

Smart Bitch: Talking Back in Unity

Anne Harris & Rebecca Long



*.. I don't want my kids to see me getting beat down
(by daddy smacking mommy all around)
(This is my notice to the door, I'm not taking it no more)
I'm not your personal whore, that's not what I'm here for
....who you callin' a bitch?*

—Queen Latifah, U.N.I.T.Y., 1993

*Talking back became for me a rite of initiation, testing my courage, strengthening
my commitment, preparing me for the days ahead.*

—bell hooks, 1989, 9

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Introduction¹

This article is tied to two short video fragments made by the co-authors, Anne and Rebecca. The two film clips are entitled “Smart Bitch” and “Just Us”, and they can be viewed on *Liminalities* as accompaniments to this essay.²

This paper is a contextualisation of these two films, and the performative pedagogical potential that they represent. Both film fragments are not intended to represent a ‘complete’ comment on the stories or relationship represented there, nor on the aesthetic possibilities of ethnocinema as method (ethnocinema is the practice of collaborative intercultural filmmaking that Anne has defined elsewhere including Harris, 2010). The relationship between these two women, like works of collaboration and any creative arts, are evolving and imperfect. They are interrogated in this scholarly context because they offer a unique contribution to an emerging discourse about intercultural video research relationships and performative pedagogies. This paper will argue that video and short film can be used within both research and other contexts, interculturally, to explore more deeply both the differences and similarities between those from diverse subjectivities. This is not to deny the very real differences in material conditions that often exist, nor is it to minimise such inequities, but to celebrate the ways in which we can use guerrilla research techniques and critical performativity to interrupt an acceptance of such differences.

What Denzin has called the performative turn in qualitative research, particularly in education research, is now taken up by many. He reminds us that “critical performance pedagogy moves from the global to the local, the political to the personal, the pedagogical to the performative” (62). For more than ten years he has encouraged the kind of boundary-crossing and uncomfortable experimentation that Rebecca and Anne have attempted in these film fragments and in this text.

But pedagogical work continues to broaden out from here; it can encompass what Holman Jones calls “telling performativity” in relation to life stories, and are always pedagogical. For her—and for Anne in this article—“adoption stories are performative” (125), and they are constitutive. Rebecca and Anne in these shared videos make a visual and discursive claim that both the refugee and adoptee journeys are “promises and pacts, public proclamations suffused with grief, joy, absence, and hope” (Holman Jones, 125) and which both “perform another sort of becoming” (125). In the following pages and in these two short videos, Rebecca and Anne perform another sort of becoming and by doing so seek to challenge accepted roles of ‘researcher’ and ‘refugee’, ‘black’ and ‘white’.

Ethnocinema, like other methodologies, cannot reasonably require its practitioners to do everything equally or equally well. So it is with the two ‘actors’ in these film fragments and their roles in this collaboration. While Anne played a more active role in the technical demands of editing the videos, Rebecca initiated the filmic relationship, and identified video as a useful tool in the telling her story. This article will clarify the context in which this relationship emerged, the back-

¹ Parts of this article, monologue and films were presented by Anne at the Performative Social Sciences conference in Bournemouth, England in September 2010.

² <http://liminalities.net/9-3/smart.html>

ground to the day of filming represented in these two ethnocinematic clips, and some editorial reasons for choosing the content that readers/viewers will see before them.

Further, the paper addresses the ways in which representation and power are sometimes narrowly linked in the minds of viewers and others when encountering a friendship between a Sudanese former refugee and an American immigrant, both in resettlement in Australia. The cohesive element in both film fragments centres on the co-creators' desire not only to tell their own stories, but to represent their *relationship* in a manner that is frequently overlooked or misjudged by others. Therefore, the central concern of this paper is not directly a troubling of representation of 'black women' by 'white women', but is rather a disruption of hegemonic discourses of research relationships and performative pedagogies.

The films attached to this article are an ethnocinematic demonstration of the ways in which our stories—different and similar—can co-educate one another when collaborative endeavour brings us together. They also ask the audience to consider different narratives about these presumed identities—as we ourselves have in relation to one another. That Rebecca wanted to speak about her abusive marriage in Australia rather than the now-familiar pathos of her refugee past has important implications about the inescapability of such categories and idealisation of (Western) countries of resettlement. That Anne wanted to tell her story of adoption, in which she continues to be rejected from 'her tribe' reflected the shared recognition between the two women, of a need for familial and cultural home. These are the stories that touched the other most deeply, and they are the stories we think remain invisible to on-lookers at first appearance.

In the first film, *Smart Bitch*, the two stories we tell each other are not meant to be parallel or suggest we are the same. They are different stories and on the surface seem to have nothing to do with one another. When Anne asks Rebecca why she wanted Anne to tell the story of her finding (but being denied meeting) her birth mother, Rebecca just laughs and says "Oh Anne, it's too sad." When Anne considers her own response to Rebecca's story of marital abuse, she feels that her sorrows here are both more distressing personally (because everything is supposed to resolve positively in resettlement), and politically (because so often all that is written about refugees is that they arrive in the 'good country'). This 'good country' trope is like the 'good family' trope for adoptees: they are both myths, but questioning arrival or adoption is not encouraged for the grateful refugee or adoptee. To interrogate such sites of relocation appears transgressive, ungrateful, undeserving. This is a deeply emotional meeting point for us, and these two films and our relationship have grown around it.

The second film, *Just Us*, is more a process document than the first. It shows us figuring out what we want to say, how to hold the camera together, where to sit. It does not show us negotiating which story to tell, because this happened off-camera (as so often the best bits do). It is much less edited, because we wanted readers to see just clips of us being together. It was edited using iMovie software with significant limitations; it has a canned soundtrack called "Jacaranda" from the iMovie sound library to soften the silences. This is a raw document of ethnocinematic process, presented more for our shared ethics than aesthetics (a constant tension in ethnographic film work, especially ethnocinematic). We note that

here we use the terms video and film interchangeably, as is often done in contemporary applied contexts, and that we will primarily also use the third person Anne and Rebecca interchangeably with 'us' and 'we'. This last decision is for sense while reading, but also highlights the ways in which video-based research disallows its participants to remain anonymous, an important aspect of this shared co-performance.

Lastly, Anne would like to comment upon the criticism she sometimes encounters about co-creating videos with Sudanese research participants and publishing them in scholarly journals, which seems to disturb many different kinds of scholars. We both find this disturbance fascinating. While Anne is deeply aware of the need for ethical care and scrutiny in working with vulnerable others (indeed this work has gained university ethics approval), both Rebecca and Anne are also constantly surprised by the often-patronising kid gloves with which researchers will fail to engage with the people about whom they so passionately claim to care. While Anne's continuing project of the development of an ethnocinematic process that is truly collaborative and mutually respectful is no doubt flawed, it is a messy and mutual recognition of multiple forms of knowledge-production and knowledge-sharing, and one of which the academy is in desperate need.

We offer this paper and these two film fragments in that spirit, a manifestation of Denzin's 8th moment scholarship in which democratic ideals are made possible by the increasingly accessible technological and performative tools of research and art-making. Therefore, this article is formatted in columns at times, to formally represent their parallel but sometimes unrelated nature; the article itself (and its voices) is in dialogue with the film fragments, and should be experienced as a (messy and incomplete) whole. We recommend that readers watch the two films before reading this text.

Small 'h' history

The short videos that accompany this article were shot on a cheap Flipcamera and an Iphone, and edited simply as described above. We did this purposely, to highlight the accessibility and ease with which videos can be made and circulated for mass consumption. We edited the film *Smart Bitch* collaboratively (*Just Us* was edited by Anne later, and Rebecca was not available), and were more concerned with the message than the aesthetics. This is not to say that ethnocinematic films cannot have aesthetic concerns, but rather that for Rebecca and Anne, it was not useful to prioritise aesthetic concerns. *Smart Bitch* was given a final edit by a professional editor as an 'outside eye', but *Just Us* remained as completely a 'home job.'

Anne and Rebecca met in 2008, through Rebecca's niece Achol, a co-participant in Anne's doctoral study with/about Sudanese Australian young women and their educational experiences in resettlement, using critical pedagogy and performative social science methodological frameworks (Harris, 2012). Anne was a high school teacher and dramatist, who became involved in video projects first in Central Australia with Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth programs, and then in Melbourne with young people both inside and outside of the high school where she taught. From Achol and Anne's earliest filming sessions, Achol wanted her aunty Rebecca and Rebecca's children in the film. Achol was an unwed preg-

nant teenager and had recently left school and a film project, both of which she loved, primarily because she had been kicked out of home for being unmarried and pregnant. Rebecca had taken her in.

We spent time together in their neighbourhood, shot lots of different kinds of video, and got to know one another. Rebecca called Anne, from early on, her 'daughter', her family, her friend. But no matter how many times Anne reminded Rebecca that they are essentially the same age (Anne is slightly older), Rebecca continues to call her 'daughter', which she finally admitted was because Anne has no children. So Rebecca was 'adopting' Anne into her family, a well-intentioned but challenging approach to someone who really is adopted.

For Anne, who as a 6-month old baby of Jewish heritage was adopted by Catholics in upstate New York, family has always been complicated but deeply important. As a seemingly single woman in the eyes of Rebecca, Anne's personal narrative that includes 'lesbian' and 'unsuccessful IVF and artificial insemination user' was complicated and felt hard to share. Eventually she shared it with Achol, three years into their friendship, and Achol told Rebecca. While Rebecca, Anne, and Achol sometimes joked about the 'gay thing' and sometimes bridged that difference by relating to one another as 'single ladies' who 'didn't need men', the differences and similarities were informed not only by our cultural differences, but by our ages, races and sexualities. Rebecca and Anne realised they had both arrived in Australia at approximately the same time (fourteen years prior), and had both lived briefly in the same outback town. Finally, in the course of making Achol's film, Rebecca expressed a desire to tell her own story of being a "Lost Girl of Sudan" and her resettlement in Australia, and at Anne's suggestion Achol agreed to film her. Anne volunteered to help shoot it, and to help Rebecca craft it into a book from the transcripts of the video if possible.

When we began to shoot Rebecca's footage, though, Rebecca became uncomfortable in front of a camera that interrupted her telling of her story. While her style of speaking is compelling and musical in person, once the cameras turned on she became stiff, awkward, and almost inaudible. It was difficult to watch, and difficult to work with. This didn't change whether Achol interviewed her or Anne did. And with two young children (six in total), it was seldom quiet enough to get good sound. Achol lost interest. Finally, we decided to go for 'naked' filming, in which we don't try to dress up the footage. This unstaged version of our ongoing ethnocinematic project includes filming each other how we are, with minimal attention to aesthetic concerns, and which resulted (amongst other things) in the two film clips that accompany this article. When Rebecca and Anne finally starting co-shooting with the flip cameras instead of the big 'good quality' camera Anne had used to film previously, Rebecca relaxed considerably. We re-hashed stories we had shared with each other previously, including Anne's story of adoption, and Rebecca's story of her abusive Australian marriage, included as parallel stories in the *Smart Bitch* film fragment. These were the two stories that touched us each most deeply from the other's personal narrative, and these were the ones we retold on flip cameras that day.

The construction of this article is parallel to the construction of our ethnocinematic film/s. Video-based performance as cultural re-enactment not only has the ability to create a dialogue between races and cultures, but (among others)

between generations, genders, and sexual orientations (Denzin 2008). Creating film together has opened up a new kind of being together between Rebecca and her niece Achol, and between Anne and both of them. Achol talks frequently about her debt of enormous gratitude to Rebecca for taking her in when she was pregnant and cast out of another relative's home, and for always supporting her in her own choices. Performative pedagogies too can offer these possibilities in collaborative learning contexts, between and within cultural groups, always commenting on and co-constructing identities from multi-perspectives.

It can do other things as well. Through ethnocinematic collaboration, Rebecca and Anne have found a shared safe space in which to explore our individual experiences of loss. We decided to make a video together to explore the ways in which ethnocinema might work with us, and to document our friendship, and this article will identify some of the process, the context, and – as Rich (1998) demands of us – “insists on the connection between the writer's life and her text, between a writer's text and her era, between an era past and an era present” (xv), and we similarly commit to these connections in these performative artefacts (including monologue and video).

Sudanese women are thriving interculturally in countries of resettlement, despite facing incomprehensible obstacles. Most often, their challenges are framed as ‘refugee struggles’ prior to resettlement, but this is not the whole picture. The film fragment *Smart Bitch* and its companion *Just Us* are part of a larger project to develop a coherent discourse around ethnocinematic methodologies and epistemologies, starting with the work of Jean Rouch (Harris, 2012) and his ethno fictions. Such films used a performative intercultural collaborative method to create and comment upon relationships between individuals from different but overlapping communities, both shared and not-shared. This video and performative scholarly article, *Smart Bitch: Talking Back in Unity*, is a part of this long-term project, and asks viewers/readers to reconsider the agency of South Sudanese diasporic women globally, the importance of their friendships and working relationships with non-Sudanese women, and the role that new media might play in their self-representation, education and integration in countries of resettlement.

In this article we argue the ways in which performative pedagogical research can build solidarity between women of different races, sexualities and cultures; in this instance, we are gay white Jewish American, and straight black Sudanese, yet we join together in our shared femaleness and emerging Australian identities. In these film fragments, Rebecca describes her efforts to look after her children in a new country with no family assistance, and highlights the ways in which women are at risk in resettlement, but this time not from their refugee experiences (the dominant narrative) but as a result of multiple marginalisations in resettlement. Anne's filmic narrative describes her failure to find acceptance from her birth-mother, and the sorrow that rejection evoked in her. It touches on the ways in which being an ‘orphan’ or ‘lost child’ represents a common ground on which Rebecca and Anne meet in grief about lost family, as immigrants and as survivors. Neither this meeting nor these films are intended to equate those losses, but to celebrate the sense of companionship that might be found in the spaces between.

Drawing on Rich and others, we attempt to examine the pedagogical possibilities of intercultural performative collaboration, with an aim which is “both mod-

est and grandiose: to bring history, theory, and experience back into better communication with one another...” (Rich xv), and which similarly understands contemporary pedagogy as both performative and constitutive for co-learners as consumers. What Giroux and Shannon (1997) have brought together under the umbrella of “pedagogy as a performative practice” (9), Sefton-Greene (2011) and Grushka (2010) in both Australian and other contexts link with digital and social media. Performative pedagogies, like performative autoethnographies, promise an embodiment of new knowledge. While the film fragments here may not be overtly pedagogical, they are artefacts of the new knowledge both collaborators are building about one another, and may represent new knowledge for viewers.

Spry (2001) comments on the ways in which, in autoethnographic performance, “the body is like a cultural billboard for people to read and interpret in the context of their own experience” (719), and in these clips we hint at the ways in which we both ‘read’ each others’ stories in the context of our own. Here video may “provide a space for the emancipation of the voice and body in academic discourse through breaking the boundaries of stylistic form” (720), and we extract monologue text from the films to complement this boundary-breaking on the page.

This unorthodox structure, “more parallel than sequential” (Rich, xv), mirrors its topical intersections: dialogue excerpts from our film fragments and dialogues as parallel commentary to the historical and theoretical context are offered as analytic counter-narrative to these voices. In this spirit, and in this format, we elaborate with both extracted video dialogue, and our own real-life words:

Dis/integration: Who Can be Friends

<p>Rebecca:</p> <p>You are my daughter.</p> <p>Bitch outsider</p> <p>Sometimes our loss make us sick, strong:</p>	<p>Anne:</p> <p>Rebecca Long is my friend.</p> <p>People think that’s weird, call us names like feminist man-hater.</p> <p>We both know about loneliness, broken hearts, and Lost tribes.</p> <p>but our independence makes us</p> <p>We don’t play along. We don’t follow rules. We laugh in the pock-marked face of tragedy.</p> <p>We are just about the same age,</p>
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<p>and came here about the same time: 14 years ago.</p> <p>I'm Sudanese, Dinka</p> <p>Same!</p> <p>Life with my children</p> <p>Is good now.</p> <p>Because two of my kids have an Aboriginal father, Some Dinka say I have 'white' kids. They mean non-African kids who are lighter than me.</p> <p>They're not white, they just won't see them.</p> <p>It's like they're invisible.</p> <p>We have a lot in common, us two.</p>	<p>But different ways.</p> <p>and I am American, New Yorker: two immigrants in Australia, amongst many.</p> <p>but when we hang out together, people ask if I'm your social worker. I am not her social worker.</p> <p>Life with my wife and dog</p> <p>But because my partner is a woman, Some in my community think it's sad that I'm alone.</p> <p>I'm not alone; they just can't see her.</p> <p>My birthmother called me 'ghost'.</p> <p>I'm not a ghost, I'm here.</p> <p>We do!</p>
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And yet, we have a lot in difference. We appreciate both truths as exciting, stimulating and offering us both (and others) a multitude of possibilities. Anne asks Rebecca if she too feels “caught between phases of social change” (Johnson 25), bobbing in a life-preserver somewhere between the too-distant shores of both transculturalism and refugeity. Anne has never presumed that her own experience is an “adequate reference point by which to gauge the impact of sexism or sexist oppression” (Johnson 25) on the lives of anyone else, including a woman like Rebecca. And yet, somehow, remarkably, and a bit confusingly, we find ourselves both women of a certain age, standing in solidarity, speaking of simultaneously frustrating and deeply reassuring sameness/difference.

This paper and its videos assert filmic self-representation as a series of (inter)cultural (re)enactments. We use video production as a dismantling tool to respond to what Appadurai calls a mass media that both “reflect(s) and refine(s) gendered violence at home and in the streets,” as Rebecca’s story shows. For Sudanese women in resettlement, the economic necessity demanding that they “en-

ter the labor force in new ways on the one hand, and continue the maintenance of familial heritage on the other” (Appadurai, 45) can be confusing and frustrating.

Rebecca’s interview of Anne in which she discusses the search for acceptance from her birthfamily even after she found them, is testament to the kinds of marginalisation and alienation experienced even (sometimes especially) within our own families. In drawing parallels between our lives, this short video does not seek to erase the many real differences between us. Rather, it seeks to document some parts – painful parts – of our stories, in ways that might surprise viewers and interrupt the dominant narratives of ‘refugee research subject’ and ‘white mainstream researcher.’ Such realities, we are saying, are only part of the picture. We challenge viewers/readers to confront their own assumptions about us based on race, class, sexualities and ethnic heritage, and in video we find the kind of ‘political potential’ that Pough and others found in rap music in the early 2000’s.

Like rap, digital technologies and social media are contemporary tools that help to “give voice to a part of the population that would not have a voice otherwise” (237). And by this we do not just mean black women, African women or former refugees like Rebecca, but also GLBTIQ voices, adoptee voices, and intercultural collaborations like ours. These are guerrilla creative and publishing techniques that do not require the funding, long wait and mainstream considerations of traditional production, publishing or creative development.

Ethnographic documentaries have, as most people well know, been around for nearly a hundred years. What makes ethnocinema different? They are still ‘culture films’, but ethnocinema is characterised by mutuality, collaboration from inception, and a mutually-negotiated audience. They are not ‘dominant culture’ films made about minority cultures, for majority audiences. In the short film fragments that Rebecca and Anne have made, we turn the camera on both ourselves and each other, and in committing our stories to film, reject hegemonic power structures which maintain separations between our lives and stories. Instead, we seek to highlight some similarities in our lived experiences or perspectival stances, and how recognition of these encourage empathy for the differences. Ethnographic films, then, are not films which seek to document a culture, or generalise about individual experience (as traditional ethnographic documentaries do). They seek to return to the individual in cultural co-construction, and to work against cultural generalisation by overturning common stereotypes or presuppositions about both ‘majority-’ and ‘minority-’ community members.

Big ‘h’ History: A Benevolent Absence

We decolonize our minds and our imaginations.

—hooks 1992, 346

Performative pedagogies allow for differing notions of belonging/not-belonging, whilst working toward some common understandings of culture, community and identity. Filming together as one performative practice has allowed Rebecca and Anne to explore through arts and creative expression what Anne has elsewhere described as *refugeity* (Harris and Nyuon, 2010; Harris 2012b). Refugeity is mutable, fluid, rhizomatically changing at the speed of global migrations and identity

reformations; it is an untying of the straightjacket of fixed ‘refugee’ identities. Similarly, the notion of *adoptee diasporas* posits groups such as adoptees and queers as diasporic, living in exile from their families of origin (Harris 2012b), an exile that mainstream culture often encourages. In these de-contextualised spaces, Grushka (2010) calls for a recognition of the ways in which visual (and other performative) learning can be understood as a constitutive process of becoming, a call with deep resonance for those like Rebecca and Anne. Grushka’s understanding of performative pedagogy as grounded in material embodied practices makes such activities essential to both educators and researchers.

Here we are arguing that Grushka’s call for an embodied and performative pedagogy in classrooms (2010) can be productively extended into the research knowledge-sharing context with equally powerful results. Co-researchers might use performative pedagogical research methodologies to “address questions about who they are and how they have come to be this way” (9), and actively draw links back to more traditional pedagogical spaces. In such transgressive spaces, teaching, artistry and research as performative pedagogy powerfully overlap in mutual acts of becoming (Warren 2007).

Rebecca and Anne use these acts of becoming to challenge not only similarities but differences; not only external but internal mis/perceptions. While Anne may feel at times like a marginalised orphan, lesbian, working class immigrant inside, she must simultaneously recognise the ways in which she personifies and is positioned as dominant class member. Anne, like hooks, evokes Spivak (1990) when addressing the imperative of problematizing our positions as dominators, even unconsciously as we so often do. This critical discourse remains deconstructive, but eschews simplistic notions of “White guilt or denial” (hooks 1992, 346). Spivak (and hooks) are asking for “the holders of hegemonic discourse...[to] de-hegemonize their position and themselves learn how to occupy the subject position of the other” (1992, 346), which is one thing Anne is learning to do sitting at the kitchen table with Rebecca and Achol, discussing being ‘single ladies’ existing outside of heterosexist and racist power structures.

<p>Rebecca: What I say Anna it’s a good thing to film me today, to say all the pain in my heart.</p> <p>and all what I feel—</p> <p>You know, and when I zoom it back in my head it make me sick sometime. And sometime I try to forget, And have faith. And have hope. And just move on.</p> <p>Cuz when I go my bed, sometime Anna, I just—</p>	<p>Anne: mmm—</p> <p>mmm—</p> <p>Yep.</p>
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Not Lost Girls
But so many
Lost Stories.

We tell our (different but related) stories so that:

People see that homophobia, racism and sexism are (in different but related ways) alive and well here at home.

So that people create relationships across borders of race, class, culture, sexualities, age, education, and material conditions.

So people stop reducing Rebecca to a tragic refugee, and Anne to a social worker.

Rebecca's real heartbreak has been here, in 'the West',
over the past fourteen years.
She survived war, starvation, swollen rivers,
Lions, isolation, disease,
Refugee camps,
Birthing in the dirt.
But she almost didn't survive one Australian man with a bicycle chain.

Performative Pedagogies: Dehegemonising Our Positions

I am my own text.

—Dunye, in Ramanathan, 56

Giroux and Shannon note how the “pedagogical as performative practice acknowledge the full range of multiple, shifting, and overlapping sites of learning” (5), and the need for this uncontainability in democratic education and research. Similarly, Dunye and more recently Rees are using film and video in ways that remind us how necessary their accessibility is for those who wish to see them, teach them, and use them to break down cultural, racial and pedagogical boundaries. Rebecca and Anne have tried to use our technologies-at-hand to co-perform, and then to self-reflect on these performances. If mainstream culture seeks to reify ‘refugee’ and ‘social worker’ when they see us together, we can create artefacts and relationships that interrupt such reification. Such videos become, by default, performatively pedagogical. While Giroux suggests that cultural studies “offers education theorists a transnational approach to literacy and learning”, and “pedagogy as an act of decentering, a form of transit and border crossing” (238), Rebecca and Anne suggest that contemporary ethnocinema and other digital forms and practices do the same in more public pedagogical spaces.

But this is pedagogy-as-becoming. Sedgwick reminds us that categorising people is an incomplete historical process, “characterized by potent contradictions and explosive effects” (xvi), and this is seen in the rawness of *Smart Bitch* and *Just Us*. This incompleteness, which can be seen in our videos, contains these potent contradictions; we do not seek to erase our differences, but to highlight our points of disjointed meeting. We do this consciously, using ethnocinema, to highlight that intercultural dialogue often results in explosive effects, but which can be

mutually beneficial, playful, and which can document and co-construct the fabric of our lives while educating others.

New media forms offer perhaps the most powerful tool for this work today. Videos, disseminated through the internet, on Youtube and on social networking sites, are perhaps the most egalitarian public pedagogical tool available today. They can instantly reach millions. They are relatively uncensored. They do not require funding or peer-review before they can be made or published. They do not require high levels of literacy, or what we educators call competencies, before they can be watched, made or distributed. Unlike mainstream media forms like television (which has been immeasurably harmful to the resettlement of Sudanese Australians in recent years), the internet allows those like Rebecca and Anne to decide “who gets to speak and who is excluded from this ongoing conversation” (Pozner 37), which in itself has radical social implications for dehegemonising dominant cultures.

Performative pedagogies are able to celebrate marginalised others including black women as “knowledgeable recorders of their history and experiences [who] have a stake in faithfully telling their own stories” (Bobo in Sullivan 2004, 212). This is in relation to – and reaction against – educational and mainstream institutions that continue to prioritise white, male western histories. Rebecca sees Anne’s story of adoptee struggle as an equally subversive one, a condemnation of western culture in which families are fractured in state-sanctioned ways, and adoptees are encouraged to forget, not to find. She has invited Anne into her story, as she invited her into her life. In this way we position ourselves as mutual supporters/ witnesses/listeners of each other’s stories, and as performative pedagogy we learn from each other, while learning about ourselves. Our intercultural experience sheds new light on our own culturally-embedded identities, and has transformative political and personal power.

Rebecca is likewise helping to educate Anne about the lives of some black women in Australia today: what it takes to confront the housing authority day after day when you haven’t had heat for the three months of winter; what it’s like to be an outsider to so many communities at once: her own Sudanese community, the Indigenous community to which two of her children (and she, for a time) belonged, the Euro-centric dominant Australian culture that wants her to be more ‘productive’ (but not reproductive), speak better English, do everything differently than she is doing now. We are the same age; we identify strongly with each other’s experiences. Our relationship feels mutual from the inside, and yet still when someone comes to the door they often ask, “Are you her worker?”, a frustrating business that limits us all.

If Anne, like Walker, feels that both mainstream culture and research ethics force her to choose within constant dyadic, binary opposites and absolutes, “instantaneously pitting us against someone, forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides, female against male, Black against White...” (1992, 41), Rebecca sees this in her cultural performance as Sudanese-Australian every day. She and other Sudanese-Australians are challenging the possibility of this hyphenated identity, constructing it and struggling with it both internally and externally. Our friendship at times makes us both feel as though we must ‘choose sides’, assert

our feminist solidarity against class or racial lines; assert our racial solidarity against gender lines: a never-ending borderland.

And yet in a practical way we are jointly enacting a performative pedagogy, in the exercise of the power of our “identities, desires, or the intersections of our internal and external landscapes” (Dicker and Piepmeier, 18) as we challenge ourselves to cross yet more borders, and encourage unknown others to do the same through contact with our stories. We both experience (in our own, different ways) a shared space that we co-construct as “undergirded by racism and sexism,” yet in which “we are all shaped by the operation of invisible systems of power and privilege” (Dicker and Piepmeier, 18-19). We can’t (and don’t wish to) ignore these unequal material conditions. We are attempting a translation of our intent into “tangible action...to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fiber” (31) of our lives. Our friendship and our mutual outrage at each other’s life circumstances is tangible action, and our commitment to one another includes emotional, financial and practical enactments of solidarity. Ethnocinematic valuing of each other’s stories is merely one such re/enactment.

Under the opening credits of the US version of the genealogy television show *Who Do You Think You Are?* (a genre, in TV-speak, amusingly called “alternative reality”), a voiceover intones: “You can’t know who you are if you don’t know where you’ve come from.” One challenge of digital media is its compelling tendency toward the catch-phrase, the hook, the punch of ‘edutainment’. For people like Anne, knowing where she comes from has never been an option and this reality resists taglines. Adoptees remain the perennial child, the acted-upon, the choiceless, in what is called the adoption triad. The fact that Anne is childless only now adds to the ongoing perception of her as somehow not-fully-mature. Yet Rebecca’s status as single-mother-of-six renders her as an ongoing tragic procreator: both positionalities are challenged in our film fragments as we continue to learn from and about each other, in the public sphere of digital media.

Reality shows like *Who Do You Think You Are?* succeed because we recognise larger cultural flows contained within, and entangled with, individual histories. Ethnocinematic collaborations like *Smart Bitch, Just Us*, and this article, too, bring history, theory, and experience back into better communication with one another.

Ghosting the Past: A Crossroads, Not a Conclusion

*I'm a bitch, I'm a lover
I'm a child, I'm a mother
I'm a sinner, I'm a saint
I do not feel ashamed*

—Meredith Brooks, *Bitch*, 1997

Anne

The past is alive in my present,
so I am drawn to others for whom this is also undeniably true.
Around the time Rebecca was getting her ticket out of
Kakuma refugee camp from the UNHCR,
I got my birth name by fax.

I was convinced my mother was Joni Mitchell.
 I had an inexplicable musical streak,
 And Joni Mitchell had given a daughter up for adoption in the same year
 I was born.
 I paid the guy known only as *Mr Big* (no lie) somewhere in Long Island
 A *lot* of money, and
 Three days later (after a lifetime of looking)
 He faxed me the names of my mother, aunt and grandparents.
 For the first time, I knew who I was, or more accurately,
 Who I wasn't: not Joni Mitchell's daughter.
 It was Thanksgiving Day weekend, 1996.

When the fax machine chugged out the names of
 Unrecognisable Polish people, I was crushed.
Baranowski.
 Polish (I found out later) Jews.
 I called him back.

<p>Rebecca:</p> <p>(laughing)</p> <p>What are cardinals?</p> <p>Ooh, no that's too sad!--</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>But she's your mother!</p> <p>A ghost?!</p> <p>Ooh no no no. White people are straaaaange...</p>	<p>Anne:</p> <p>I thought you said I was related to somebody famous—</p> <p>Mr Big said, “your uncle played 1st base for the Cardinals for 2 years in the six- ties.”</p> <p><i>(to Rebecca):</i> A baseball team. <i>(to Mr Big):</i> I want a refund!</p> <p>As time went by, I wrote to my birth- mother, I called her, I even flew to Cal- ifornia to her house. She wouldn't see me, wouldn't speak to me.</p> <p>Dunno. I sat on her porch once for seven hours. Nothing.</p> <p>Finally, once, quickly, before hanging up the phone <i>again</i>, She said, “You're a ghost.”</p> <p>I'm <i>not</i> a ghost, I insisted. You are, she said. You're a ghost and you have to stop haunting me.</p>
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<p>(tearful) I can still see the scars on your heart.</p>	<p><i>I'm alive. I'm alive and I deserve to see someone who looks like me.</i> Just once, just one time in my life. <i>Abh, Rebecca don't cry please, it's okay. It's over now, I'm here.</i></p>
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After this sharing, Rebecca understands better why we are drawn to each other.

Why we have an understanding about family, about tribes.

About how the past is alive in the present.

How ghosts do haunt; my birthmother was right.

One thing Rebecca and her husband had in common was a love of rap music, and hip hop culture. They felt a kind of black solidarity in this, for a time. As Queen Latifah did in her 1993 lyrics, Pough questions what it means to be a “hip-hop feminist” (233), and so does Rebecca when she wonders if the abuses inflicted by her husband had roots in the misogynist lyrics of some rap that he listened to. She still loves rap, and still believes there is power in it, not only for black women as well as men, but for white women too.

Is it possible for white/black alliances like ours to use rap in “teaching moments”, to “enact a public pedagogy that can be used not only to bring women’s issues into the public sphere but also to mobilize action” (Pough 238), in ethnocinematic video projects or other intercultural collaborative work? Rebecca and Anne wonder together if ethnocinema can be considered a form of activism itself, and online spaces a widening pedagogical sphere.

Sefton-Greene (2011) is expanding the theoretical and applied discourse about creative learning for the 21st century in ways that suggest broad application. In collaborative research relationships, those like Rebecca and Anne can be considered creative agents who both actively (albeit in different ways) inform each others’ (and outside others’) learning. By considering past discourses that draw on both queer and feminist theories, Sefton-Greene encourages us to see creative partnerships of many kinds as crucial to the broad pedagogical project of 21st century learning.

We borrow from Sefton-Greene and others before him (including Garber 2001) by insisting on the performative and repetitive alliances between queer, feminist and performative pedagogical discourses. Contemporary creative pedagogies (including performative ones) proceed with a healthy “suspicion against constructions of monolithic self-identities and subject positions” (Rogers 182), agreeing rather that identity, like gender, is a “matter of layered social constructions” (p 182). The filmic alliance between Rebecca and Anne is characteristic of Denzin’s 8th moment scholarship in that it transcends established research categories and definitions, but explodes borders that have kept queer, feminist, refugee and adoptee voices out. Such borders are no longer impermeable, and Denzin (2008) and others encourage research that is transgressive and ragged in order to challenge hegemonic structures and practices.

Anne’s role as an interloper, sometimes interlocutor, sometimes intruder, into/between the Sudanese women in her life and non-African others is often prob-

lematic. As with teachers in intercultural contexts, researchers can often fall prey to a desire to “overcome or resolve” (Hides 2005, 331) the difficulties of difference, instead of making room to “accept and value the juxtapositions, disjunctions and difficulties intrinsic to the engagement with difference” (331). Hides’ performative learner is not only to be found in classrooms, but in the ways in which all intercultural relationships are inherently pedagogical. Drawing on Foster (1997), Rebecca and Anne hope to contribute to a filmic “diasporic space [which] is neither essentialist nor heterocentric” (18), in which ethnocinema and other shared practices work to deconstruct the borders and definitions of culture-based ‘ethnographic’ films, made for elite audiences, by “film academics who often mystify the production side of film and video” (Foster 19).

Too often, girls and women continue to be socially positioned as in-front-of-the-camera objects rather than behind-the-camera constructors of media images, or an “active, powerful agent with her own creative vision and voice” (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 293). Part of the political intent of *Smart Bitch* and *Just Us* echoes Dunye’s (1996) filmic experiment *The Watermelon Woman*, a mockumentary in which Dunye documents a fictitious black lesbian foremother in order to foreground “the relationship between missing precedence and contemporary identity” (Ramanathan 56). These ongoing relationships between geographical and historiographic identities and spaces will be enhanced by more filmic projects that include border-crossers in performative and pedagogical ways.

Girls and women, both black and white, are continuing to take a bigger role in video and film production since the turn of the 21st century. Technological innovations including high definition video production and film editing software, which are becoming more user-friendly and ever-cheaper, make these forms more accessible. This increase has been affected, too, by reconfigurations of public pedagogies which incorporate ever-evolving performative strategies and products, but the fact remains that “female youth are still doubly disadvantaged as a result of their sex and their age” (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 293), a disadvantage which shows as disproportionate under-representation in online digital spaces. Using film and performance as a strategic lens of analysis and knowledge production within academic discourses can redress the absent presence of women—including those from refugee, gay, and adoptee diasporas. Through ethnocinematic film, artistic collaborations can advance the project of intercultural dialogue and go some way toward reversing the inequalities with which all women continue to struggle.

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