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Robin Morgan

Monster*

May my hives bloom bravely until my flesh is aflame
and burns through the cobwebs.
May we go mad together, my sisters.
May our labor agony in bringing forth this revolution
be the death of all pain.

May we comprehend that we cannot be stopped.

May I learn how to survive until my part is finished.
May I realize that I

am a
monster. I am

a
monster.

I am a monster.

And I am proud.

* Extract from Robyn Morgan (1972) *Monster*.



because of their openly voiced anger and passionate call to end women's oppression.⁸ But radical feminism is passionate. We are passionately committed to Women's Liberation and through our work we hope to impassion others. Nothing less will do if we are to develop theories and practices for a future in which women can live autonomous as well as socially responsible lives.

8. See Frye (1983), *A Note on Anger*, for an excellent discussion of the meaning of this anger.

Joy James

Experience, Reflection, Judgment and Action: Teaching Theory, Talking Community*

Contemporary African American theorists think within an African and community-centered tradition in which the creativity of a people in the race for theory sustains humanity. Barbara Christian writes that theory not rooted in practice is elitist (1987, p. 336). However, teaching theory as non-elitist, and intending the liberation and development of humanity, specifically African communities, contradicts much of academic theory¹ which is Eurocentric.

Making Our Presence Known

Before I can even teach theory, given its current social construction as biologically marked, I seem continuously challenged to "prove" that I am qualified. Comparing my work experiences with those of other African American women academics, I notice that despite our having been hired through a highly competitive process, we seem to be asked more routinely, almost reflexively, if we have PhDs. We could attribute this, and have, to our "diminutive" height, youngish appearance or casual attire. Yet I notice that White women about our height, unsuited, and under sixty, seem not to be interrogated as frequently about their qualifications. Continuously asked my "qualifications" as a "theorist" I cited to the inquisitive or inquisition: my *training* – a degree in political philosophy; my *research* – a dissertation on a European theorist; or my *employment* – teaching theory courses in academe. These

* Excerpt from *Teaching Theory, Talking Community* originally published in Joy James and Ruth Farmer (Eds.) (1993).

1. Native American writer Lee Maracle (1990, p. 3) notes the circular logic of academic theory: "Theory: If it can't be shown, it can't be understood. Theory is a proposition, proven by demonstrable argument. Argument: Evidence, proof. Evidence: demonstrable testimony, demonstration . . . Argument is defined as evidence; proof or evidence is defined by demonstration or proof; and theory is a proposition proven by demonstrable evidence. None of these words exist outside of their inter-connectedness. Each is defined by the other".

are prerequisites for institutional membership but not measurements of competency. I accept that nothing will qualify me to students and faculty who do not struggle with their racism, fear, and hostility towards Black/African people, philosophy, and theorizing centered on liberation. For me, teaching theory courses on the praxis of African American women permits me to claim that I think. Connecting my teaching to community organizing allows me to say I theorize. Service in African/Black liberation qualifies me.

These qualifications make me a suspicious character if not "unqualified" for academe. A hydra for teachers and students who do not set them, criteria established without our input appear like shrouds. The issue is not whether there should be academic standards and qualifications; there always are. The issue is who sets and will set them, and for whose benefit they function. The reward of transgressing conventional academic standards is re-establishing connections to some community wisdom and practice larger than academe. The spectre of failing to meet institutional standards and "qualifications" inhibits the search for new models of knowledge and teaching.

In teaching, I try to learn and share more about the history of social thought. Teaching about the origins of the "academy", "philosophy" and "theory" as predated the "Greek ancestors" of "Western civilization" broadens the scope of both the time and space in which theory takes place; it expands academia's concept of who theorizes. Changing the concept of time or the time-line changes the context for philosophy and theory.² Philosophy extends beyond the appearance of Europeans (and their designated ancestors) in history; so theory extends beyond the spaces they occupy or dominate. To restrict our discussions of the contributions of Black/African cosmology and philosophy to the "contemporary" period implies that we have no "ancient" or "modern" history in philosophizing. Any people of gender labelled as being without a history of philosophy is a people of gender for whom philosophy is not indigenous; often for the marginalized, "contemporary" theorizing becomes disconnected from culturally diverse traditions. That is why women and Blacks or other people of color must reinsert ourselves in time and history on the continuum, and confront academic disciplines attempting to erase us from that line. The ways in which I approach theory are changing.

2. Academia's presentation of time and consequently the history of thought promotes the delusion that philosophy (and civilization) began with "Greeks". The role and contributions of Black/African scholars who preceded and taught them and the African civilizations often erased before Athens are ignored. Voids in timelines manufacture artificial "origins" which, legitimizing European dominance elide African contributions in philosophy. "Ancient" becomes the "sui generis" thinking of "Europeanized" Greeks; "Medieval" the European Christian Church, with a de-Africanized Augustine; "Modern" European Enlightenment *philosophes*; and "Contemporary" European (American) writers and thinkers. "Ancient", "Medieval", "Modern", and "Contemporary" as categories for time also become categories of space and "race", denoting geography and ethnicity. Theorists assigned in each category are invariably "White" men in masculinist theory (where a few such as Hannah Arendt might qualify as the "exceptional" woman) and "White" women in feminist theory.

Extending time to find other origins of theory, I encounter more comprehensive spaces and thoughts. Hypatia, the (Egyptian) woman philosopher, sits with the "Ancient" philosophers of academic masculinist theory. The Kongo women kings theorize in a unique cosmology coexisting with the space occupied by Locke, and Rousseau and other *philosophes* of the European Enlightenment. Angela Davis and Black/African revolutionary theorizing coexist with the European (American) liberalism of Rawls, Arendt, and Bentham in contemporary political theory. In "essential feminist writings", Ida B. Wells is taught alongside Mary Wollstonecraft and Susan B. Anthony; Virginia Woolf and Mary Daly are placed beside Assata Shakur and Audre Lorde.

The ways in which I teach theory are changing. Cultivating respectfulness in myself and seeking it in my students, I ask my classes: "Who are you? Do you know your personal and political relationship to the knowledge studied?" I find that autobiographical theorizing discourages appropriation and objectification, while encouraging students to identify themselves as potential theorists and embark in self-reflections that include critiques of racist, classist and (hetero)sexist assumptions (a "backlash" usually follows any sustained critique of entrenched, dominant biases). I urge students to carefully consider the claim by revolutionary African American women who write that the roles of living thinkers are open to all and that they are not "exceptional" (those who participate in a legacy follow rather than deviate from the normative).

Students encounter the women's images and voices through video and audio tapes that supplement readings for discussions on women's contributions to and roles in liberation struggles. These images, along with exploring our relationships and responsibilities to writers, stories, and theories, pull us off the sidelines as "spectators" and consumers of Africana "performance" towards our own roles as actors. Contending with my own "consumerism", I find that progressive activists give me more than subject matter for courses; they also provide instruction in philosophy and democratic pedagogy. I am pushed most as a teacher-student when wrestling with the implications of philosophy and theorizing in the autobiographies of revolutionary African American women. More than any other type of writing, this form prods me to confront my personal and political responsibilities to ancestors, youth, and future generations. Attempting to share what I learn, the internal obstacles appear. They emerge out of my physical and sometimes intellectual alienation from work for community liberation and the philosophers and theorists of the community. They coexist with the ever present external obstacles of indifference and hostility towards Black liberation theorizing. Despite the internal and external obstacles, I begin to fear less being dismissively ignored by academics and fear more my own ignorance about and faltering ties to our ancestors' loving, radical traditions. Although it grates the academic norm, responsibility means that legitimacy and authority come from the humanity of my communities.³ If respect

3. Bernice Johnson Reagon (1991) argues this about the work of Martin Luther King, Jr.

and recognition mean communicating our wisdom and humanity in struggle, regardless, then pedagogy will be the transport.

Talking Theory: Activism in Pedagogy

Pedagogy rooted in ethical concerns and an epistemology based on a four part process of experience, reflection, judgment, and action⁴ organize my courses. Readings stimulate and challenge students to expand their experiential base. They then enter their reflections in journals, essay papers and compare their insights in small student work groups. Judging dominant norms, students design activities or projects to demystify and challenge economic and racial-sexual oppression, and evaluate their own ideologies. Through organizing, they obtain a greater experimental base to reflect on philosophy and theorizing, cosmologies, freedom and liberation struggles. The last step in this epistemological framework is action. Ethical action expands experiences, stimulates self-reflections, and judging. A pedagogy that denies the validity of personal experiences, that makes no space for self-reflection, that discourages judgment, and severs action from insight confuses fragmented thinking with knowledge. Guided by ethical concerns to think and organize to resist oppression, we walk closer to the place where humane political thinkers stand. There, hopefully with a less distant and more substantial awareness of their theorizing, we begin to comprehend and critique.

To respectfully teach about theorizing by African American women activists requires such a pedagogy based on ethics and active commitment to community liberation. So, I reject the concept of education as value-neutral and use "extracurricular" activities as a lab component (for instance, the hands-on experience of "applied" knowledge or "labs" to supplement "book" knowledge is indispensable in disciplines such as chemistry or architecture). These activities, encouraging students to take an active rather than passive role in their self-development, advance critical analyses of: child abuse; sexual violence; adultism; racism; (hetero)sexism; and classism.

For example, in my senior seminar on "Women and the State", students wrote papers and organized educational forums for the campus and local community on relevant topics. Their educationals in the campus center, held on Tuesday afternoons in March during Women's History Month, were: "Women and Militarization", "Women and Occupation", and "Women Political Prisoners". "Women and

4. Theologian Bernard Lonergan (1957) discusses an epistemology similar to the African (Afrocentric) ethical paradigm in which knowledge exists for the sake of communal good and individual human liberation (which are not presented as oppositional). Experience, reflection, judgment, and action are part of the process by which people (knowingly or unknowingly) learn. Action is indispensable to the learning process: you know how to ride a bicycle or drive a car not from merely reading books about bicycles or cars, but from riding or driving one as well (building furthers your knowledge). One knows how to live, learn and teach without patriarchal, White supremacist, or classist elitist assumptions by doing activities that confront and diminish racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism.

"Militarization" occurred around the time of the US bombing of Iraq. Over 100 people attended this educational, which students organized as a tribunal or mock trial in which African American, Caribbean and Native American and European American women activists and teachers testified on US crimes against humanity, specifically violence resulting from racism and sexism in US domestic and foreign policies. The students performed—educated as poets, defence and prosecution lawyers, judge, and witnesses. They staged guerilla theatre to disrupt their mock trial: dressed in mourning garb, the "ghosts" of several women murdered by their male companions in domestic violence interrupted the proceedings, bitterly denouncing the court for ignoring their desperate petitions, as living women, to stop their batterers.

Although the majority of students in the "Women and the State" seminar stated that they found organizing their forum and attending and critiquing the others as one of their most difficult and most rewarding educational experiences, interrelating doing and knowing for ethical-political action is not a popular practice in academe. White students have told me that they resent not the request to engage in activities outside the classroom (they do for other classes), but the request to act against racism, believing it unjust to require, as proper and necessary, that students (staff and faculty) confront adultism, classism, racism, and (hetero)sexism in their courses and themselves. (Other more liberal advocates of multiculturalism have argued that critiques of texts are the only responsible action in academic classes.)

I argue for activism as an indispensable component in learning. Action promotes consciousness of one's own political practice; such self-consciousness is a prerequisite to literacy. "Interest" in the lives of Black women and democratic struggles is superficial and the "knowledge" acquired specious if one remains illiterate in the language of community and commitment spoken by the women activists. Activism promotes literacy. It is usually the greatest and most difficult learning experience, particularly if it is connected to communities and issues broader than the parameters of academic life.

Theory and philosophy "born in struggle" carry extremely difficult lessons. Activism concretizing ethical ideals in action, allows us to better comprehend a form of thinking unfamiliar in abstract academic thought — theorizing under fire or under conditions of confrontation or repression. Thinking to stay alive and be free is the heart of liberation praxis. For half a millennium, Indigenous and African peoples in the Americas and Africa have theorized for their individual lives and the life of the community. Theorizing as a life and death endeavor rather than leisured, idle speculation, embodies revolutionary praxis. As faculty we may find ourselves in positions where living by our beliefs and theory carries the hazards of not receiving grants, promotion or tenure; students may lose scholarships and higher grades. We rarely though find ourselves in positions where living by our ideals carries the possibility that we may die for them. We generally never have to risk our lives to claim our ideals and freedom, as have radical thinkers

and activists such as Harriet Tubman; Anne Moody; Assata Shakur; Martin Luther King, Jr.; Malcolm X; and Fred Hampton.⁵

Several years ago, while a visiting scholar at a mid-western university, I was able to learn more about how risk-taking and radical organizing test ideas, ideologies and commitments. During my semester tenure, the Ku Klux Klan based in its national headquarters in Indiana decided to march and stage a rally in the local campus town. The general response against the march and rally centered on individual comments of fear and anger. There was little collective, organized response until one night, as part of a women's film festival, a small number of students viewed William Greave's video, "A Passion for Justice" on the life of Ida B. Wells. An African American woman senior facilitated the discussion session that followed the video during which students shared how they were impressed by Ida B. Wells' courageous and influential activism, which began at such a young age, their age. They were silent when asked about the relationship between their feelings of anger and fear about the story of Miss Wells' resistance and their feelings of anger and fear about the upcoming Klan march. Exploring these issues later that night in their dorm rooms, students began strategy sessions: they decided to allow their admiration for Miss Wells to lead them to organize a counter-educational critiquing racism, homophobia, sexism, and antisemitism in response to the impending KKK march.

African American women students led the organizing and formed a coalition with European Americans, European Jewish Americans and gay and lesbian activists. Some of these African American women students had experienced the most violent racial/sexual assaults on the campus. At an early organizing meeting, one African American senior spoke of being dragged off a catwalk into bushes as her White male assailant yelled "nigger bitch" while repeatedly punching her. As she struggled away she noticed White student spectators who made no effort to assist or intervene. The woman student stated that the university's investigation and handling of the attack were equally unresponsive.

Faculty criticisms and complaints about White dominated universities did not translate into support for the student initiated organizing. Most African American faculty and administrators, like their White counterparts, were reluctant to publicly support a student "speak-out" against racist, sexist, and homophobic violence critical of the university. University employees mirrored the divisions among African American students in which more cautious or conservative students dismissed student organizers as "radical" and ridiculed them for "over-reacting". Political differences among African American students, faculty and administration were exacerbated during the KKK organizing.

5. Prior to his assassination by the FBI and Chicago police in 1971, Fred Hampton prophesied: "I'm going to die for the people because I live for the people." Quoted in *A Nation of Law?* (1968-71), *Eyes on the Prize - Part II* which documents Hampton's political work for the African American community, the FBI's disruption of the Black liberation movement and its eventual assassination of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark.

Fear of criticizing the administration or faculty, along with homophobia, sexism and caste elitism allowed faculty and more conservative African American students to distance themselves from student activists. Yet students and youth face the greatest dangers from racial-sexual violence on campus and in society. Alongside community women and men, only two European American women and I as faculty actively organized with students educating against, in the wake of the Klan rally, increasing racist/antisemitic verbal abuse and physical violence on campus. The Klan rally highlighted faculty ambivalence and refusal to support student organizing and the university administration's unwillingness to publicly take an uncompromised stance against and responsible action for diminishing racist, antisemitic, homophobic, and sexual violence on campus.

It seemed that we faculty and administrators believed our class and caste status in academe granted us immunity from the violence assaulting many African American youth, women, and gay, lesbian and bisexual students. My own inabilities, with others, to always speak and talk to community in the midst of organizing conflicts, were compounded by my impatience and frustration with the political rhetoric and passivity of non activists. The confusion and strains impressed on me the precarious balance of teaching and talking for justice and my own uncertainty and anger, with others, about the terrain of struggle and community.

Community

Individual changes in classroom teaching to deconstruct racist-heterosexist curricula and build community are marginal if not supported by the department or program and other instructors. Often the struggles for more accuracy and accountability in education are labelled and depoliticized as personal (personnel) whims of faculty rather than responsible action. I have found that personalizing my confrontations with Eurocentric thinkers or academic careerists is a form of depoliticization that contributes to my own isolation and ineffectualness. Supporting progressive curricula and pedagogies demands political change. Yet, my experiences show that few are willing to engage in the type of activism and restructuring necessary to supplant tokenism.

I share Toni Morrison's observations in "Rootedness: The Ancestor As Foundation", applying her thoughts on writing to teaching, another art form:

If anything I do in the way of writing . . . isn't about the village or the community or about you, then it is not about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of my imagination that fulfils only the obligation of my personal dreams - which is to say, yes, the work must be political. It must have that as its thrust. That's a pejorative term in critical circles now: if a work of art has any political influence in it, somehow it's tainted. My feeling is just the opposite: if it has none, it is tainted (1984, pp. 344-45).

Academics and students, if not always content, seem comparatively "safe" from the political-economic conditions destroying African communities and villages. Educational status and economic "stability" grant us space to move about the world as if our survival were guaranteed, despite the increasing impoverishment and death of Africans worldwide.⁶ Privilege may reduce our primary preoccupation in academia to struggles for accreditation and legitimacy from the intellectual representatives of the "new" old world order.

I am paid – and so I pay my bills and taxes to the military – by teaching "theory" in a White university's White Women's Studies program in a White suburb called "Amherst". On my better days, I think freely about a people loving and theorizing for liberation. I try to think in the traditions in which philosophy and theory are the tools of initiates and "slaves"⁷ to the community, rather than the techniques of academic employees; this is problematic in places where people talk and write about life and death in and to abstraction. Although at times afraid to forget and to always remember my indebtedness to the militant Black praxis that forced open the doors of White academia, I am grateful to the call to be in a tradition of midwifery to philosophizing and theorizing, a tradition that intends community and respect for African ancestors, the living, and future born.

6. The US dominates international financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). These institutions have underdeveloped Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean so that we as a people are poorer in the 1990s than we were in the 1960s. According to UNICEF's 1988 report, *State of the World's Children*, the "Third World" is in debt to the US and western European nations/financial institutions for over \$1000 billion (US currency).

7. According to Bunseki Fukia, in Kongo philosophy the Nganga – the initiated elders and teachers – are "slaves" to the community (lecture, Caribbean Cultural Center, New York City, February 1991).

Catharine A. MacKinnon

From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?*

And ain't I a woman?

– Sojourner Truth¹

Black feminists speak as women because we are women . . .

– Audre Lorde²

It is common to say that something is good in theory but not in practice. I always want to say, then it is not such a good theory, is it? To be good in theory but not in practice posits a relation between theory and practice that places theory prior to practice, both methodologically and normatively, as if theory is a terrain unto itself. The conventional image of the relation between the two is first theory, then practice. You have an idea, then act on it. In legal academia you theorize, then try to get some practitioner to put it into practice. To be more exact, you read law, review articles, then write more law review articles. The closest most legal academics come to practice is teaching – their students, most of whom will practice, being regarded by many as an occupational hazard to their theorizing.

The postmodern version of the relation between theory and practice is discourse unto death. Theory begets no practice, only more text. It proceeds as if you can deconstruct power relations by shifting their markers around in your head. Like all formal idealism, this approach to theory tends unselfconsciously to reproduce existing relations of dominance, in part because it is an utterly removed

* Reprinted from *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, (1991b), 4 (13) pp. 13–22. This paper benefited from the comments of members of the Collective on Women of Color and the Law at Yale Law School.

1. Bert J. Loewenberg & Ruth Dugin (1976, p. 235).

2. Audre Lorde (1984, p.60). The whole quotation is "Black feminists speak as women because we are women and do not need others to speak for us."