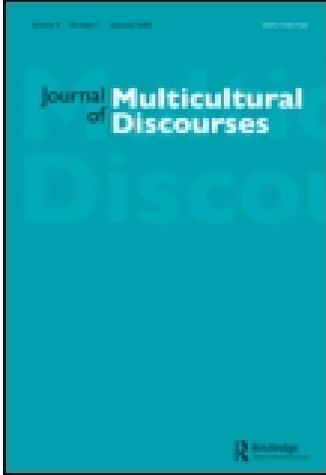


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Going 'global,' (re)locating privilege: a journey into the borders of whiteness, foreignness, and performativity

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Going ‘global,’ (re)locating privilege: a journey into the borders of whiteness, foreignness, and performativity

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In this article I draw on my personal experience of partially forced repositioning as a way to advance our understanding of the theoretical and practical contours of whiteness, foreignness, and performativity. In particular, I consider how specific aspects of our identities can get strategically redefined depending on the context where they operate, thus placing the transposed body at a constant risk of being excluded from certain privileges. I also bring foreignness to light as an organizing principle that (re)creates places for belonging and marginalization as it interacts with other dimensions of identity. From here, I propose to emphasize the incontrollable aspects of experience and thus expose the strategic attempts to protect privilege and also, and maybe more importantly, the limitations of such strategies. At a broader level, with this contribution I hope to turn a self-reflexive eye on the politics of language and/as method, and how different assumptions and expectations for particular kinds of writing styles may affect the possibilities for those whose first language is not English to make our voices heard.

Keywords: cultural politics; foreignness; immigration; language and identity; performativity; whiteness

Post this, post that, and in the end, not past a thing. (Seamus Heaney)

To be inside and outside a position at the same time – to occupy a territory while loitering sceptically on the boundary – is often where the most intensely creative ideas stem from. It is a resourceful place to be, if not always a painless one. (Terry Eagleton)

Preludio: narrating the parts, explaining the whole¹

The present article takes (mostly) the shape of a personal narrative of symbolic and material relocation that aims to show how ‘architectures of subjectivity work across multiple axes,’ as Giardina and Newman elegantly put it (2011, 524). Specifically, I draw on my personal experience of partially forced repositioning as a way to advance our understanding of the theoretical and practical contours of whiteness, foreignness, and performativity as they interact with the ‘politics of location’ (Shome 1999). My overall purpose in these pages is not only to highlight that multiplicity, but also to show how it can be a valid starting point to reflect on larger social and cultural practices, and more specifically, underscore how some of these practices are ‘chosen for emphasis’ while others are ‘neglected, obscured [...] reinterpreted or diluted’ to fit dominant narratives, both personal and communal (Williams 1958, 39).

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As many others before me have articulated (see Lindlof and Taylor 2011), examining the particular in relation to the general context is the essence of many qualitative approaches to generating knowledge. This kind of goal drove ethnographic work focusing on ‘others’ – what different authors now call ‘imperialist ethnography’ – for many decades (Breglia 2011). More recently, however, whether it is desirable to aim for a ‘complete,’ often-fixed picture of different cultural practices has been increasingly put into question. In this scenario, the ‘self’ has compellingly claimed its unique value as a key factor shaping knowledge (Gingrich-Philbrook 2005) – a move that some scholars interpret as a response to the triple crisis ‘in representation, legitimation, and praxis’ in the human disciplines (Holman Jones 2005, 766). Different studies have thus progressively conceptualized the role of the ethnographer as that of a non-neutral participant/observer whose positionality cannot remain unacknowledged. Following this understanding of lifeworlds as ‘partial, fragmented, and constituted and mediated by language’ (Holman Jones 2005, 766) many contemporary accounts have not only begun to recognize the scholar’s personal experiences as she interacts with others, but have also placed these experiences at the center of inquiry.

In this context, notions such as ‘autoethnography’ or ‘personal narrative’ have been progressively embraced in humanistic approaches as a way to emphasize the dynamic and fragmented nature of human experience, while at the same time providing vivid accounts of the tension between the personal and the shared aspects of culture (see Ellis and Bochner 2000). As Holman Jones (2005, 764) explains:

autoethnography works to hold self and culture together, albeit not in equilibrium or stasis. Autoethnography writes a world in a state of flux and movement – between story and context, writer and reader, crisis and denouement. It creates charged moments of clarity, connection, and change.

In communication-oriented approaches, this move toward centering the ‘self’ in ethnographic accounts is mostly facilitated by performance studies scholarship (Alexander 2003; Spry 2001). Here, the forms of expression provided by personal narrative and performance are combined in an attempt to influx the notion of performance with self-reflexivity. The result is ‘performance ethnography,’ an approach that ‘seeks to *implicate* researchers and audiences by creating an experience that brings together theory and praxis in complicated, contradictory, and meaningful ways.’ One way to do this is to present ‘individual (autoethnographic) experiences as a means for pointing out the subjective and situated nature of identity, fieldwork, and cultural interpretation’ (Langellier 1999, 770, original emphasis).

However, and in spite of its strong deconstructive impetus, it is important to recognize that performance ethnography is also the result of incorporating performativity into the notion of personal narrative, thus emphasizing the mediated character of all kinds of experience, even those that feel most personal and intimate. As Langellier (1999, 128) writes: ‘performativity adds a self-reflexive turn to performance, it draws attention to how, through performance narration, we are constituting us and others’ in particular ways, rather than rendering a ‘pure’ experience immediate for our audiences. This constitution, furthermore, does not occur in a vacuum, but interacts with a series of cultural and social guidelines (Holman Jones 2005).

Performance ethnography thus pushes us to recognize ‘the way that narrative mediates experience even when a factual account is promised’ (Langellier 1999, 128). As Pratt (1991) proposes, the autoethnographic is an alternative narrative that necessarily involves an engagement with – and often a response to – representations that others have

made of oneself, that is, to ethnography. As such, it can contribute to a more productive and egalitarian dialogue not only between researchers and ‘researched’ but also, and importantly, among different kinds of research. In other words, autoethnography can help us work toward the broader goal of de-imperialization of scholarship and the subsequent reconstruction of ‘culturally pluralist, dialogical and egalitarian paradigms’ in our work (Shi-xu 2009, 43). I will return to this important level of the discussion in my conclusions.

Building on these understandings of (auto)ethnography and performativity, informed by and informing the personal journey I narrate here, in this article I will attempt to move between the ‘I’ and the ‘They’ – and maybe, eventually, toward ‘Us.’ My goal is to invoke other academic voices as I try to problematize the emphasis on the deconstructive potential of individual accounts in performance studies and beyond. In my view, this necessary move allows us to embed ‘the personal’ within a cultural studies project (Conquergood 1991; Diawara 1993) aimed at working productively with the tensions, not just between self and culture, but also between *different aspects of culture*, and more specifically, between culture as a symbolic system and as material production (Williams 1958).

Thus, even though, as a project grounded in lived, personal experience, the autoethnographic is also often an intimate and even therapeutic kind of intellectual work (Ellis et al. 2011), I argue that it still can (and should) contribute to illuminating, not only culture as ‘the special processes of discovery and creative effort,’ but also culture as ‘a whole way of life’ (Williams 1958, 75) that enables some practices and precludes others – and in the process privileges the experiences and needs of some people over others. What follows is an attempt to capture these processes as they took place at a particular intersection of time, place, and space.

Fuga

I

It’s Thursday morning in Boulder, Colorado, USA. Yet another beautiful winter morning. After 4 years, I’m still not used to it. Maybe a sad (or is it?) reminder of the fact that I will never completely fit in here, that I’ll never get used to the overwhelming unpredictability and volatility of Colorado weather – or is it the unpredictability and volatility of US life as a whole?

I got up early, so I try to enjoy the precious – in its scarcity – calmness before my daughter wakes up and our family’s daily routine begins. As I often do in my struggle to minimize the distance, physical, and mental, that places me away from ‘my people,’ I glance through the online version of the Spanish newspaper *El País*. A headline immediately catches my attention: ‘El 40% de los ‘sin papeles’ dispone de cobertura sanitaria en España.’ I shiver while I think: ¡sólo el 40%! However, as I dive into its content, I realize that this article emphasizes that Spain has the *highest* rate in the European Union of undocumented immigrants who can access health care at no cost. (As if wanting to rub salt into my wound, the ad next to the article, promoting a private insurance company named ‘American Family,’ insistently flashes in front of me.) I keep on reading and I find out that, in Sweden, people without a residence permit have zero right to free health care, even in a case of emergency or when giving birth. In other European Union (EU) countries, such as Germany, the law forces public institutions to denounce people in ‘irregular’ situation who come to them for help.

From the distance, a word sneaks into my mind: privilege. For the first 31 years of my life, and as Spanish citizen living in Spain, access to health care was never on the list of my immediate preoccupations. When she was 2 years old, my daughter had to be hospitalized for a week due to pneumonia. Aún recuerdo cada segundo del miedo y la impotencia que sentí mientras la oía llorar y gritar desde la habitación contigua, mientras la enfermeras trataban de inmovilizarla para poder colocarle una sonda en ese bracito, y me pidieron, educadamente, que esperara fuera – supongo que por miedo a que mis emociones interfirieran en su rutinaria actividad. Recuerdo cómo gritaba, entre sollozos: ¡Mami!, ¡Mami!, y recuerdo el dolor insoportable al no poder estar allí para consolarla, y mi llanto brotar incontenible, junto a mis disculpas, mientras la administrativa de turno me pedía mis datos.²

However, in the midst of all these painful memories, there is a feeling I do not remember, and that is being worried about how I was going to pay for the bill. Instead, a burning realization is now growing in my mind through that sneaky word, privilege, enmeshed with a growing guilt: I never had to worry about how much I would have to pay, because there was no bill. At that time both my partner – who holds Italian citizenship – and I were unemployed. No one asked us if we were ‘contributing to the economy’ or if we had a balanced record of ‘rights and obligations.’ It did not seem to matter. The idea of being privileged did not even cross my mind at the time. However, I learned (too) fast that these taken-for-granted rights do not come naturally, and in fact they can disappear from one day to the next. For me, it took only 17 hours, the length of my trip from Spain to the USA, to start experiencing health care from the other side: the side of those with no immediate access to all kinds of direct and indirect advantages.

II

In spite of the uncomfortable set of emotions triggered by this newspaper article, I decide to explore the thread of online comments posted by readers of *El País* spread throughout the world. I want to (hope to?) see if someone else also thinks that this is shameful. My expectations could not be farther from reality: a Spanish woman who emigrated to Mexico claims: ‘soy responsable de mí misma y no debería esperar a que un gobierno haga de mi papá y se ocupe de mí.’ Other readers call immigrants ‘victimistas’ who cannot take care of themselves or their countries of origin. The way in which what Peggy McIntosh (1990, 3) calls ‘the myth of meritocracy’ is taken from the individual to the state level here is definitely interesting – and astonishing. The message is clear: these people/countries do not deserve the privilege of access to health care because they have not ‘earned’ it. There it goes again: the illusion and delusion of choice.

The myth, therefore, ‘that all have access to [...] power through individual resourcefulness’ (Wildman 1996, 11) is alive and kicking. And not only in the USA. Most (Spanish) respondents to this article refer to how they have ‘earned’ access to health care with their hard work – although none of them reflect on the specific location from which they could access that ‘hard work’ in the first place. Immigrants, on the other hand, are, according to these readers, taking advantage of an already weak welfare system, aspiring to get ‘todos los beneficios sin ninguna de las obligaciones’ that come with being part of this ‘sociedad del primer mundo.’

I want to be sympathetic to those concerned people who picture a landscape of scarcity where there is just not enough to share with everybody. I understand the anxieties associated with the thought of who should come first if there are not enough resources. I am not convinced, however, that those to blame should be certain individuals, and more

specifically, non-whites: in Spain, those known as ‘sin papeles’ are the ones with a more complicated access to health care. Most of these are non-white. Michelle Fine’s example of how American ‘angry white men’ do not look at macrostructures but at Black people in order to explain why they do not have access to jobs clearly resonates with many of these claims. The only difference is that in the Spanish context, instead of white vs. black, there is a predominant ‘legal’ vs. ‘illegal’ framing, where in practice the meaning of ‘illegal’ often rests outside of or even in opposition to whiteness.

As Fine claims, ‘in times and sites of constructed “scarcity” such as schools and labor in current times, whiteness is being reconstituted as quality, deservingness, and merit’ (1997, 61). The discourses around this newspaper article clearly show how health care has become part of this list of scarce services for which immigrants are often to blame. As an angry Spanish woman puts it in her comment: ‘¿Por qué tengo yo que pasar por una lista de espera de años, mientras que a los inmigrantes se les atiende inmediatamente?’³

As I continue to reflect on these responses, however, I start to wonder what the real problem is. Are the undesirable ‘chupopteros’ (literally, suckers) those who are not Spanish, those who do not have an ‘active’ status as legal workers, or those perceived as racially – ‘culturally’ would be the contemporary euphemism in the European Union – different? Some close-to-home examples begin to suggest that it may be the latter. First of all, not all foreigners are created equal. There is no mention of them in this article, or in the comments about it, but there has been, in the last decades, a considerable number of ‘legal’ immigrants from Northern European countries who spent their retirement years or vacation months in warm Eastern and Southern sea towns across Spain. During their stay, some received medical treatments and were scheduled for free surgery that would cost a fortune in their countries of origin.

Second, not even all the people who do not ‘contribute’ to the welfare state are created equal. As I narrated before, I experienced this first hand. What, then, about Spanish citizens who do not have a job? Would these readers be willing to take the right to public health care away from them? Devastated by the current Western economic crisis, Spain presents a rate of unemployment close to 25% these days. Of those more than 5 million people, most are long-term unemployed who have not had a job for over 12 months now. That would surely be a relief for the worn out Spanish state!

The real problem then, I start to think, is not the act of benefiting from a public system if you do not – or cannot – help to make it sustainable. This is more a matter of automatically categorizing people as suspect of abusing this system or as entitled to be protected by it based on what they look/sound/act like. That is what allowed my partner and me to unquestionably get help for our daughter while other people got the ‘White gaze,’ that ‘thing in their look’ that you cannot quite name but nevertheless feels very real and ‘makes the non white body experience her- or himself as a site of struggle and otherness under white eyes’ (Shome 1999, 122).

III

But of course I did not realize any of this until I found myself on the other side. In Spain, my looks, my dialect, my behavior, all communicated without effort that I belonged, thus fostering an invisibility that, when dealing with a health emergency, made my economic situation irrelevant. But this is not the only benefit I obtained from my status as an ordinary Spaniard. In my case, normalcy also meant accumulating a significant amount of cultural capital at a very low financial cost, thanks to an economically accessible (for EU citizens) and high quality undergraduate and graduate college system that ultimately

allowed me to escape the full consequences of the deteriorating welfare state in my home country.

Interestingly, as an English major, many of the courses I had access to while enjoying the benefits of my citizenship only reproduced the invisibility of European whiteness, as they fostered heated discussions of race and gender that located the consequences of their pervasive logics as far away as possible from EU shores (Griffin and Braidotti 2002). These discussions ignored the crucial role – as well as the fluctuating character – of whiteness in the European context, and its relation to the expansion and delimitation of Europe's external and internal borders throughout history.

In the case of Spain, this entailed a transformation from colonizer, to 'sender' of immigrant labor to places like France and Germany and, most recently, to attractive 'destination' European country for contemporary immigrants, mostly from North Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin-America (Arocena 2011).⁴ Because of this particular history, we find an interesting, 'in-between' dynamic in Spain that constructs immigrants as both unwanted and desired, since there is a kind of narcissistic pleasure derived from being the target of unsolicited immigration (Martínez Guillem 2013). As Santaolalla (2002, 18) suggests, 'despite the strong and often unacknowledged racism in contemporary Spain [...] Spaniards derive a certain gratification from the fact that the new phenomenon of large-scale immigration (mostly from North Africa) constructs their country as a desirable, economically advanced nation.'

Importantly, therefore, postcolonial dynamics both allowed my symbolic and material mobility and triggered my identity crisis, thus forging a subjectivity enabled by the very conditions it then raised against. In this context, (post)colonialism stood as the root and the result of the anger, self-pity, and marginality that became inherent characteristics of my transposed body. In short, the loss of certain advantages only hurt because I had taken them for granted – just like those *El País* readers that made me so angry. In this sense, I was (I am?) only a victim of my own investment in privilege.

But like I said, I did not realize any of this until I found myself on the other side. In the USA, I went from what I saw as racial and ethnic invisibility – although bell hooks would keenly remind us that this is only a white illusion – to encountering a series of 'race' and 'ethnicity' boxes to check, one of which read 'White European, except Spain.' In the USA, I learned about the existence and value of whiteness just as I was forcefully expelled from its meaning. In this space, it was not me, but other people who could take their baby to the emergency room and not worry about entitled citizens thinking that they were abusing their health care system. It was others who could disagree with the doctors' diagnosis without hearing references to their culture's lack of knowledge about 'civilized' practices. Here, I was the one with the looks, 'accent' and behavior that people singled out, constantly scrutinized, and often associated with lack of competence – even though some other aspects of my identity, such as my occupation, my sexual orientation or my marital status, sometimes helped to lessen such scrutinizing.

Suddenly I remember some conversations with my mother, and they acquire a whole different meaning. She used to work at the maternity section in a Spanish public hospital. I remember how she used to complain

¡Y ahora hacen falta traductores para toda esta gente, y hasta menús especiales!

Revivo mi experiencia cuando estaba embarazada allá en España, lo sola que me sentía cuando tenía que compartir mis sentimientos más íntimos con un extraño, qué insignificante y poco serio parecía todo lo que yo decía, y no puedo ni siquiera imaginar

la soledad que esas mujeres de las que tanto se queja mi madre deben sentir al tener que pasar por lo mismo y ser literalmente malentendidas o ni siquiera escuchadas.

Or maybe I don't need to use my imagination that much; a while ago, during my first semester as an international PhD student in the USA, I tried to schedule an appointment for my daughter at 'People's Clinic' in Boulder. She had had high fever for three days. All the lady on the phone could offer me was an appointment for the following week. I insisted that this was an emergency. She then suggested me to take her to the emergency room. I did not do it because I had no idea of what the bill for that 'service' was going to be – my daughter is not a US citizen and she did not have insurance at the time; we could not afford it. So I had to take what she was offering. She even went on to say, in a completely aseptic tone: 'And for this visit [the one scheduled for *eight* days later]: did you want the doctor to do a physical examination or just look at her fever?' I just wanted to punch her. Luckily, the cultural capital that earned me a slot in a Ph.D. program, including a teaching position and a salary, allowed me to pay for a 'private visit' to a pediatrician who could take a look at my daughter and start the appropriate treatment. She put her on antibiotics – not covered either – right away. All I could think about was: ¿Y qué pasa con la gente que no se puede permitir este gasto? ¿Qué pasa con sus hijos?

IV

The grounding provided by the specific circumstances and events narrated here – with their corresponding tensions – places us in a suitable position to explore both the rigid and malleable character of whiteness, as well as its more general theoretical and practical implications for our understanding of identity and performativity. As different studies show, and throughout US history, whiteness's contradictory nature allowed it to remain a synonym of privilege, often secured through strategic moves that systematically protected both its normalization and its attachment to a minority (Baldwin 1955; Dyer 2007; Dubois 1903 [1989]; Frankenberg 1996, 2002; McIntosh 1990; Morrison 1987; Nakayama and Krizek 1995; Roediger 2005; Rowe and Malhotra 2006). Building on this scholarship, several projects have used performance theory and practice as a way to get (other) whites involved in the recognition of their unearned advantages, and the ways these are perpetuated through apparently race-neutral structures and everyday practices (see Carter 2007; Moon and Rolison 1998; Warren 2001; Warren and Kilgard 2001).

In a parallel move, the relatively recent 'performance turn' (Conquergood 1991) has also allowed many scholars to shift the emphasis from performativity as inevitably bound up with power structures (Butler 2004) and toward the potentially empowering nature that 'performing whiteness' may have for non-white individuals. There is thus an important body of work, usually centered around historically marginalized groups, focusing on how the unstable nature of socially constructed selves, together with our mobility across multiple subject positions, creates spaces for resistance that can be seen in the appropriation, through performance, of particular elements associated with privilege. Thus, awareness of the kinds of performative moves needed to access a series of privileges makes it possible to purposefully adopt those behaviors that will translate into the possibility of material gains (Amaya 2007; Savran 1998; Warren 2001; Wray 2006).

Even though these are important and illuminating contributions, I would argue that my enfleshment of the 'politics of location' in the previous sections also showed that the mixture of disciplining and empowering aspects embedded in whiteness carries with it another important aspect: an aspect that speaks to the instability of the advantages that this and other constructs provide, and to the fact that these advantages are never

guaranteed, not even for those who – it would appear – most comfortably navigate within their ‘safe’ space. Accounting for this volatility of whiteness, I argue, is crucial for expanding our possibilities for action beyond the (conscious) capacity to join the enemy, or to realize that one *is* the enemy.

When we incorporate the unplanned, uncontrollable elements of people’s experiences, we account for the chance to challenge privilege as a fundamental aspect of our societies. This is what Chávez (2010), when discussing gender, refers to as ‘subversive performativity,’ triggered by extreme circumstances in which one’s and other people’s survival is at stake. In these spatio-temporal locations, she argues, the rigid boundaries between masculinity and femininity – and the actions associated with them – may blur or even disappear, pushed by a ‘state of ecstasy’ that is ‘the result of some extreme event that causes a person to realize that he/she is not autonomous and does not possess complete control over her/his existence’ (2010, 2).

Working from this broader understanding of agency, I would argue that seeing loss of privilege – and the longing for that privilege – as an always-imminent possibility is of utmost importance in an approach to social dynamics that can incorporate a less conformist view of the different relations among groups, and a more direct questioning of the current – and unequal – order. In other words, a productive discussion of possibilities for action – and, for example, the roles that whiteness may play in them – cannot solely rely on the individual initiatives of those who can afford them. Instead, such discussion should highlight the possibility of collective efforts that emerge from common material needs beyond a particular – and often assumed to be fixed – ‘location,’ and toward a ‘politics of *relation*’ (Carrillo Rowe 2005, 16, my emphasis).

Incorporating the always-imminent possibility of material scarcity, I believe, can open the path toward challenging an often taken for granted privileged/unprivileged dichotomy when it comes to incorporating racialized bodies into academic research and activism. Disrupting this division, as I see it, can create alternatives for those identifying with historically disadvantaged groups, who are now often trapped between either oppositional or compliant roles (see Amaya 2007; Delgado 2009). It would also, I believe, open up new options for whites that go beyond awareness raising (Warren 2001) or even ‘racial treason’ (Ignatiev and Garvey 1996).

Could it be possible, then, to conceive of ways to (un)perform whiteness, not purposefully, but still subversively? And if so, what could be the necessary conditions that would allow those read as white to experience the necessary unintelligibility to act accordingly? Drawing on the insights gained through my personal journey, I argue that a possible starting point would be to think about the constraints and freedoms attached to different material spaces. Thus, instead of arguing for the rhetorical creation of ‘mobile subject positions *willing* to engage in border crossing’ (Flores and Moon 2002, 186, my emphasis), we could draw on real experiences of real people, showing how those positions already exist, and how sometimes this border crossing is not ‘willing’ but inevitable, not only for those historically marginalized, but also for those who, at certain times and in certain places, have enjoyed the privileges of belonging to the ‘mainstream.’

✓

In sum, what the ‘politics of location’ may help us understand is that we may not realize that we live a life of privilege until we see that same privilege at the basis of our experiences of marginalization. The best proof that we did not naturally earn our advantages is to see how easily we can find ourselves longing for them. And this lesson,

fortunately, is not only available to non-white bodies or ‘in betweeners’ like myself. Advantages are not granted, not even for white people. Nobody, therefore, should have the ‘privilege to opt out of engagement’ (Wildman 1996, 16). However, as scary as this may sound, I’m starting to think that maybe it is a good thing. Maybe it is necessary to experience the pervasiveness *and* fragility of whiteness so that we can start to not only understand its power, but to actually undo it.

Da Capo al coda

In this article I engaged in an autoethnographic journey from southern Europe to the USA, weaving two apparently unrelated sets of circumstances and events: a collection of reader responses to a Spanish article on health care coverage, and my experience as a born and raised Spaniard who moved to the USA as an adult. I used my own personal journey – a journey that revealed the sometimes-imposed borders of whiteness – as a springboard to reflect on the involuntariness, self-pity, and loss of status that may accompany subject mobility, together with the possibilities that lie in these.

Through my own experience of partially forced repositioning, therefore, I tried in this article to expand on what Shome (1999) has called ‘the politics of location.’ More specifically, I considered how constructs such as whiteness may be invoked to include and exclude different bodies from privilege, depending on the context where they operate. Of course this does not mean that invoking whiteness is necessarily a conscious, tactical process (see Nakayama and Krizek 1995) only carried out by those who benefit directly from its rewards. In fact, as the readers of *El País* demonstrated, on many occasions the different exclusionary practices associated with whiteness go hand in hand with seemingly neutral or even marginalized actors. Unawareness, unintentionality, or lack of direct benefit, however, does not make these processes inconsequential or less harmful.

As I wrestled with these broader tensions among un/awareness, im/possibility, and agency, and building on the insights gained through my personal narrative, I found it necessary to rethink the usually unproblematized correlation between (good) action and choice. Grounded in my personal journey, my critique of whiteness and/as performance literature then emphasized the potential of impossibilities when exposing not only the strategic attempts to protect privilege but also, and more importantly, the limitations of such strategies.

As I showed in my narrative, being poor and ‘alien’ definitely seems to be a dangerous combination regardless of your location. This is why ‘whiteness needs to be studied through the interlocking areas of power, spatial location, and history’ (Shome 1999, 109). To Shome’s statement, I would add that it is precisely through this multiple lens that we will be able, not only to expose whiteness’s power, but also to use that knowledge in our quest to bring our ideas closer to specific actions.

By examining its surface and latent elements across national contexts, I tried to emphasize that the privilege that whiteness provides may fluctuate between unquestionably granted and not guaranteed – not just for some, but for *all* of us – depending on where we are located. This is because, apart from incorporating a particular skin color, together with a particular religion, language, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation, the variety of practices that make up whiteness may receive different emphases in different contexts, and even the meanings attached to each of them in isolation can change from one space to the other.

This, I argue, is why whiteness is best explained as a hegemonic project, dominant and contested at the same time. And in order to take a more consistent advantage of its

weaknesses, we need to move our discussions beyond non-white accounts on how whiteness may be performed and thus accessible for a priori marginalized bodies – usually in possession of a significant cultural capital, we may add – as well as (mostly white) ‘awareness raising’ of the fact that one may be privileged – which tends to rely on and reify privilege as an unchangeable social reality. We need more emphasis on the fact that we do not always get to set the rules for inclusion and exclusion, and that *any* of us, at *any* particular moment, may see their advantaged position diminished. We need to foreground the fragility of the privileged condition in order to prompt action, since only the recognition of the possibility of becoming the ‘other,’ and the reality of the fear that comes with it, is a strong enough threat to trigger actions toward securing that being this ‘other’ will never entail a significant social risk.

Postscriptum: performing the performance – or how to ‘show’ in a foreign language

The insights about whiteness, foreignness, and performativity that I advanced in this article stem from a particular location and my struggle, within that location, to make sense of my own body in relation to others. This, in principle, would place my contribution as part of a growing body of scholarship in which the personal and the political go hand in hand (Holman Jones 2005). However, the particulars of my experience, together with my specific way of writing about them, also re/place me in an uncomfortable position in relation to both the form and the content of my narrative, as well as the kinds of identifications with particular groups that my contributions may (not) allow. These dynamics, although operating at a different level, have important implications for the overall argument about the precariousness of privilege that I developed here. Hence, I would like to end this article with some general reflections on my own problematic and possibly contested positionality in academia, its relation to the politics of language and/as method, and the potential consequences for authors, audiences, and research in general. My goal is to make an explicit move toward a more culturally pluralist, dialogical, and diversified kind of scholarship (Shi-xu 2009).

An important aspect of my identity is my nationality, which is intrinsically tied to the language I am most comfortable speaking. Even though, as I think it became apparent through my narrative, being Spanish has undoubtedly granted me a series of privileges, this condition also definitely affects my ‘competent face’ in the US academic world—mostly due to the fact that English is, by far, my second language. My work, from this position, risks to be (read as) much more out of place in academic circles as a ‘performance studies’ contribution than, for example, when I present myself as an ‘intercultural communication’ scholar. By this, of course, I do not mean to say that the two are mutually exclusive, or that the resisting and naturalizing processes in academia that may accompany these assumptions are always conscious ones. Rather, it may be more useful to think of these as the result of inferential processes related to dominant standards of ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ ‘appropriate’ or ‘inappropriate’ scholarly practices, and more specifically, ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ ‘appropriate or ‘inappropriate’ academic performances.

My unique position places me at odds, mostly, with the aesthetic conventions informing most performance studies work. These conventions tend to privilege personal, artful, and evocative essays over detached accounts that do not establish a close connection with readers. In short, a performer, more than any other kind of scholar, is supposed to ‘show’ more than ‘tell’ (Ellis and Bochner 2000). However, as Hector Amaya (2007) points out, sounding ‘poetic’ in a language other than the one you feel as your own can be an extremely difficult enterprise. Thus, attempting to be personal in an

artful and evocative way can easily turn a non-native speaker's performance into a too analytic, prosaic, and ultimately unviable project.

Because of this, I too have found a more comfortable shelter – and a warmer welcome from fellow academics – when ‘writing theory’ as opposed to more personal stories, and discussing/developing different theoretical frameworks has in fact been at the center of most of my scholarly work up to now. However, taking a distant, purely analytical stance was just not possible when trying to make sense of the experiences that literally forced me to write this article, just as it was impossible for me to communicate the urgent, personal, and even visceral nature of many of these experiences solely in English. Hence, this project would have felt incomplete, inauthentic, had I not performed also in my mother tongue: Spanish. Still, and due to the specific context in which I write, my original performance had to go through a ‘re-performing’ process in order to make it accessible to a wider academic audience that, generally speaking, is (more) fluent in English.

The bilingual – but mostly in English – format in the previous sections thus reflects my struggle over – and the double work involved in – accounting for different emotions as immediately as possible (i.e. not mediated by translation) while at the same time trying to conform to the dominant expectations of academia. In spite of the potential limitation of journals, reviewers, and readership, I kept some fragments in Spanish because, to borrow from Gloria Anzaldúa (2007), they allowed me to connect to my ‘true’ identity, to communicate the realities and values true to myself, and ultimately to legitimate my contribution (p. 77). As Anzaldúa puts it in reference to her own writing:

I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself [...] Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate [...] and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (2007, 81)

While in some ways inevitable, my re-performance is still at odds with many of the conventions of performance studies work. Evaluated from these conventions, my (English) personal narrative is probably a mediocre one, since it may not read as particularly authentic, artful, or evocative. This creates an irresolvable paradox in the sense that, on the one hand, the (valued) authentic nature of my writing is intrinsically tied to my condition on non-native speaker of English, but at the same time, that condition makes it very hard, if not impossible, for me to reach a level of authenticity that will make my work appreciated from a dominant performance studies perspective: after all, how can you ever ‘show’ in a foreign language? The process of translation necessarily mediates our thoughts and experiences, even constructing a different kind of reality.

As readers who are fluent in English and Spanish surely noted, there is a much stronger ‘telling’ dimension in the English portions of my narrative, which we could describe as the performance of a performance, or a *meta*-performance. In order to engage with this authentic/inauthentic paradox, one of my goals in writing this article was to create those necessary spaces for ‘imperfect’ performances that, nevertheless, do tell important stories and can help give a voice to those who would not have it otherwise (Ellis and Bochner 2000). One way to do this is to push bilingualism and code switching into the world of academic aesthetics, based on the fact that these practices create for us the same sort of uneasiness and inevitable access to the unconscious that works of art and literature produce (Sommers 2004).

In combination with my first language, my nationality also places my contribution – and myself – in a problematic position when compared to dominant understandings of

'Latinidad,' which is a North American concept and thus one that triggers ambivalent emotions in me. In other words, not only am I not an ideal performer – could I be a good *meta*-performer? – but also I am most definitely not an ideal *Latina* performer. As discussed in my narrative, I did not grow up thinking of myself as anything else than a Spanish (and sometimes European) heterosexual female from a working-class background. That is, categories such as race and ethnicity were not salient parts of my identity back home, which definitely made me complicit with the invisibility of whiteness in that context.

An important implication of this invisibility of racial and ethnic background is that, as a function of postcolonialism, I never experienced myself as a marginal subject – until, as I narrated, I became part of a different societal order. This particular (hi)story is certainly different from those of many Latin@s in the USA – and Spanish speakers more generally – which are often marked by that racialization, marginality, and even literal exclusion from participation in their societies through different generations (see Anzaldúa 1987; Moreman and Persona Non Grata 2011).

My goal in pointing this out is not to determine whether certain potential readings of my (academic) persona are accurate or inaccurate, but rather to expose how, from my perspective, they complicate possible alliances along the race/ethnicity axes, which in turn may affect how I – the person, the academic – am perceived in particular circles, and shape my performances in different contexts. For most non-Latin@s, and based mostly on an 'accent' that they then racialize into physical traits and/or personality, I am *Latina*, and therefore not quite white – a reading that certainly resonates with many of my everyday experiences in the USA. However, for many Latin@s, and in spite of superficial commonalities, the specifics of my circumstances place me closer to whiteness than to *Latinidad*. Unlike others who may have experienced similar isolating moves in academia or some place else (see Delgado 2009) I do not have a non-white, non-Spanish part of the family to invoke in order to soften the charge of being a 'Castilian aristocrat.' Because of this, I often find myself invoking my economic background – definitely not aristocratic – although this does not completely erase the (often negative) connotations of my nationality in the US Latino context.

As a result of these dynamics, in order to connect to other 'experiences of marginalization' (Delgado 2009, 156) and thus make space for the recognition of different kinds of struggles, as well as for my voice to be heard in this particular context, more often than not I cannot rely on shared race or ethnicity. Instead, I tend to consciously highlight shared foreignness, often combined with social class. This frequently translates into alliances with other non-whites, but it has also helped me foster meaningful class-based connections within and beyond race. In these contexts, foreignness becomes the organizing principle that (re)creates places for belonging and marginalization as it interacts with other aspects of identity. Ultimately, as I hope to have shown throughout this article, this back and forth movement between insider and outsider positionality, and its implications for our (lack of) access to privilege-in-context, is a space of possibilities that needs to be further explored as 'a resourceful place to be, if not always a painful one' (Eagleton 2003, 40).

Notes

1. This article has benefited tremendously from formal and informal conversations with many colleagues and friends, both at the University of Colorado-Boulder, and at the University of New Mexico, as well as from the insightful comments from both sympathetic and unsympathetic reviewers. To all of them, my most sincere thank you. Previous versions of this essay were presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association,

November 2011, and at the annual meeting of the Western States Communication Association, February 2013.

2. I chose to keep part of this narrative in the 'original' Spanish both as a rhetorical and a political strategy. For a more detailed explanation of the motivations and implications of this move, please see the postscriptum.
3. This is obviously another myth. Different reports show that what Western European countries are calling 'health care immigration' barely exists. Moreover, the use that immigrants make of regular health care services is very limited, mostly due to administrative obstacles and/or the lack of any rights as workers (Médicos del Mundo 2009).
4. It is also important to note that, in purely geographical terms, Spain occupies a strategic, Southern border position as the closest state to the African continent. Moreover, part of the Spanish territory – specifically, the cities of Ceuta and Melilla – extends to northern Africa, and the Canary Islands, which also belong to Spain, are much closer to Africa than to the Iberian Peninsula. Therefore, quite literally, when in 1986 Spain joined the then 'European Economic Community,' a portion of the African continent became part of Europe, with the expected reticence of other 'core' European states (Labany 2002).

Notes on contributor

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