internationalization offer means to new (and genuinely “global” – that is, broad, inclusive, and potentially resistant) knowledge production or operate as an alibi for neo-missionary projects? That is, are scholars endeavouring in the new internationalization to foster genuine research exchange or a taking or imposing of knowledge from elsewhere – and for what ends? Does the opportunity for “foreign” exchange present more than an experience in cultural tourism? Certainly, the asymmetrical power relations between North/South or between Western nations and formerly colonized nations as a result of imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and neo-colonialism set the stage for this skewed relationship (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 2003). The inferiorization of non-Western nations as “other” or “backward” is proscriptive of the ideological and practical ways dominant discourses and systems have worked to manage, exclude or simply erase the cultures, knowledges and expertise of the majority of the world’s people. Thus, against a brief backdrop of feminist literature on affect, embodied learning, and the politics of globalization, and with recognition of increased pressure to engage internationalization issues in higher learning, this paper identifies global feminist strategies at work in a collaborative curriculum and research project shared between the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, Nita Barrow Unit (IGDS:NBU) at The University of the West Indies in Cave Hill, Barbados and the Department of Women’s Studies and Feminist Research (WSFR) at The University of Western Ontario in London, Canada.<sup>1</sup> Although the project is still in progress, we share the following preliminary and multi-pronged findings:

1) that cross-cultural exchange of information and experience is integral to responsible feminism in the new millennium, and must work to resist what bell hooks would term *mind colonization*, wherein dominant (Western or Anglo-American) knowledge structures replicate themselves through educational apparatuses, to strive instead to learn and grow not by reproducing the same ideas and forms of knowledge but by actively seeking alternative, multiple ways of knowing, and multiple knowings – with emphasis on experiential and affective learning, and

2) that this “exchange” in learning can be fostered by careful and self-reflexive attention to global feminist principles of co-operative bridge-building across diversities and concepts of learning from “within” through interactions inside other cultural locations. This includes, but is not limited to, a dialogic process of sharing personal stories and critical reflections with others outside one’s home location which can be meaningfully transformative in building or producing what hooks calls “beloved community” which is integral to her vision of democratic epistemes and which, in our research today, seems to cohere to tight relations between belongingness and both learning success and satisfaction in student exchangers’ perceptions. It is important to consider that “sharing” has to be done with the acknowledgement of difference (across gender, race, class, cultural, national, geographical markers) and working through issues of power and privilege. Sharing can bring about cross-cultural understanding but transforming this into a “beloved community” takes reinforcement and ongoing work. At the same time, we identify the various risks associated with the sureness of one’s knowledge gained from within local experience in asserting an “authentic” intercultural awareness on the basis of study away trips, which can function as further exclusionary or hegemonic operations of knowledge-power.

In this paper, we use the genesis, development, successes and limitations of our project so far to meaningfully explore their relevance to a global feminist pedagogy in action.

## **II. Description and Genesis of the Project: The Personal is Political, and The Effects of Affects**

Our research project broadly is a collaborative initiative between the two partner institutions to study the impact of what "internationalization" actually means for the women’s and gender studies students at UWI and UWO, as well as for students in other disciplines and at other locations, who have chosen to participate in exchange programs, and for their facilitators. The partnership is among 4 scholars, 2 from UWI and 2 from UWO, and 2 graduate students, one from UWI and one from UWO, who work together across geographical, institutional, disciplinary and other differences. Specifically the portion of the project we treat in this paper is our endeavour to explore and build on diverse cultural experiences and ways of knowing experienced in the “field case” studies of student exchangers from London, Canada to Cave Hill, Barbados. It is precisely to critically probe the meaning/import/impact of study outside one’s home culture (acknowledging, of course, the diversity of “home culture” for both groups) that is the objective of our research.

The context for the project’s genesis is feminism’s longstanding critical understanding that the “personal is political” – both in the recognition that our everyday realities are connected to broad systemic structures *and* in the understanding that we need to be in touch with the lived effects of global capitalism, in their varied consequences, both including and beyond our own direct experiences, whomever “we” in the speaking moment might be. V. Eudine Barriteau (2006) and others have called for a critical shift in our understanding of the relations between these spheres, not simply in recognizing that the separation of private and public, in shaping gender ideology and unequal relations of power between men and women, is the product of Western political theory rooted in colonial Enlightenment thinking but, as Barriteau underscores through the early work of the Combahee River Collective, we must expand our understanding, as the Collective’s statement exhorts, to incorporate understanding that *the personal is also cultural* (2006, p. 25). Barriteau speaks to the possibilities for radically new knowledge generation if we look to the work of black feminist theory and make space for the articulation, *from inside*, of the lived realities of black women. These are realities which, black feminist thought articulates, account for the intersectional factors of race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity that inform black women’s experience (not as a unitary group) – and the experiences of other women both individually and collectively. This is

knowledge practice that challenges feminist theory which universalizes all women as the same or privileges a Western perspective:

*Black feminist scholarship underlines the importance of using lived experience as a criterion for generating knowledge. These experiences should be used to validate knowledge claims, and to create or refute generalisations. This insistence that theory should be built “from the ground up” rejects Western philosophy’s fascination with and faith in rationality, objectivity and theory that move from the abstract to the concrete. The epistemological and methodological shift offered by black feminism also recognises and values black women’s subjectivity. (p. 17)*

In thinking through this insistence on the value of lived experience as an integral mode of learning, as scholars in Women’s and Gender Studies we are also engaging the corollary effects of addressivity – that is, the fundamental role of learners listening for and practicing an anti-colonial pedagogy in receiving the experiences of others. In this way, we consider the pedagogical value of inviting affective & intersubjective connection to the materials students take up. As Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead argue, citing M. Boler: women’s anti-oppression work generates a “collectively articulated feminist ‘politics of emotion’ particularly through practices of consciousness-raising” (Boler 1999: xi; cited in Pedwell and Whitehead). In Pedwell and Whitehead’s analysis, the politics of “[f]eminist engagements with feelings ... tell us most about the affective workings of contemporary power when they illuminate the complex and shifting co-constitution of emotional subjectivities and encounters and socio-political and economic structures and relations. Further, they suggest, citing Elizabeth’s Grosz, that “feminist theory might most productively explore affects less for how they dominate, regulate or constrain individual subjects and more for the possibilities they offer for thinking (and feeling) beyond what is already known and assumed” and, too, that

*[t]hrough fleshing out the critical imbrications of location, embodiment and knowledge, [feminist] thinkers not only illustrate the impossibility of objective knowledge detached from embodied location, but also explore the potential for affect to provide different, and potentially transformative, ways of knowing. As Hemmings notes, feminist theory has illustrated potently that “in order to know differently, we have to feel differently” (2012: 150). (Pedwell and Whitehead 2012)*

In this way, “affect” and its relations to embodiment and knowledge can be usefully conceptualized in nexus with feminist epistemological frameworks which take up the value of standpoint, and which emphasize contestation against dominant knowledge practices and objectivity in favour of situatedness and space for other ways of knowing, particularly through attending to women’s experiences, voices, and knowledges from within diverse locations. Indeed, the impetus for our project of knowledge “exchange” between the two Universities began in an epistemological and affective encounter with narrative: the story of Ms. Beulah Brown.

Ms. Beulah Brown is a pseudonym. But the woman the fictive name represents is at once very real and, to some degree, too, a figure for globalization’s gendered impacts. She appears as “Mrs. Beulah Brown” in work by Faye V. Harrison. Harrison’s book chapter (2007), “The Gendered Politics and Violence of Structural Adjustment: A View from Jamaica” emerged out of her fieldwork in Kingston Jamaica exploring the economic and socio-political effects at local and national levels of structural adjustment policies and other development-driven initiatives on the health, well-being and working lives of “ordinary

Jamaicans,” particularly to argue, informed by the work of Peggy Antobus, that “[t]hose most heavily burdened by the impact of these deteriorating social conditions and capitalist-centred policies are women” (Harrison 2007, p. 162). Harrison uses the life story of one research subject, “Mrs. Brown,” collected over a period of years, to sustain exploration of long-term effects of global economic policy in relation to the gendered informal labour sector and female-headed households. Harrison argues that

*[t]o appreciate and understand the effects, contradictions, and meanings that constitute the reality of a structurally adjusted pattern of production and trade, we must examine the everyday experiences, practices, discourses, and common sense of real people.... Highlights from Mrs. Brown’s life story lead us to the more encompassing story of postcolonial Jamaica’s experience with debt, export-led development, and structural adjustment, and their combined impact on women workers as well as on neighbourhood-level negotiations of crisis. (pp. 162-3)*

Harrison’s work underscores the critical feminist imperative to listen to the voices and experiences of women from within particular sites of knowing; indeed, understanding the effects of neocolonial economic agenda from Ms. Brown’s own perspective is one effort to contest neocolonial structures of knowing rooted in the logic of numbers and mainstream development discourse. Students in a first-year course in Women’s Studies at UWO have been studying global neoliberal economic violence largely in part through Harrison’s – and Ms. Brown’s – qualitative data. The two of us, Drs. Verwaayen and Lawson, who teach there both speak to the success of materializing the complexities of the economic and socio-political effects in part through the affective response of students to Ms. Brown’s lived reality. An early conceptualization for the project of knowledge exchange as an intervention in conventional learning practices took shape when our students most earnestly and insistently asked, over the years: “whatever happened to Mrs. Brown”? Our response was to think through relations between individual and “representative” (structural) experiences, and, too, to engage the idea of relationships between students and the “subjects” of which they learn.

Learning for students, made personal, establishes intimate connection with the formal/theoretical (and for some, otherwise remote) issues of the course. All four of the faculty partners have found, over our various years of teaching, different disciplinary perspectives, geographical locations, and levels of experience, that students seem better able to grasp and connect to the complexities of issues studied in the classroom when they can attach to the data in some kind of “intimate” way – but with imperative corrective against potential violence of “Saming” – the erasure of difference across experience and the risk of individualizing response over attention to structural relations of power. These issues are particularly significant when engaging students in relation to economic, socio-political and other cultural realities situated as “elsewhere” or as very much “here” in relation to their own self-identified locations. We are cognizant of the emotional structures of identification and distancing for those students who may have deep (and possibly difficult) first-hand experience of the issues (in this paper, we mean of, for example, structural poverty; but attention to this concern is critical in relation to the varied issues we cover in women’s and gender studies). At both institutions we are wary of the risk of neomissionary responses by some of our more privileged students who might otherwise see themselves in geographical, economic, or other forms of material and emotional remoteness from both the responsibility and impact of global structural poverty (and this is the false and essentialist “victimology” profile that Barribeau and others identify in development discourses on the South, an us-vs-them reduction). So we have come to recognize the affective power both of personal narrative and of learning encounters that vitally situate knowledge generation in the context of some

kind of interpersonal “exchange” rather than tabulation of figures and statistics. In other words, “coming to know” the story of Ms. Brown, in the context of global interventions and effects, of neo-colonialism and feminist resistance to its formations, and in learning by encountering these through a personal narrative of resistance became, for us as team members in the project, a catalyst for re-thinking the possibilities of a pedagogy genuinely endeavouring to expand global ways of knowing in the framework of feminist coalition both literally and figuratively across our spaces of distance. We were working through the figure idea of learning through the practice of intersubjectivity; we wondered about the potential effects of literalizing the relations.

So our project began to take shape by expressly engaging the question: “what does it mean” -- to critically enter an emerging/ongoing dialogue calling for more nuanced questions and study on the *meaning* of internationalization. Of course, more specifically too, internationalization and internationalization issues are of interest to women’s studies and gender development programs, both in terms of offering an enriching educational experience and fostering the collaborative principles of global feminism from critically-informed perspectives, as feminist theorists Chandra Mohanty (2003), Uma Narayan (1997), and Shari Stone-Mediatore (2003) have variously argued. Thus we proceeded by asking ourselves the following questions: What are the benefits (and risks) of learning outside one’s cultural community? What do or don’t these exchanges accomplish in terms of (new) knowledge production and experience, and how can “new” knowledges be tied not just to curriculum, but to community experience – that is, how is knowledge production to be understood beyond the borders of the classroom? And again: what, we asked, might a global feminist approach contribute to globalizing curriculum/learning initiatives? In particular, we wanted to think further through the concepts of giving or taking knowledge to ask: can a non-appropriative model of “international” learning be possible? How would that look? We wanted to attempt our own model of mutual enrichment and intersubjective engagement as a practice of global feminism in action.

### **III. Funding obstacles: The one-sidedness of “exchange”, or: What to do with what we have**

Our original conception was to generate a culture of genuine “exchange ” through a learning opportunity that would bring UWI students to UWO and UWO students to UWI through shared work in women’s and gender studies classes for short-term learning. We were thinking particularly of the challenges to transnational learning opportunities posed for students who cannot afford sustained sojourn across an academic year or even an academic term; another factor to be taken into consideration is the administrative and the structural differences of the universities in terms of student population, resources, faculty, technology, and more. Thus, while a first stage of the project was to initialize an agreement formally recognized by both Universities<sup>ii</sup> to facilitate broader study across both institutions (a conventional “exchange” opportunity which, at least literally, functions more as a sustained “study abroad” program), our more fundamental goal envisioned opportunity for funding shorter but fully reciprocal movement across locations, with emphasis on partnership between the two units, IGDS:NBU and WSFR. However, given the constraints of the funding initiatives most readily available to us, we needed to adapt the vision to work both within and against the limitations of internationalization resources at our institutions. So, applying for funding through UWO, the project was re-conceptualized as a shared opportunity for learning through a one-sided trip of UWO students to UWI during the London students’ reading week in February 2012.<sup>iii</sup> Certainly, collaboration was considered vital for both units. For the IGDS:NBU, it continued the unit’s partnership with researchers and scholars on an international level Throughout the years, the NBU’s graduate students and faculty have participated in short-term residency and Summer Institutes in Canada, US and UK, and the

unit hosts Adjunct Faculty from abroad who lend their expertise through co-supervising graduate students and assisting with research. These interactions have allowed for new knowledge to be gained, for curriculum development and graduate supervision. IGDS:NBU saw partnership with UWO as a way to share knowledge and explore new teaching approaches at the undergraduate level with faculty from an institution committed to teaching and learning exchanges on an international level. In turn, UWO's WSFR saw opportunity to learn from and grow with a partner organization whose excellence in teaching and research in the area of international development could provide integral learning opportunities for students and faculty not then available in the home location. Further, the partnership worked well to meet UWO's Strategic Plan for Internationalization through collaboration in research and training and student exchange programs which includes formal initiatives with the Caribbean Basin. UWO's President Ahmit Chakma articulates UWO's specific interest in study away opportunities: "If you want to be an engaged citizen in Canada, you have to understand Canada's role in the world. What does it mean in terms of what we do at Western? Wouldn't it be wonderful for students to go and spend some time abroad? Similarly, we need to bring students to our campus from different parts of the world so that our campus is a bit more enriched"( Travis 2009). Thus, our partnership worked to devise strategies that could foster the concept of "exchange" despite uneven opportunity in the travel component – and to critically take up the question: *what does it mean?*

Supported by 2 small internal grants from Western for international study and curriculum development, we narrowed our pedagogical and research aims to work in a third-year UWO Women's Studies class on issues in motherhood and mothering (re-titled for this project as "Motherhood and Mothering in the Global Context: Issues, Discourse, and Images") since there was excellent overlap in expertise in the area across the partner Universities. The focus of the UWO course was a good fit because IGDS:NBU has a faculty member whose research is on Caribbean women and transnational motherhood and the Institute was co-hosting an international Mothering Conference which was scheduled to take place during the student exchange (in which the students travelling to UWO took part). The objective in part (on the course-home end) was to enrich the class curriculum with comparative perspectives, research, and international course content on feminism and gender through input from both partners.

Most significant for this study, the course re-design established a one-week study abroad opportunity (a term more literal to the proposed experience than the original aspiration for "exchange") for the UWO students to the IGDS:NBU at UWI in Cave Hill. In collaboration with all partners, the study abroad opportunity for students was planned to include lectures and workshops by representatives from organizations that work with mothers and families, and participation in local cultural events. Specifically, the students experienced direct learning from the Barbados Nurses' Association, Midwives Group, about the centrality of midwifery to primary care for expectant mothers, learned about gender and motherhood in Barbados from the Business and Professional Women's Club/Crisis Centre Group, and participated in a discussion with Dr. Peggy Antrobus, a leading Caribbean feminist scholar, about the feminist movement in the Caribbean. They also had the opportunity to attend a lecture by Dr. Crawford on mothering and motherhood in the Caribbean. Because transnational mothering as an emerging field of feminist inquiry explores the ways in which, for example, women's migratory experiences shape or construct mothering relations in the global political economy, by establishing revised curriculum and international study, we felt our work directly related to these critical developments in the scholarship. Moreover, we wanted students to be at the forefront -- in both academic and (inter)personal engagement -- in taking up questions that reflect the complexities of global feminism today: how do differences/diversities, understood in relation to gender, race, class, sexuality, (dis)ability –

but also to nation, language, policy, institutional organizations and more – impact women’s freedom in the global world? In particular, how does the study of motherhood and mothering lend itself to an examination of women’s experiences in a global context? And, specifically, what could a transnational experience of learning offer students in relation to a global understanding of the “common themes, different contexts” of mothering across diverse locations? But perhaps more importantly: what do students learn beyond/outside the content of formal curricula? Ultimately our aim was to probe at once the impact of study away and study hosting on Women’s and Gender Studies students not just in terms of subject matter, but the matter of students as subjects. That is, we wanted to ask, what impact might learning across the borders of their “home” classroom (both for UWO students away from London, and UWI students engaging the experiences of the students from “away” whom they were hosting) have on their sense of self, study, global citizenry etc.? On their sense of the value of knowledge from “within”?

#### **IV. Participant Responses: What We’re Learning from Their Learning**

Fourteen students registered in WS 3359G: “Motherhood and Mothering in the Global Context: Issues, Discourse, and Images” in 2012; eight students undertook the travel away opportunity in the course; seven of those participated in both questionnaires and interviews for the project. We recruited eight more students from UWO more broadly who had undertaken any study away opportunity and fifteen through The Institute for Gender and Development Studies, Nita Barrow Unit at UWI, including two program administrators. Participants responded through questionnaires and/or in-person, open-ended interviews. Several key themes have been emerging: the importance of a sense of belongingness not just to one’s sense of well-being while away but also to one’s ability to fully take up the learning opportunities of exchange; the entrenchedness of cultural and other stereotypes, which learning literally outside one’s cultural location can 1) help reduce and 2) exacerbate, if the replication or production of problematic cultural assumptions become authorized through discourses of authenticity in the intercultural experience; and the feelings of expanded self and knowing through learning both inside and outside classroom space located “elsewhere.”

To our questionnaire invitation to define what “international” means, students overwhelmingly responded with an understanding of “international” as enmeshed with the concept of reciprocity, both from the WS 3359G group, and among the IGDS and other student exchangers. For example, Maraiv suggests that “international” is about human relationships:

*... I think international would mean an exposure to, interaction with, sharing and experiencing of not only a culture that is considered different from yours, including history, ethnicity, political and other climate, etc. A place where persons of different ethnicities, cultures, histories, etc. come together and exchange their way of life, eating, dressing, playing, learning etc. (Emphasis added)*

Lorraine, too, delineates “international” by reciprocity: “My definition of ‘international’ is more than one country, hence a coming together of more than one country or nation, therefore an international experience would be a student/advisor being able to have a sense of their culture (country of choice) and them a sense of mine”; in this way, “international” and “exchange” seem, again, already imbricated in each other.

On the value of learning of learning outside the borders of the classroom, through close encounters, Lorraine continues:

We could actually see what the professors were talking about, and we better understood why people were acting the way they did or the beliefs that they had, we noticed

the particular sayings that people would say that had to do with the history ... um so it, I, for me it kind of enriched it because we were better able to understand why things were the way they were there and maybe being a little more aware ... even meeting some of the graduate students ... it was interesting to talk to them and see in their everyday life how they take up the term “mother” or how they are seen even as feminists in their society. So to me it kind of enriched it because we were able to see it firsthand *rather than just reading it in a textbook*. (emphasis added)

Julia is a UWO student whose exchange was to France; like many of the interviewed students, she speaks about the travelling opportunities that many exchangers pursue while away and on breaks from their programs, particularly in relation to the learning occasions that travelling and interpersonal interactions produce:

*I got to see different countries and because my interest is in political science I got to understand how the different governments work because like I would ... as a student when travelling you get to socialize more so you get to understand a lot more of the political scenes there and I mean just culturally, you meet people and you talk, uh, that was great, so just everywhere that I went I managed to befriend locals and just talk to them and understand what they think of their countries and what they think of other countries and what they think of everything and also the Euro debt crisis was going on while I was there and I was studying a class actually “Politics in the EU” and that was interesting.*

About the relationship between the classroom and external reality, Julia explains her excitement about being in France during elections for the French presidency, and how the candidates actually came to her school to speak while she was studying there, making her studies come to life, in a sense. Christine also explains how learning comes alive through embodied teaching; she speaks about the important connection she makes between her “formal” knowledge of WS 3359G content, and the meaningful experience of being witness to its lived communication in both the formal expertise and experiential location of the many speakers the students heard in their week at UWI:

*in our days of seminar when we were at the campus and we were being spoken to by some of the, like the midwife and various people and they all tie in these very similar ideas, like “when I was a child I did...” and that was the really interesting thing, a lot of the people weren’t teaching theory, they were talking about their personal experiences and so they tied that to what had happened and so in that way, when you’re reading through like, uh, a 13 page text of tiny font that’s telling you about all these theories to have somebody say actually, “this is what my life is like, I had my mother do this and she left and da-da-da, this is what I felt” it was just, it was interesting.*

Christine pursues the idea of intimate connection as vital in her learning experience: connecting to an/other and in making connections between others’ knowing and experiences with her own: “it was interesting because I had no experience with the Caribbean culture and so it wasn’t only tying it with the material, I could tie it with my life and I think it’s something in Women’s Studies where what the only thing I could say is that my best work is done *for things that I know or things that I’ve felt were really interesting to be able to make that connection*” (emphasis added). Indeed, the idea of learning through human relationships and making various kinds of “connections” is important to Karen: “Like when I originally heard about it [a WS 3359G excursion to Oisten’s]v I wasn’t like, I wasn’t expecting anything

big from it, because I just heard it was like fish fry but it was actually one of my favorite places ... [it] was kind of cool to meet people from other areas of the world and even being able to learn their dance moves was kind of cool.... I really enjoyed that and it just seemed like, I don't know, like people coming together from different walks of life and it seemed more real I guess in a way." Francis, a graduate student exchanger recruited through the IGDS commented that, in the series of events organized in her exchange opportunity such as sightseeing tours, coffee hours and lectures, "what I thought valuable was the opportunity to meet students from other parts of the world" (emphasis added). Indeed, "learning" and teaching as practices of everyday interaction with people, not just texts or classroom lectures, is a repeated theme across the interviews -- sometimes formally stated and sometimes not.

In relation to this important sense of connection articulated repeatedly by students but in the context of confronting one's sense of dislocation, of pushing into new and frightening metaphorical territory, Heather stresses how support and sense of "new" community can make dislocation productive. Heather (WS 3359G) comments on giving a paper at an international conference on mothering and motherhood as part of her class exchange experience:

*Um it was an amazing feeling, I guess it kind of gave me a boost of self-esteem and I felt like, I guess I felt really confident after; like, initially I felt really nervous and I felt like I didn't belong, and I felt kind of out of place, but after talking with people who were also presenting, I felt more at ease and I realized that it wasn't so weird to be like, self-- .... like lacking the confidence because I noticed they [reference to international scholars participating] were a little bit nervous too. And it kind of helped talking to them before the presentation, before people came in because they assured that it would be fine, you know it's an exciting experience and so I took it as that. So they [Heather interrupts to refer back to her mother and grandmother "at home"] were very excited for that because I'm the first one in my family to achieve something like that and the first one in my family to go to university like right after high school so it's a huge deal that I'm doing all of this stuff, and they were incredibly proud and excited for me.*

For Heather, the anxiety of being in a different location – not just geographically but academically, as an undergraduate student giving a paper at an international conference of scholars on mothering and motherhoodvi is alleviated in part by the knowledge of support and pride in her accomplishment by her family back home, as well as by the recognition, welcome, and warm interaction she has with other participants (that is, particularly senior scholars) at the conference. Her own sense of achievement is evident through the interview; she begins by speaking about her lack of self-assurance: "I've always had a lack of confidence when it came to education ... I always felt like I wasn't as intelligent as everyone else in the class" but how those feelings have in part been countered by positive responses to her work in Women's Studies. She further articulates the positive reinforcement she experienced through responses to her paper at the conference:

I noticed they [scholars at the conference] could actually identify with my standpoint particularly because of the standpoint I was taking up ... I guess in relation to my standpointvii a lot of the women seemed to nod in agreement and as well, like even when the people were critiquing the other presenters, they weren't really critiquing me at all, they were just saying that they were really impressed and that they think that I'll go far because of the topic that I was talking about. I ... remember the feeling of it mostly.

Heather's answer speaks to the positive effect/affect associated with learning and experiencing new things, with support and community and understanding as shared experiences in the new space.

This emphasis on individual contribution – but within the context of a receptive community – was important in the experiences of many of our respondents. Kara is a graduate student exchanger recruited through the IGDS. She speaks to how individual contribution is not limited to one's personal growth but, as Heather's interview suggests, to intersubjective exchange and, further in particular, critical intervention in dominant knowledge gaps:

*it was being able to share and to be a resource, and to say, well, here I can share some sources with you, I can share some readings with you, and be able to give kinda critique and feedback, because before I embarked on any of these programs I had been intensely immersed in the literature in a lot of areas ... sparking some new kinds of questions that they had not even talked about and, so it was not that you brought a different perspective in a kind of essentialist sense but because you were reading a different group of scholars from what they were reading that you were able to introduce some arguments and information that for them, um, forced a kind of rethinking about some of their, even their whole approaches to gender studies as a whole and to the kinds of questions they would ask and I think that was something I brought and that was openly appreciated by others; and the fact that I could bring it to the diverse projects that people were working on.*

Kara continues “[J]ust the exposure to a new group of thinkers was really for me just crucial to my own growth as a scholar.” In sum, Kara's experience speaks to the integral sense of exchange fundamental to a study away opportunity – the import of going to a location to learn and grow but also of sharing one's own knowledge and experiences and facilitating opportunity for growth for students and educators in the host institution, as expressed across so many of our interviews. Alisa, an international exchange program facilitator, understands how this is especially urgent when experiential or academic knowledge – and often both – function as a de-colonizing pedagogy. Alisa states:

*So when you are in a new environment and you are required now to speak up for yourself, you are required to show “I am here in this mass of other students; I am somebody who has a voice, I have something to contribute to the various discussions, even though I may be from a Caribbean territory,” because some people see us still as places that have not developed, you know, how do you explain yourself and how you present yourself, you need to be assertive. So I find when the students, you know, because they write to me every so often, and they would say something like that: “I went to class and the lecturer said this about Caribbean nationals and I was the only Caribbean national in the class so I had to stand up and I had to say something.” [... ] [T]hey understand that they have something significant to contribute and they need to let their voice be heard. That's what I found in my interaction with students.*

Alisa's account addresses the concept of positive contribution -- but in the face of negative assumptions which, Alisa's interview suggests, can be pervasive in international exchange experiences. In many ways, the failure of intersubjective experiences marks the worst of study away opportunities when those interactions attempt to foreclose growth and

function as operations of *othering*. Patricia speaks to this as someone who also administers/facilitates study abroad programs:

**Interviewer:** What would you describe as the best and worst experiences (or strength and weaknesses) of a travel/exchange opportunity?

**Patricia:** Well ... the cultural exchanges, the social bonds, contacts made and the independence it helps them attain. *The worst would be the racist experiences and the failure to make contacts.* In one way I would suggest that ... it would help if the SA [study abroad] programme encouraged during the orientation strong community/families/organizations to help the exchange student to be involved, have lunch with them on Sundays etc., so that the environment is more welcoming. (Emphasis added)

Patricia's response as an exchange facilitator reiterates not only the importance of support networks and sense of belongingness essential to the success of a study away program, but, too, how "failure" to establish networks can be rooted in deep structures of alienation, in "racist experiences." In turn, Patricia suggests that close contact with families in/and community in the host location can at least offset (if not pre-empt?) experiences of alienation. Shelley, recruited into the study through the IGDS, addresses this as well from the perspective of the student exchanger; her account does not specifically name racism but addresses the effects of isolation and othering, and again the mitigating effects of support:

*I would say that you kind of assume that the world is this free place where everybody's opinion is valued and that people have the utmost respect for one another and their views and values and although you see that to an extent it is not true ... part of you still feels that this is the way that it should be and this is what you would encounter. But when you move to other spaces you realize it is definitely not true. One, your awareness of self is kind of not the same as what people have of you and you kind of become part of something bigger in a way that you don't have to conceive of when you're in Barbados. So the thing about respect and equal opportunities and all the rest of it kind of blows up when you move from this space 'cause while here there's unequal opportunities -- there's a lot of it existing here -- ... I didn't feel it as much as moving outside of Barbados. And I guess it's buffered by the fact that you've got friends, you've got family and it's a space where you could discuss any sort of opportunity or what you might see as an unfair experience, you have people to discuss it with. To me when you move outside of the space, like that network is kind of not the same, even skypeing is not the same. So you realize you are really just a part of something bigger and most people don't care about the part you inhabit.*

Certainly, negative effects of othering experienced by exchangers were issues raised by several students as well as the administrators we interviewed. But, we wanted to ask, what about the othering effects in which exchangers may be, themselves, complicit? The subject of stereotypical assumptions was central in many of the interviews, with a majority of participants speaking to the critical importance of confronting ignorance through lived experience from "within" and intercultural encounters. But how meaningful can these encounters be across the temporal and institutional limits of study away opportunities, against the force of dominant knowledge practices and cultural hegemonies more broadly? We explore the entrenchedness of cultural stereotypes across a number of student interviews. For example, Donna is a UWO student who undertook exchange to Copenhagen, Denmark. Donna speaks about the richness of diversity that her study away opportunity opened for her

in the classroom; most of her peers in the program were also student exchangers rather than local to Denmark. In her interview, Donna speaks about how her classes were filled with people from many different geographical locations, what she identifies as socio-economic classes, and ethnicities, and addresses the value of this exposure: "I think there was so much more, so many more opinions, so many more different ways of seeing things that weren't available to me in the past." But in this account of the richness of differences, and their value to Donna's learning growth as she perceives it, it is of note to us that Donna's understanding is produced by an essentialist view of culture:

*And I think that in the classroom because there are so many people on exchange from different parts of the world – even on the first day that professors would ask everybody to go around and introduce themselves and say what country they were from; that way you sort of have an idea of the type of people in the classroom, you have an idea of how certain opinions, for example certain political opinions, what part of the classroom they would be coming from because you already know what part of, you know where the student from France is sitting, for example, they always had a certain opinion. (Emphasis added)*

Donna's idea that there is an identifiable "French" attitude or politics is, we believe, rooted in her understanding, articulated later in the interview, that "stereotypes" are not understood as sweeping generalizations that she seems to read as neutral but as overt and more broadly recognizable negative or hurtful statements.<sup>viii</sup> For example, she makes the specific point to describe what she identifies as erroneous information about Canada she encountered on her exchange (such as the idea that Canada is "just the little brother of America" – a small clone) not as "hurtful stereotypes" but as "misconceptions." This distinction between "stereotypes" and "misconceptions" in Donna's understanding helps us contextualize her reading of essentialized culture. For example, Donna states in interview that at times she felt compelled to offer what she calls "the Canadian view": she states, "I wanted to give the Canadian point of view because I would have felt that they would have walked away with a very bad opinion of Canada; they don't have any other source." Clearly, "the Canadian view" is one that offers a positive counter-discourse to what Donna understands to be harmful assumptions – stereotypes – about Canada and its culture. The diverse and potentially contradictory messages she communicates about Canadian culture don't contest her sense of singularity but rather support her position that the "view" is a reactive one: "There would be times when other students would say things about Canada that I thought they misinterpreted. Sometimes they would say that it is such a socialist fairytale land, you know, because they compare it America. And so I'd tell them that it's not completely happy and dandy here. But then if they were to say that, 'I've heard about your crime rates and it's so chaotic', I'd say, 'No, it's not *that* bad.'" Later in interview Donna, as a second-generation Vietnamese-Canadian, speaks about contesting others' limited understandings about Canada and Canadians in terms of an erasure of ethnic and racial diversity, particularly in her travels through Asia and Turkey which she undertook out of the Denmark exchange experience:

*Because a lot of the time when they would ask me where I was from, I would say "Canada" and they would say, "No, you're not from Canada. You don't look like you're from Canada." So I would ask them, "What does a Canadian look like then?" But they didn't, they still didn't have a clear idea. I don't know if they wanted to say that person would look white because I think they knew that Canada was multicultural, they just didn't know to what extent. And so I said most of the people that I see in Canada*

*don't look white – like the neighborhood I grew up in, the schools that I went to.*

Donna speaks to the value she brings in these exchanges in expanding limited knowledge about her home country, and indeed understands this ability to offer *insider information* as a counter to cultural misperceptions as one of the central advantages of diversity exposure opened up by study away opportunities: “I always told the other students, if I have any assumptions about your country that you find is [sic] unjust then tell me because that’s what we are really here to learn. We are all here for an international experience and we have sources for each country that can actually give us a better idea of what it is that goes on in a country we’ve never been to.” But although Donna responds, when asked, that she doesn’t or didn’t hold any stereotypes about Danish culture, she answers another question, on the relationship between learning inside and outside the classroom, like this:

*You know, if you notice that the Danes are very cold people – you can try to strike up a conversation with them but they will just give you short, curt answers and don't really do what we do in North America, where, you know, if you were walking down the street you would just say hi to somebody, or if you are walking down a small road and there is someone walking in the opposite direction you just make eye contact, you smile or say hi; they don't do that in Denmark. So it was just one of those things where when we got into the classroom, a lot of the exchange students would have sort of the same experiences. Like we all noticed that Danes don't apologize when they bump into you.*

Donna later contextualizes this “coldness” as a cultural custom rooted in the country’s climate; Danish friends, she explains, have suggested to her that, through Denmark’s history, “it was so cold that you would spend more time with people who lived close around you, that you are not used to this type of socializing, where you just go out and you talk to everybody because they knew that, I don’t know, they said how most of the time you only stay with your immediate friends.” The relationship between cultural conventions (as contentious too as these may be) and how these get interpreted or read is, of course, highly complex -- and is the subject of further work in our project here (forthcoming). Donna cannot understand her suggestion that Danes are “cold” in relation to the concept of stereotypes; she articulates support for this conclusion about Danish people as a truth about “the culture” through reference both to other exchangers and local friends who appear to share the view. Donna is not pressed in interview to consider how this assumption measures up, for example, to broad discourses on Canadian culture as “polite” nor to counter-cultural narratives about Canadian indifference, even rudeness, in urban centres like Toronto – and it is not our intention to engage a cross-cultural or country-specific discussion on levels of friendliness or responsiveness in relation to either culture. Rather, our concern is with sure conclusions about “a people” that emerge through limited experiences (in terms of the bounded duration of a study away experience and the constraints of place and circumstance attached to exchanges) which become authorized as truths in part *through* the legitimization of one’s experience “from within.” Although Donna references other exchangers and Danish acquaintances in part as knowledge-sources for her claim, ultimately her study away experience functions itself as final authenticator; she can claim authentic truth about the culture *because she has been there, experienced it first-hand*. Donna states, “Before Denmark was one of the countries that if I were to have a conversation about it, I would always have to provide a caveat that I have really no basis of understanding anything to do with Danish society. But now I am glad that I actually know more about it so I have a more reliable sense of what it’s like to be there.”

Donna's conclusion about having more cultural authority to speak about Danish culture conflicts, in one sense, with Mara's interview; Mara is a former UWO student who also undertook exchange to Copenhagen. Mara is uncomfortable about generating generalizations about her experience; in particular, she states, "I can't really say, you know, 'here is a thing that was Danish,' you know?" Like many of the exchangers, including Donna, Mara also speaks about the importance of learning from within the culture, but not with emphasis on knowledge conclusions but rather knowledge processes: "I think it's so important to try and communicate with locals in the local language. Or try to learn and try to ask questions without being demanding, or without demanding information. Even trying to listen; those attitudes are, for me, important and ethical." Further, Mara insists the ethical relation is one in part that requires ongoing critical self-reflexivity. Commenting on the concept of "exchange," Mara states: "It just means, I think... I think it means remaining critical to your position, you know: where you are coming from; how you're impacting the place you're coming to based on your position; how you're impacting it based on your actions there." Mara clarifies further what ethical exchange, for her, entails – again articulated less in terms of knowledge conclusions than processes: "So mostly, I mean it's not obviously only reflection, its acting and carrying out this critical awareness by trying to make links with local people, and trying to, I guess, listen to what's happening there, and trying to get as much as you can in terms of *the diverse flow of life there* without being either a voyeur or a consumer, or either of those, or both of those" (emphasis added).

Ben is a UWO student who studied in Singapore on exchange. Ben addresses the idea of confronting stereotypes of Asian women in his creative writing class there. He explains that one Asian-American play the class studied deconstructed a broad range of stereotypical depictions of Asian women (limiting them to work in massage parlours or rice fields, to a strict domestic and rural life, to a classic representation, as Ben comments, of the "Thai Princess"): "It was written in the USA, so. And then in the class, the [Singaporean] students were like 'okay this is too much, like nobody thinks these things.' And then my opinion was like, 'actually a lot of people think these things.' A lot of people don't make a distinction, or a lot of people think of Asian people as having these kinds of lives in Asia." Indeed, Ben had expressed some similar stereotypes at the start of his interview when asked about general assumptions he had for his study away opportunity, which he recognized and articulated *as* stereotypes his experience away required him to confront. Like other students interviewed, Ben says he also encountered stereotypes about Canada (for example: Canadians are always polite, Canadians are better than Americans, Canada's climate is always very cold); he implicitly articulates his desire to avoid sweeping generalizations about a (singular) Canadian culture: "like you get asked, 'What is the Canadian cuisine?' and then you have to explain that this is sort of not a thing, that there is not a Canadian, like a traditional Canadian, you know, thing to wear, or a traditional Canadian dance." But Ben's answer also reveals that his ability to communicate "diverse" knowledge about his home culture is limited to what he knows about it. For example, the absence of discussion of First Nations peoples in his interview (although he was not pressed by the interviewer for what he may know or have said about Indigenous cultures in Canada) across several responses is notable, as in the following: "And then you have to explain what is it *to be from a country with less history and less culture*" (emphasis added). While it may not be accurate or fair on the part of us as researchers to assume that discussions of the broad diversity of Canadian cultures may have been Ben's intention but with very missed opportunities, we nevertheless find it significant that Ben recognizes the strengths and limits of individual knowledge – specifically on his experiences of being Canadian: "in Singapore, some people, like, it was easier to be, for example, a Canadian because I wasn't *in* Canada, because I didn't have to define what that meant or anything, it was just like, 'Oh, where are you from?' 'Canada.' 'Oh, you're

Canadian.’ ‘Yes.’ Then it was okay because they didn’t know too much about Canada *and I didn’t really have to know too much either*” (emphasis added); Ben makes it clear that being of a place does not or cannot fully authenticate or assure full or decisive knowledge about that place or its peoples.

Further, we find it especially noteworthy that Ben speaks to how assumptions are perpetuated and produced through the information network of other student exchangers:

*And then talking with other exchange students ... they would say how it was less interactive,ix or that there was less class participation. And then I would kind of expect that, like, “Yeah, that’s right.” And then the next class I would go to, I would think before I went, “Okay well, this is just going to be another stupid lecture.” And it was and I was like, this kind of thing where you kind of notice something, and then someone remarks, or that you pick up something else a bit negative and then because of that you expect.... It’s an issue of framing. (Emphasis added)*

Ben recognizes that negative assumptions about a place shared through this informal network of students away seem correct in some situations and not others, and that assumptions communicated *through* a support network like other exchangers, who seem to *share experiences*, can actually produce rather than simply reflect one’s own responses to an experience. This can be related to some of the findings in relation to the WS 3359G student exchangers; several of that group expressed similar impact, but many without the same self-reflexivity, in relation to “shared” knowledge and perceptions among different exchangers in relation to local experience in the host community. Specifically, the example we study for the UWO group relates to information on the potential “dangers” posed by Barbadian men communicated to the students by a group of American exchangers in Barbados. Several of the UWO group spoke in their interviews about the dangers that local men and/or specific bars/clubs posed, and which they were careful to avoid; when pressed, several of these UWO students could not provide more concrete reasons or examples for this concern about threat, nor articulated the possibility that this “knowledge” shared with them presents a stereotype, despite, in several of their answers, awareness about pervasive cultural stereotypes and the importance of exchange opportunities for building resistant networks that contest limited and overgeneralized means and matters of knowing. It is interesting to us that Kara is one of the students who speaks especially about this warning given from the American students, framed as endangerment in certain parts of a bar; she was told not to go to the back area, but not told why. When speaking about “heightened masculinity” as a gendered difference at the bar, Kara does not relate this to her other comment, in a later moment in the interview, about men’s behaviours at that bar as “passive” – rather than aggressive.x Further, we note that Kara positively recognizes that travelling allows experiential and interpersonal encounters with people from diverse locations, opportunity to learn history from ‘within,’ and invites self-reflexivity:

*But travelling, and travelling to somewhere like Barbados, which has had such a complex history, um, from “discovery,” to colonization and slavery, and then emancipation, it’s very complicated. It makes you really think about power differences in the world and that ... I always try to think about it when I think about my sense of self, when I think about my strengths: why do I have these strengths and why don’t I have other strengths?*

But what follows immediately in her answer at least *possibly* reiterates particular assumptions about who “others” are, despite her express intentions for the opposite and her

rich understanding of situatedness: “People are very complicated and it’s easy to just make judgments about people, you know, where they’re from – whether they have *come to Canada as refugees, or migrant workers* or these sorts of things – and to just make initial judgments about people, but it’s important to remember their history and where they come from; and the role that we have – and by *we* I mean Western, white, European people” (emphasis added). It is clear to us that Kara is working to contest hegemonic knowledge practices but less clear to us how trouble-free a process that is.

We want to address one more example of how *mind colonization* seems so difficult to unsettle; our anecdote is taken again from an experience shared in the WS 3359G group. Sandra is one of that company who spent some time in her interview explaining that much of her trip learning took place outside the classroom; she speaks about how her feelings and responses are connected to learning about Barbadian culture on a sight tour of the area and learning the history of Bridgetown in particular. She also describes how going to other local public spaces like bars or nightclubs likely can’t officially be part of a learning curriculum but how she feels these spaces afforded her more “real” contact with Barbadian culture – that is, with the “majority” of the locals rather than the many graduate students and professors she met through her one-week study at the IGDS.<sup>xi</sup> Sandra specifically suggests that the cultural encounters she experienced in interactions with everyday people offered a less “academic” view than what she encountered institutionally at UWI including in the classes as part of her week study there and too than in UWO classes that addressed Caribbean culture. But the specific example she uses to illustrate this tension between “formal” and “informal” understanding also speaks to the challenges of “knowing” a culture from within when one’s experiences are limited to particular spaces and temporalities – especially the im/possibilities of coming to (think you) know a culture within the boundaries of a one-week sojourn. Sandra specifically references the WS 3359G group’s encounter of homophobic graffiti (the phrase, “Bowlers will be exposed”) inscribed on a building wall, also seen and mentioned in interview by several other of the course exchangers. She indicates that it is only in asking “locals” about the graffiti that “that’s how we found out that um, Barbados seems to be a very homophobic society” – information, she states, that is contradicted by the institutional messaging at UWI including from the specific UWI professor she asked about homophobia in the culture. Sandra goes further to assert that “the fact that we saw that writing very vividly on the wall – it didn’t seem, *it’s not something that I guess you could write here in Canada*” (emphasis added). The interviewer did not challenge Sandra in this blanket statement on the “unacceptability” of such inscription in her home (university) culture,<sup>xii</sup> but we further take up its implications in what follows.

Sandra intimates that Canada, in comparison to Barbados, is progressive with respect to LGBT rights, at least in the public use of space, to express homophobia. The juxtaposition of a progressive ‘Northern’ nation in relation to a ‘backward’ Caribbean country which seems implicit here draws on racialized narratives rooted in colonial ideologies which, in this case, are complicated by rights, sexuality, and race. Alleardo Zhangellini (2012) citing JK Paur, argues that homonationalism “refers to deployments of gay rights for racist and islamophobic ends, resulting in the consolidation of more sexually inclusive, but racially exclusionary, ideas of citizenship.” Within the frame of their particularities, race, citizenship and sexual rights are sites of contestations in Canada as they are in Barbados. Yet the latter is presented as anachronistic and the singular focus on Barbados as a homophobic society, made real through the ‘authentic’ voices of ‘real Bajans’ (as separate from University-educated individuals, as Sandra problematically distinguishes) is dislodged from a host of complicating factors, dynamisms, and widespread resistances to homophobia in the society. Certainly, it is not our intention in this paper to gloss the significance or impact of illustrations of homophobia nor to make either uncomplicated equivalences in expressions or experiences of hate representations

across different discursive and geographical locations *nor* to suggest specific relativity in pervasiveness across a Barbados-Canada dichotomy. Rather, we consider the limitations of “knowledge from within” and the im/possibilities of coming to knowledge of not just a place but ‘a people’ when bounded by particular limitations of time, space, and opportunity – particularly in relation to deep-seated cultural assumptions individuals may bring to other places with both conscious and unconscious recognition. We wonder about how knowledge generated out of “experience” in these limitations may function as another kind of imperialism: the right to claim a truth *about* as the outcome of one’s own entitlement to discovery. As we have mentioned already, the WS 3359G students had less than a week to “experience” the local culture. It is interesting to us that Sandra later and in a different context (that is, on learning about mothering and motherhood experiences in the Caribbean, through the lived experiences of Caribbeans) speaks of the need to have more time than a week to appropriately establish relations of trust for learning. Further, we also find it noteworthy that Sandra responds to a later prompt from the interviewer about feminist perspectives with the suggestion that the Women’s Studies students were constantly filtering their experiences on the trip *through a feminist lens*: “That was a running joke, that, we could never just hang out. We’d always have to start analyzing things.” The implication without direct assertion is that the group’s reading of deep-seated homophobia is produced through their deployment of a critical feminist analysis; certainly, this is a sentiment expressly articulated about the graffiti recognition in our interview with Christine, another WS 3359G student. Particularly we question Sandra’s (and, by some extension, the responses of other students on her trip) easy and sure assumption, despite its qualification, that Barbados can be understood as “a very homophobic society.” Specifically we read Sandra’s assumption through

1) a single local encounter with homophobic graffiti and interchange with “some locals” on the subject,<sup>xiii</sup> particularly when that assumption is, in part, countered by knowledge from others within the cultural location. Indeed, two things appear to be conflated here: ‘homophobia exists in Barbadian society’ [as elsewhere, as ‘at home’] and ‘Barbados is a homophobic society.’ Of counter responses to her ‘reading’ by others in the culture, Sandra states: “They wouldn’t want to be like ‘oh yes, we have a homophobic society, but please come!’”); and

2) her certainty effected through relative and erroneous assurance that similar expression would be unacceptable in the home location, despite our own potentially problematic assumptions that, as a senior Women’s Studies’ student, Sandra should have encountered discussions of heterosexism and homophobia in contemporary Canada in her coursework and/or been exposed to graphic illustration of homophobia in her home campus or town graffiti.

As researchers, we come to some conclusion on Sandra’s reading of ‘the culture’ she is visiting compared to her own in part through the articulation of another student in the WS 3359G group, Mel, who speaks to the destabilization of self and disorientation of experience in being away from the familiar, in relation to the same incident, the experience of the graffiti:

*I think that with any culture there always, like going to any other country, there is always that kind of culture shock; for me there were a couple things, just like the general attitude of, like, certain homophobia and certain amount of racism were things that I’ve experienced before but because like when we’re in this Western bubble and we can choose and we can select our own friend-scape ... like I guess I just kind of forgot that it existed and then going into a place where there is just a lot less control of the surroundings and you’re just put in and you just experience what you experience, I think I wasn’t expecting it, so it jarred me when I did*

*see instances. I don't think that it ruined the entire experience, it was just interesting overall.*

Mel's statement above reverberates with Shelley's comment earlier (see page 18 of this text) on how being out of one's home environment magnifies experience, makes encounters that may well be experienced at home seem more alien, foreign, in 'different' space; as both Mel and Shelley state, one's sense of estrangement in experience is exacerbated by the absence of familiarity markers and relations – as in friend and family support networks. (And, as we have suggested, the presence of support in the form of other students undertaking exchange in same or similar space can have influence/ authenticating effects in interpreting events *because* of that sense of solidarity/similarity). We also consider additional indices like unfamiliar food, sound, visual space, and more as functions in one's sense of the "strangeness" of particular experiences away which may well be more familiar at home than one finds "comfortable" to admit. We think through this prospect alongside bell hooks' call for "commitment to 'radical openness,' the will to explore different perspectives and change one's mind as new information is presented" (48); while many of both our Women's Studies exchangers and students in other disciplines articulated their readiness and willingness to confront their own and others' assumptions, we see the deep-seatedness of hegemonic, value-laden interpretation and understand persistent critique and query as requisite in the learning process, and the urgent need to further develop pedagogies that push unremitting self-reflexivity. Of course, we must include ourselves and our own work as objects of this critique.

We have attempted, to the best of our recognition, to interpret student responses with fairness, with every sense that there may be more than one way through which to understand their answers. But we recognize that our reading of their accounts may be appropriative -- or determined, if not intentionally, by assumptions or expectations *we* bring to the work, and/or by the academic returns we might accrue through particular interpretations of their voices and ideas. We mean neither to blame, embarrass, nor discredit any of our students, all of whom participated generously in our study. Rather, we situate their responses and our use these in the context of the socio-cultural, economic and political circumstances in which we are all embedded; we illustrate this through the work of Sannie Y. Tang and Annette J. Browne (2008), who maintain, of their own work, that:

*[A]s Augoustinos and her colleagues (2005) would suggest, the analytic site for this paper "is not the 'prejudiced' or 'racist' individual, but the rhetorical and discursive resources that are available within an inequitable society" (Augoustinos et al. 2005, p. 318). These rhetorical and discursive resources, as we see it, would include those ideas and images produced and reproduced in the dominating discourses that serve as a "road map" to "guide" our common sense-making of our everyday experiences (Smith 1999). Our ability to speak of/to those experiences, as Smith (2004) might argue, is not merely idiosyncratic but manifests a "social consciousness" expressive of the social relationships and historical conditions that enable and at the same time limit our knowledge of our world. In this sense, differences in the ways that reality is interpreted by different social actors are not really "contradictory;" rather, they tell us something important about the social nature of our world and how 'race'/class/gender relations organize differential experiences. (pp. 110-11)*

We understand that our interpretations, like those of our students', are sites for query or excavation of those operations of knowledge-power of which we may be unreflexively unaware.

### **V. Preliminary Encapsulations: In/Conclusions or, Thinking into the Future**

So to the question: does internationalization afford those who undertake its processes a “critical and intellectual distance from their respective local cultures and from those standardizing processes of globalization against which numerous national cultures – and the school curricula designed to reproduce those national cultures – are now reacting so strongly” (as the University of British Columbia’s now-defunct Centre for the Study of the Internationalization of Curriculum Studies and William Pinar have argued), our answer is:

*maybe.*

But *how* the experience of internationalization is materialized is crucial: to foster genuine relations, collaboration, indeed, a sense of “exchange,” personal/intimate engagement is necessary. But so too, on one hand and which we have not addressed in this paper, is structural opportunity for equal or equitable learning experiences, for somewhat parallel funding streams; in the absence of structural equalities we call for financial support from socio-economically advantaged institutions to bear a greater share of student exchange costs in both the sending and receiving of students, so that intercultural learning can become a genuinely open opportunity. Although all partners in this project recognize that “like” treatment can itself be an exercise of disciplinary knowledge-power (for example, it seems imperative to acknowledge that, given the historical violence of various western imperialisms in southern economic, political, and education systems, the value of learning *from* students and faculty at UWO (an institution recently rebranded by its administration in the colonial-sounding nomenclature “Western University”) and in the London, Ontario community carries different ideological valence than in the corollary value of UWO students learning from UWI professors and students and within the local communities there. Of course, we also understand that who comprises the UWI and UWO, the Cave Hill and London communities, cannot be generalized and that recognition of diversity within is also key to the learning this project seeks to foster; above all, our emphasis is, as always, on the critical urgency of genuine “exchange” in learning opportunities but, too, with particular encouragement for the diffusion of traditionally subjugated knowledges as interventive transformations in hegemonic institutional epistemes.xiv

Travel can open the world – through particular affective experiences and lived encounters – but to establish real learning “exchanges” we need to be self-reflexive about our locations, constantly challenge our assumptions, develop learning communities both inside and outside the classroom, and learn to connect these together. While our project explores the role of community and sense of belongingness in relation to student exchange success, and the meaning of intimate intercultural relations particularly in the context of de-colonizing pedagogy both inside and outside the classroom, our data also reveals the deep embeddedness of *mind colonization* -- the persistence of cultural assumptions even as our students perceive themselves most self-reflexive in other locations. In this way, we must then also be wary of “using lived experience as a criterion for generating knowledge... to validate knowledge claims, and to create or refute generalisations” (Barriteau 17; cited earlier in this paper) when that experience is *particularly* culturally, spatially, and temporally bound. Thus we must work to foster not, perhaps, authoritative knowledges but to make spaces and places for encounters with diverse processes of knowing, guided by attention to the deep structures of dominant knowledge paradigms and our will to practice persistent critique of our “locations” (however these may be situated) in relation to these. This requires self-scrutiny *and* diverse

interpersonal, intercultural relations. Certainly, the world is richer when we share, rather than simply take or give, or attempt authorization over or authentication of, our human resources.

## Notes

i The Centre for Gender and Development Studies (now Institute for Gender and Development Studies) was established at the University of the West Indies in September 1993. It emerged out of the path-breaking work of Women and Development Group (WDG) and a Project of Cooperation in Teaching and Research in Women and Development Studies between the University of the West Indies and the Institute of Social Studies at the Hague. IGDS is a dynamic entity within the University of the West Indies that is engaged in a programme of teaching, research and outreach in the areas of gender, feminism, sexuality studies and masculinity studies in the Caribbean. The Regional Coordinating Unit is based at the Mona Campus in Jamaica with units on each of the three campuses (Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados) of the University. The mission of IGDS is to produce and disseminate knowledge to transform gender relations in the Caribbean in support of the UWI's mission to enhance regional and international development. At The University of Western Ontario, Women's Studies and Feminist Research was established originally as a research centre; it became a department in two faculties, Arts and Humanities and Social Science in 2006 and offers undergraduate and graduate programs in interdisciplinary areas of feminist research.

ii This agreement was finally, after some considerable administrative delay, signed and approved by both Universities in spring, 2012.

iii Currently, we are working with Western's experiential learning office, particularly through Anne-Marie Fischer and Stephanie Hayne Beatty, to actually implement this concept of "true" exchange in bringing and sending classes across both Universities; the project is being re-generated with a proposed 5-year plan for "reciprocal learning" including faculty teaching and research exchanges that the original partners, Joan Cuffie (former Ag. Head of the IGDS:NBU), Charmaine Crawford (current Head of the IGDS), Erica Lawson (Assistant Professor, WSFR), and Kim Verwaayen (Assistant Professor WSFR) are in the process of preparing for presentation with the support of Fischer and Hayne Beatty noted above.

iv The names of all student participants and exchange program administrators have been changed to protect confidentiality. Our ethics statement to participants indicated we could protect confidentiality but not assure anonymity, since particular details in relation to small study away opportunities (such as the WS 3359G trip) could potentially identify interviewees.

v Oisten's is both a market for people who work as fishers and a major venue for socializing, eating, and dancing by both Barbadians and tourists.

vi Heather participated in the annual conference of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI) held in Christ Church, Barbados on 2012, as part of her WS 3359G trip experience.

vii Heather identifies as a First Nations woman; although she doesn't name her standpoint as such, it is clear she references an Indigenous, anti-imperialist feminism.

viii Our interpretation of Donna's distinction is in part produced by our reading of her statement that "I don't think that any of the Danish friends that I made said that any of the stereotypes are wrong, but I guess that they weren't explained in their full context" – by "context" she means explanation for the source of the assumption. (In this case, Donna references the explanation that Danes are "cold" in the context of a sociobiological

understanding of climate impact, which we discuss later in this paper.) That a “stereotype” is not “wrong” suggests perception of overgeneralization as neutral.

ix Ben is referring here to comparisons between class/lecture styles between the host and home institutions, which he articulates as assumptions about Asian-versus-western differences.

x By “passive” Kara means that men line the sides of the dance floor and it is women who choose their partners in opposite-sex dancing.

xi The IGDS:NBU at Cave Hill offers a Minor in Gender and Development Studies at the undergraduate level and also has a MPhil/PhD Programme at the post-graduate level. Thus the majority of interactions for the undergraduate students in WS 3359G there involved MPhil/Ph.D. students. It was actually a repeated theme across most of the WS 3359G responses that the opportunity for “reciprocal” exchange in meeting with the graduate students at UWI and sharing experiences about their work in women’s and gender studies was negatively impacted by differences in their learning levels – including in relation to many of the undergraduates’ own feelings of anxiety and uncertainty in speaking with UWI students they felt to be so academically senior to them.

xii See, however, the following sources for discussions of homophobia expressed through graffiti in the country at large and in the London, Ontario and more specifically UWO campus communities in particular: Faulkner, “Homophobic Hate Propaganda in Canada,” and both Nealy, “USC working on anti-hate posters for graffiti” and Day, “Bathrooms become hate havens.”

xiii We do not know the number of individuals who expressed homophobic views with whom Sandra interacted. But Christine, who also mentions the graffiti, indicates the student group, on encountering the inscribed phrase, approached one beach lifeguard for clarification. What further interactions followed for Sandra or other members of the group we don’t know, because we did not ask in interview.

xiv We know that there are various strategies for implementing “exchange” effects that can require more pedagogical investment than the non-surety of institutionally-generated financial support. Including global content in curricula by experts from within cultures and fields, diversifying theoretical expertise, employing technologies like Skype to generate partnerships across distant geographical classroom spaces and relationships among globally-situated students (with patience for periodic failures across technology’s global unreliability), encouraging faculty research and teaching exchanges are, among other possibilities, strategies that can strengthen feminist and gender-focused collaborative projects for learning in particular but more broadly as well. Indeed, we believe that the inclusion of multiple, rich, non-tokenized expertise (both by academic scholars, community activists, and experiential “knowers”) from across various parts of the world and various diverse identities and epistemes, regularly into curricula is perhaps more critically urgent, certainly more resourceable, than travel opportunities in education.

## References

- Barriteau, Violet Eudine. (2006). The Relevance of Black Feminist Scholarship: A Caribbean Perspective. *Feminist Africa*, 7, pp. 9-31. Retrieved from [http://web.uct.ac.za/org/feministafrica/Feminist\\_Africa\\_7.pdf](http://web.uct.ac.za/org/feministafrica/Feminist_Africa_7.pdf).
- Day, Nancy. (2006, February 22). Bathrooms become hate havens. *The Gazette: Western's Daily Student Newspaper*. Retrieved from <http://www.gazette.uwo.ca/article.cfm?section=news&articleID=602&month=2&day=22&year=2006>.
- Faulkner, Ellen. (2006). Homophobic Hate Propaganda in Canada. *Journal of Hate Studies*, 5.1, pp. 63-97. Retrieved from <http://guweb2.gonzaga.edu/againsthate/journal5/ghs107.pdf>.
- Ferree, Myra and Aili Tripp. (2006). Preface. In Myra Ferree and Aili Mari Tripp (Eds), *Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights*. NY: NYUP. pp. i-vii.
- Harrison, Faye V. (2007). The Gendered Politics and Violence of Structural Adjustment: A View from Jamaica. In Marcia Degal, Marcia Texler and Theresa A. Martinez (Eds), *Intersections of Gender, Race, and Class: Readings for a Changing Landscape*. Cambridge: Oxford UP, pp. 161-174.
- hooks, bell (2003). *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. NY: Routledge.
- Hosein, Gabrielle Jamela.(2011). Caribbean feminism, activist pedagogies and transnational dialogues. *Feminist Theory & Activism in Global Perspective: Feminist Review Conference Proceedings*, pp. 1-14. Retrieved from e116–e129<http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/fr.2011.24>.
- Narayan, Uma (1997). *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*. New York: Routledge.
- Neary, Claire. (2006, October 3). USC working on anti-hate posters for graffiti. *The Gazette: Western's Daily Student Newspaper*. Retrieved from <http://www.gazette.uwo.ca/article.cfm?section=FrontPage&articleID=749&month=10&day=3&year=2006>.
- Mohanty, Chandra T. (2003). *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Pedwell, Carolyn and Anne Whitehead. (2012). Affecting Feminism: Questions of Feeling in Feminist Theory. *Feminist Theory*, 13, Retrieved from <http://fty.sagepub.com/content/13/2/115>.
- Pinar, William F. (n.d.). The Centre for the Study of the Internationalization of Curriculum Studies (CSICS), Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia. Retrieved from <http://csics.educ.ubc.ca/>.

Stone-Mediatore, Shari. (2003). *Reading Across Borders: Storytelling and Knowledges of Resistance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tang, Sannie Y, and Annette J. Browne. (2008). "Race" Matters: Racialization and Egalitarian Discourses Involving Aboriginal People in the Canadian Health Care Context. *Ethnicity & Health*, 13.2, pp. 109-27.

Travis, Heather. (2010, September 10). Planting the Seeds for Internationalization. Interview with Amit Chakma. *Western News* [London], 12-13. Retrieved from [http://www.president.uwo.ca/media/docs/Chakma\\_Centrespread.pdf](http://www.president.uwo.ca/media/docs/Chakma_Centrespread.pdf)>.

Zhanghellini, Aleardo. (2012). Are Gay Rights Islamophobic? Some uses of the Concept of Homonationalism in Activism and Academia. *Social & Legal Studies*, 21, pp. 357-374.

#### **Author Bios:**

**Dr. K.J. Verwaayen** is an Assistant Professor in Women's Studies and Feminist Research and an Affiliate Member of the Centre for Transitional Justice and Post-Conflict Reconstruction at The University of Western Ontario. A poststructuralist feminist and Canadianist, she works in the areas of deconstruction, women's auto/biography, trauma studies, pedagogy, and global and Indigenous feminisms. Her work has appeared in *Feminist Studies in English Literature*; *Canadian Poetry*; *Open Letter*, Cambridge Scholars' Press, and *Essays on Canadian Writing*, with forthcoming work in *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, *Canadian Literature*, and *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien (Journal of Canadian Studies)*.

**Dr. Erica Lawson** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research at The University of Western Ontario. She specializes in feminist and critical race studies. Her research and teaching interests include feminist theories about mothering and motherhood in a transnational context.

**Dr. Charmiane Crawford** is Head (Ag.) and lecturer at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados. She completed her graduate work (M.A., Ph.D.) in the Women's Studies Programme at York University, Toronto, Canada. Some of her research interests include gender and sexuality in Caribbean culture, Caribbean women and transnational motherhood, Caribbean domestic workers and post-colonial, black and queer feminist theorising. Her recent publications include "It's a Girl Thing" Problematizing Female Sexuality, Gender and Lesbophobia in Caribbean Culture (2012)" and "Who's Your Mama? Transnational Motherhood and African-Caribbean Women in the Diaspora" (2012).