



Review Essay

Against the Grain: Socially Just Social Science from the Standpoint of Roxana Ng

ELAINE COBURN
York University, Canada

ABSTRACT *This contribution seeks to highlight the important scholarship of Roxana Ng, arguably one of Canadian sociology and political economy's most underappreciated theorists. Like her activism, Ng's academic work is both wide-ranging yet firmly focused on major, unjust inequalities. Her research particularly concerns the Canadian capitalist political economy but inevitably, given the embeddedness of these social relations within worldwide historical relations, stretches beyond national borders. In particular, Ng sought to unpack the everyday, intertwined – exploitative and unjust – relations of class, race, and gender, and the ways these unjust relations are articulated through migration and citizenship. This contribution situates the reception and uneven uptake of Ng's varied work before critically analysing her contributions to understanding (1) immigrant women's labour in Canada, (2) the complex racialized, gendered relations of power in the academy, and (3) the liberatory potential of embodied epistemologies, specifically Qi Gong meditation. In the conclusions, I consider the overall contributions and some contradictions of her work, in moving from the local to the global, and from the personal to the political.*

KEYWORDS academy; globalization; Roxana Ng; sociology; Traditional Chinese Medicine

Roxana Ng's theorising and empirical research, like her activism, is systematically concerned with major, unjust inequalities, how they are produced and reproduced, as well as how they may be challenged. Specifically, Ng seeks to understand gender, race, and class as these are articulated through contemporary nation-states and capitalist relationships, drawing in part on her own insights as an immigrant woman to Canada. At the same time, Ng challenges epistemologies rooted in Cartesian mind-body dualities. Informed by unwarranted assumptions about radical separations between the intellect and the body-spirit, and between human beings and

Correspondence Address: Elaine Coburn, International Studies, Glendon College, York University, 2275 Bayview Ave, Toronto, ON, M4N 3M6; Email: ecoburn@glendon.yorku.ca

ISSN : 1911-4788



other life forces, she argues that these dualities are unhelpful. Not least, they obscure embodied ways of knowing that may be critical sources of insights, at once personal and political.

As this suggests, Ng's sociology and political economy include strong commitments, simultaneously political, epistemological and with methodological implications. She takes seriously the lived experience of relatively dominated persons, understanding the lives of immigrant women, in particular, as sources of insight into webs of social relations that are both immediate and local, while stretching world wide. She insists on the relevance of ways of knowing that specifically engage the body-spirit as well as the intellect. Specifically, she values insights from Traditional Chinese Medicine, usually marginalized in European traditions of knowing. She rejects the positivist premise that political commitments to social justice represent a contaminating bias that warps "objective" knowledge. Instead, she maintains that these commitments lend urgency to the search for truths. In this way, political commitments to social justice inform a research approach emphasizing the epistemological value of the lived experiences of relatively dominated, racialized women. Underlying this is the premise that all knowledge emerges from researchers and social actors who are inevitably socially situated and who are never neutral but hold political (and moral) values.

In keeping with this insight, Ng maintains that often, even usually, true descriptions and analyses of social realities are disguised by hegemonic ideologies that misrepresent actual social relationships. Typically, she argued, existing social inequalities are understood as inevitable or desirable, so supporting the interests of the powerful who benefit from these inequalities. Sociological inquiry may therefore play an important role in unmasking the common-sense of hegemonic ideologies, not least by confronting dominant, ideological claims with the realities of social life as experienced everyday by dominated actors, including immigrant women. In this approach, Ng's work joins other feminist epistemologies and methodologies, as elaborated, for instance, by Collins (2009), Harding (2004), and Smith (2004). With them, she pursues new ways of doing research outside still-dominant, if often critiqued positivist paradigms, by centering subaltern women's standpoints as a (if not *the*) privileged starting point into social inquiry.

In this review essay, after situating the reception and uneven uptake of Ng's varied work, I offer a detailed account of three major strands of Ng's theorizing and research. In particular, I emphasize commonalities across what might appear to be quite different concerns regarding first, immigrant women's labour, second, complex relations of power in the academy and third, the liberatory potential of embodied epistemologies, specifically Qi Gong meditation. In the conclusions, I consider the overall contributions of her work, in moving from the local to the global, and from the personal to the political. Yet, I point out that her work is not without tensions. Not least, I consider whether it is possible to reconcile Ng's insistence, on the one hand,

regarding the useful, expert role of the sociologist in unmasking hegemonic ideologies and, on the other, her urgings that researchers take seriously the lived experienced and beliefs of relatively dominated social actors who may accept hegemonic accounts of their own lives.

Ultimately, I suggest that Ng's research does offer new ways of understanding the intersections between the local and the global and the personal and the political. By privileging a feminist epistemology that takes into account the ways that race, class, gender and nation are produced through everyday interactions, she sheds new light on workplaces that range from the garment industry to the academy. Importantly, however, her sociology and political economy is not only descriptive and explanatory. Rather, she offers pragmatic insights that inform struggles for social justice, especially if not only those led by and for immigrant women.

Situating Ng's Sociology and Political Economy

In many ways, Ng's sociology and political economy are shaped by the institutional ethnographic approach developed by her mentor, Dorothy Smith. Recalling her decisive encounter with Smith, when she was working in the Vancouver-based Women's Centre where Smith was an active presence, Ng (2006, p. 96, n. 2) writes: "I was so impressed by the feminist methodology that she (Smith) was developing that I left Vancouver in 1978 to study with her at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education" (OISE), located at the University of Toronto. Certainly, as Goli Rezai-Rashti (1994) observes, Ng's contributions draw on Smith's emphasis on the importance of beginning theory from social relationships as experienced in everyday life. Writing and analysing from her own standpoint as a racialized immigrant woman to Canada, however, Ng expanded Smith's feminist framework, as originally formulated, to emphasize the ways that race, class and gender are discoverable not as distinct, abstract concepts, but, "in the everyday/evernight world of experience" (Smith 2004, p. 42; for a brief discussion of Ng's research as an exemplary application of institutional ethnography, see Campbell and Gregor (2000, pp. 114-116).

As Smith (1992, p. 90) observes, Ng has usefully explored how, for instance, "the category 'immigrant women' is constituted in the social relations of the Canadian state and the labour market." Such socially constructed categories are not conceptual abstractions. Rather, they profoundly shape and are reproduced by supposedly neutral institutional processes, as well as buttressing stereotypes that inform everyday social interactions. Put differently, Ng's work shows how the historically contingent ontological category of "the immigrant woman" has consequences for the actual, lived experiences of Chinese women, among others, who have

migrated to and live and work in Canada.¹ At the same time, the lived experience of actual immigrant women may be used as evidence to challenge hegemonic, often stereotypical conceptions of “immigrant women.”

Ng’s work can be understood as contributing to a burgeoning anti-racist feminist theorizing and Marxist scholarship, much of it connected with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. Alongside Daiva Stasiulis and Abigail Bakan (2005) Himani Bannerji (2000), Sherene Razack (1998), Nandita Sharma (2006) and Sunera Thobani (2007), among others, Ng’s theorizing and research is attentive to the simultaneous experience of race and gender as articulated through the state and capitalist class relations. Her research may therefore be understood as participating in scholarly conversations that are explicitly informed by political efforts to support migrant workers, including research concerned with:

- how a vastly unequal world capitalist system produces mass migration and a gendered, racialized labour force divided between citizens and non-citizens, the latter including “illegal” or undocumented migrant workers (Stasiulis & Bakan 2005);
- the ways that, in the latest iteration of historically changing ideologies of nationalism, the state of Canada officially valorizes discourses of cultural difference and diversity, obscuring gendered and racialized class inequalities (Bannerji, 2000);
- how relations of domination and subordination are organized and sustained in the classroom encounter, which is never a “naïve” interaction between men and women, Whites and racialized Others, but always informed by diverse histories of radically unequal colonial and neo-colonial power (Razack, 1998);
- how national immigration policies enable people to enter Canada, where they often work without formal legal status and so without formal legal protections granted other workers, functioning as cheap labour profitable to capitalist enterprises (Sharma, 2006);
- the ways that the law symbolically transforms the raw violence of colonialism into new nationalisms, creating a class of legal citizens who act as “exalted subjects,” enjoying powers denied to racialized, legally demarcated and implicitly inferior Others (Thobani, 2007).

Put another way, Ng’s research may be understood as part of a broader scholarly conversation, informed by pressing political struggles and led

¹ In referring to historical ontologies, I borrow from philosopher Ian Hacking (2002). Through this concept, Hacking calls attention to ways of being that are historically possible at particular moments and that subsequently disappear. Same-gender sex, for instance, has existed with and without the historical ontology of the queer, gay, lesbian or bisexual person. Similarly, women may cross borders but “the immigrant woman,” as an *ontological* category – and associated stereotypes – comes into being through state institutional procedures, and other means, at a given historical moment and may subsequently disappear. Hacking himself develops the concept of historical ontologies from Michel Foucault’s vocabulary.

primarily by racialized women scholars, investigating the imbrications among race, gender and labour, law, nation and capitalism.

Given her scholarly and activist concerns, it is unsurprising that Ng's publications have appeared primarily in feminist, anti-racist and socialist journals. These include, for instance, publications in *Canadian Women's Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme* (2002), *Canadian Ethnic Studies* (1981), and *Studies in Political Economy: A Socialist Review* (2007). In addition, she has published in edited scholarly collections that offer radical critiques of an unjust status quo, including books like *The Politics of Diversity: Feminism, Marxism and Nationalism*, edited by Roberta Hamilton and Michèle Barrett (Ng, 1986), *Pedagogies of Difference: Rethinking Education for Social Change*, edited by Peter Pericles Trifonas (Ng, 2003), and *Indigenous Peoples' Wisdom and Power: Affirming our Knowledge Through Narratives*, edited by Julian Kunnie and Ivy Nomalungelo (Ng, 2006). These titles are suggestive of Ng's diverse but related interests in anti-racist feminisms and Marxist theories, as well as in the social construction of the nation, education systems, and understandings about what does (and does not) constitute knowledge.

In many instances, Ng's publications reflect her close ties to political and social activism. Thus, some of her writing was published with the support of advocacy and political organizations and was specifically intended to inform struggles, in a pragmatic, immediate way. Her early co-authored work, *Immigrant Housewives in Canada*, for instance, was published by the Immigrant Women's Centre in Toronto (Ng & Ramirez, 1981). Along not dissimilar lines, she was part of a collective that edited *Race, Class, Gender: Bonds and Barriers* (Vorst et al., 1989), published with the support of the Society for Socialist Studies. As this survey of her writing suggests, Ng both participated in and was supported by institutionalized as well as informal networks of radical feminist, anti-racist and socialist scholars, as well as by social justice activists, in and outside the academy.

At the same time, this representative (if non-exhaustive) overview of Ng's publications suggests another reality, shared by many radical feminist, anti-racist and socialist scholars. That is, her research and theorizing was and remains relatively marginalized within more mainstream academic publications. By way of illustration, despite her consistent concern with the social reproduction of social inequality, a major sociological question, the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* does not contain a single citation of Ng's work. The *Canadian Review of Sociology* has just three references to her scholarship (Eichler, 1985; Li, 1992; Sharma, 2001), each limited to a short, parenthetical reference to her research by and for Chinese immigrant women. In other words, Ng's theorizing and research have been taken up by politically like-minded colleagues, but much of her work is circulated apart from a (Euro-Canadian, liberal) "malestream" social scientific tradition. These traditions still understand radical feminisms, anti-racisms and socialisms as secondary and specialized. Professional scholarly competency,

as a sociologist, does not demand familiarity with the approaches developed by Ng and other feminists, anti-racists and Marxists (for a useful account of how the marginalization of feminisms, anti-racisms and Marxisms is routinely accomplished in academia, see Smith, 2004, especially Chapter 3).

Perhaps then, it is not surprising that there is no critical accounting of Ng's work taken as a whole. When other scholars have mobilized her work, they tend to pull apart her varied writings about social inequality, considering each empirical domain as a separate matter. Typically, for instance, Eichler (1985, p. 625) cites Ng for her co-authored study of immigrant housewives in the context of a feminist analysis of gendered household labour. In a separate publication, Shahjahan (2014, pp. 2-3) draws upon Ng's rejection of Cartesian mind-body dualities to develop ideas about decolonizing pedagogies in the education system. Last, Mackey (2002) mobilizes Ng's work in her critical analysis of Canadian official multicultural policies of "cultural difference and national identity." Such diverse uses of Ng's writing are a testament to the wide-ranging applications of her research. Nonetheless, the consequence of this characteristically segmented mobilization of her insights is that there is no single, overall, critical appraisal of her theoretical and empirical research.

There are, however, occasional essays explaining the important impact and influence Ng had on her students, many of whom she wrote with collaboratively (e.g., Mathew, Wong, Ng, Woschuk & Patton, 2008). Diana Gustafson (1998), for instance, recounts her experience in one of Ng's graduate classes. Unconventionally, this class featured Qi Gong meditation, deliberately challenging Cartesian dualities of thought and body, mind and practice. As Gustafson explains, her initial, deep scepticism about Ng's pedagogical methods cannot be separated from the dominance and hence taken-for-granted authority of Western ontologies and epistemologies in the Canadian classroom. Yet, in the end, Gustafson suggests that Ng's Traditional Chinese Medicine-based teaching, as well as Ng's careful construction of a "safe and supportive environment" allowed for "transformative learning" (1998, p. 55), that profoundly altered Gustafson's understandings of knowledge, health, medicine, and ultimately of herself as an embodied being. If such essays offer important insights into Ng's pedagogy, epistemology and her impact as a teacher, nonetheless they do not offer an overview of Ng's theorizing and research.

Ironically, although Ng consistently demonstrated a high degree of reflexivity, situating herself within her research by making explicit the immigrant woman academic's standpoint from which she researched, taught and wrote, she never produced a critical overview of her own contributions. Her professional webpage offers only a short summary of her work, including a radically incomplete résumé of her publications – she lists five co-authored books and just two co-authored articles of the several dozen that she

published.² For whatever reason, Ng never issued an edited collection of her own essays, with an introduction that might have sought to explain the tensions and commonalities across theorizing and research that she did over more than three decades. This review essay therefore seeks to partially remedy this lacuna by considering, together, three significant theoretical and empirical contributions that Ng made in her teaching, writing and activism. Specifically, I survey, first, her research on globalization from the standpoint of migrant women workers, second, her writing on academia from her own standpoint as a minoritized, immigrant woman, and third, her insights into challenging opposition-mobilizing insights from Traditional Chinese Medicine. In the conclusion, I consider some of the commonalities and tensions across these three important areas of Ng's theorizing and research.

Globalization from the Standpoint of Migrant Women Workers

Ng's research was motivated by questions about the production and reproduction of unjust social inequalities, as well as the possibilities and strategies for creating more socially equal and just relationships. As briefly observed above, in seeking answers, she consistently began from the standpoint of dominated classes and groups. In particular, Ng privileged the viewpoint and experiences of migrant women workers in Canada. Hence, an important preoccupation from about the 1990s onwards was Ng's concern with the latest phase of world capitalism, popularly referred to as globalization.

Given hegemonic conceptions that celebrate globalization as the harbinger of wealth, but also of human rights, rising ethical standards and even the end of sweatshops and pollution (Ng, 2002a, p. 74), Ng asked if this characterization of globalization was true and, if so, for whom.³ Specifically, she asked, as a concrete empirical question, if this characterization of globalization is accurate from the standpoint of the mostly female, mostly immigrant Asian garment workers in Canada. In asking questions from such perspectives, she insisted, "abstract, macro processes" (Ng, 2002a, p. 7) like globalization are brought back to the realities of everyday social relations, particularly the experiences of those objectively exploited and dominated. Abstract theory is made to confront everyday social existence.

² See her website, now under the authority of the Estate of Roxana Ng: www.oise.utoronto.ca/lhae/Faculty_Staff/1596/Roxana_Ng.html

³ I understand "globalization" as the world-wide reach of capitalist social relationships, including through the liberalization of trade and finance. A typically optimistic assessment of globalization, from the popular if specialist economics magazine *The Economist* (2007), is the following assertion: "It's easy to assume, with globalisation, that a rising tide lifts all boats. And most people do gain, even if the improvements in their way of life can sometimes be hard to discern..." Here, failure to appreciate the benefits of globalization are understood as difficulty in "discerning" them, not as evidence that globalization may not be as beneficial for "most people" as is often supposed.

From the perspectives of migrant women workers in Canada, Ng argued, it was clear that globalization was not the positive development championed by specialized economics and business media. Rather, globalization, characterized by instantaneous world financial exchanges and the ease of capital movements across the globe – enabled by new technologies and facilitated through trade agreements understood as first and foremost political agreements (Ng, 2007, pp. 202-205) – was associated with stagnant wages rather than increased wealth and limited respect for workers' legal rights, never mind wellbeing.

Specifically, the transformation of the global political economy from the 1970s to 1990s, meant important changes in the world garment industry (Ng, 2007). Increased global competition and the creation of special export processing zones (EPZs), featuring low corporate taxes and few labour rights, were facilitated by free trade agreements that specifically diminished protections for domestic industries. In efforts to compete with lower production costs elsewhere, not least in EPZs, most of which are located in Asia, garment manufacturers in Canada shut down production, entailing massive layoffs as they shifted from sites in Canada to lower cost production sites worldwide. Clothing was and is then imported back to Canada, through internationalized production chains made possible through new transportation and communications technologies. The remaining garment industry in Canada shifted from formal labour to casualized homework, often piecework (Ng, 2002a, pp. 75-76), in an effort to lower production costs and remain competitive with overseas operations. At the same time, unionization within the garment industry dropped from a high of about 40% in the 1960s and 1970s to 20% in the 1990s (p. 77), in part because of concerted resistance by governments to changing labour legislation that would allow for the unionization of homeworkers, leaving many workers without organized worker advocacy.

In describing these processes, Ng confronted the myth of globalization and its supposed universal benefits with the realities of the restructuring of the garment industry in Canada. She documented the ways this left immigrant women workers engaged in increasingly precarious, isolated, low-paid work. At the same time, Ng contrasted Chinese garment workers' situation in Canada with stereotypical discourses casting Chinese immigrants as successful and wealthy, hence not in need of scholarly investigation nor of solidarity. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, common sense discourse around Chinese immigrants in Canada stressed their wealth – as Ng put it, the idea that “they bring lots of money into Canada and build monster homes” (Ng, 2002b, p. 2). Yet, in reality, many Chinese migrant women workers were and are facing terrible working and living conditions. As Ng explained, “Not only are they not rich. They are the subjects of severe exploitation, and sexism and racism in the labour market” (2002b, p. 2). Indeed, Ng stressed that non-English speaking women garment workers from China serve as a factor of adjustment for capitalist employers. These women's suppressed wages, non-

unionized home working conditions – later transforming into flexible movement between homework and factories (Ng, 2002b, p. 8) – and irregular labour, enabled capitalist employers to maintain profits despite intensified, global competition. Ng thus laid bare the actual, everyday social relations and realities behind “globalization” for these women workers against mainstream economics’ suggestions that globalization leads to uniform improvements to the livelihoods of all. Where mainstream economic news celebrated globalization, she mobilized evidence that describes the realities of everyday, gendered exploitation of a captive labour force. In particular, Ng observed that the beneficiaries of Chinese immigrant women’s labour were capitalist employers, who preserved profit margins by using these women’s work as a flexible, inexpensive variable in production. At the same time, Ng unmasked stereotypes that cast Chinese immigrants to Canada as a homogeneously wealthy community, emphasizing the precarious, hard existence of many Chinese migrant women workers.

On the strength of such observations, Ng argued these women’s position within the world capitalist political economy is that of captive workers, despite their formally free status. That is, she argued that these women are simultaneously “essential to and disposable within a capitalist economy” (Ng, 2002a, p. 5). Their labour is necessary to allow for the production of cheap clothing and so profits for the owners, yet may be discarded during periods of lower demand. Moreover, this captive status, despite the low pay and uncertain hours, is reinforced by multiple factors. These include the fact many do not speak English and lack affordable childcare that might enable them to work outside the home, in a context where women are still responsible for most childcare and unpaid household labour. Further, these women’s skills are devalued, since regardless of the substantive content and complexity of the work itself, their women’s work is constructed as less skilled than work done by men within a gendered division of labour (Ng, 2002a, p. 5). Aggravating this negative assessment of the women’s labour, in Canada, Western educational certificates are the only accepted proof of skill and competency (Ng & Shan, 2010, pp. 176-178). In short, a lack of formal, Western educational credentials is taken as proof of lack of skill, so justifying lower wages as “unskilled” labour.

At the global level, the hardening of immigration and refugee requirements and limitations on migrant worker mobility, combines with human trafficking on a broad scale to create a new category of illegal or undocumented racialized workers. Because of their illegal status, these workers have few formal rights (Ng, 2002a, p. 77). Hence, globalization is characterized by a global division of racialized labour, in which these women’s illegal or undocumented status exacerbates their vulnerability to pressures from capitalist employers, making it difficult to leave even the most badly paid, precarious piece-work. In such ways, Ng unpacks the complex constellation of factors contributing to these women as formally free but actually unfree labour, a consequence of a range of variables, from women’s responsibilities

for unpaid childcare and household labour to the implications of immigration law for ease of worker organization and respect for workers' rights.

Although Ng does not draw out these insights for more general analyses of the world capitalist system, it is not difficult to imagine these. Hence, for instance, if these women's formally free labour is actually captive labour, this is suggestive of the contradictions of a capitalist system that employs liberal rhetorics of freedom while overlooking the reality that many workers have few alternatives to badly-paid, precarious work for survival. Likewise, in emphasizing the ways that undocumented workers, for instance, are created politically through formal immigration, and refugee and migrant work policies limiting their mobility and rights, Ng drew attention to these as deliberate political processes rather than economically or technologically determined inevitabilities.

Ng applied the same critical acuity to the study of programmes that were supposedly meant to help migrant women workers as she did to mainstream economic myths about the supposedly universal benefits of globalization. In practice, she argued, training programmes for these women tend to be motivated by the needs of states and employers, not by the needs of women migrant workers themselves (Ng, 2002b, p. 9). Hence, such "training" programmes imagine the women to be the problem, their poor working conditions a straightforward consequence of their lack of English language skills and supposedly limited work competencies. This meant that advocacy for these women focussed on improved personal skills. At the same time, such approaches left unchallenged the gendered idea of these women as unskilled workers, therefore deserving of lower pay and incapable of other, supposedly more skilled and better paid kinds of work. Moreover, such approaches did not address racism in and outside of the workplace, as factors limiting employment mobility, including across borders. Neither did these approaches consider these workers' precarious legal status and the problems this poses for formal labour organizing and the protection of workers' rights. Finally, these approaches leave unexamined questions of childcare and the gendered division of labour. In short, training leaves unconsidered a host of critical factors that these women face, from legal constraints to discrimination to gendered double days as they seek better paying employment.

Yet, ironically, Ng argued that such state training programmes could fulfil some important, if unintended, functions for migrant women workers (Ng, 2002b, pp. 7-9). Thus, for instance, English language classes were attended, not necessarily in order to enable job mobility, but rather to enable parents to understand English language correspondence about their children. Training classes in new garment-making skills were taken up, not so much with the aim of better pay or employment – workers were very realistic about their limited opportunities, Ng observes (p. 7) – but, for instance, to learn how to make affordable, stylish new clothes for themselves and family members. Such training sessions were also important in allowing workers to socialize, including the exchange of complaints about working conditions, sometimes

resulting in coordinated actions against employers, for instance, around unpaid work. In some instances, training coordinators emphasized formal decision-making and organization, creating spaces for debate, decision-making and action, so that such sessions became important spaces for learning about how to organize debates and discussions and then to act upon these politically. In short, existing structures – including training programmes that are currently more responsive to the state and employers than workers – have the potential to answer to the multiple needs of women migrant garment workers, including for learning and creating spaces for political advocacy.

In such ways, Ng emphasized the contradictions within capitalism, between the rhetoric of free labour and the realities of captive labour, between promises of training for better jobs and the realities of limited opportunities in a context of anti-immigrant racism, among other factors. However, Ng's analytical and policy work did not end with descriptions of the world as it is. Rather, she considered practically how these women's lives and work might be bettered through collective agency via institutions existing here and now, for instance, through training centred around workers' needs rather than state or employer priorities. Such action means taking the standpoint of the migrant women workers themselves seriously, as experts about their own experiences and priorities.

Academia from the Standpoint of a Minority, Immigrant Woman

Although most considerations of Ng's theorizing and research separate her writing about Chinese immigrant women from her reflexive analyses about the university and pedagogy, these are not separate concerns. That is, Ng did not only study and work in solidarity with minority, immigrant women. Rather, she herself was a minoritized, immigrant woman. Particularly in the latter part of her career, her own work experiences in the university became a focus of research about the ways that unequal relations of citizenship, gender and race play out in academia.

As Ng observed, in a typically direct statement, "it is not easy to be a minority, a woman and an immigrant in a society that upholds white male supremacy" (Ng, 2011, p. 345). If this is true of Canadian society, generally speaking, it is likewise true in the specific institutional configuration that is the university, an institution historically conceived, as with so many institutions within contemporary capitalism, "to preserve the privileges of certain classes of men" (Ng, 2011, p. 345). Ironically, Ng observed, moving up the hierarchy of academy does not make being a woman, an immigrant and a minority easier, but rather more difficult. This is because academic relations of power become more narrowly centered on specific types of bodies, experiences and ways of knowing, so that the minoritized woman scholar is repulsed as a challenge to the previously homogenous upper strata of academia.

In looking at the *how* of this marginalization of minority women professors, Ng observes that it may be accomplished both directly and indirectly. Direct attacks include sexist, racist and other attitudes that tend to dehumanize minority women and rob them of their authority. “Sexism, racism, a sense of class privilege and other such biased attitudes” (Ng, 2011, p. 345) are shared by many, perhaps most administrators and colleagues. These normalize the disrespect of women, minority, immigrant and working class professors. Often, these attitudes are shared by students, too, who may draw upon the (relatively) dominated position of women immigrant minorities in broader society to exercise power within the classroom and undermine professorial authority and even basic human dignity.

Yet, minority women are not necessarily attacked directly for their persons. Rather, more insidiously, they are challenged for the research they choose to pursue, the ways they think about knowing, and relatedly, how they carry out teaching. Specifically, ways of knowing and teaching that emerge out of traditions other than those of Western Enlightenment thinking are devalued. The professor herself is not attacked, but “only” the importance of her research and teaching and the ways that she carries this out, if these are not focussed on standard topics and carried out in standardized ways that re-centre upper class white male and Western experience (see, for instance, Smith, 2004, pp. 15-28). Likewise, tenure and promotion depend on writing, publishing and teaching in standardized formats where the standards reflect the interests, pre-occupations, traditions and methods of dominant classes and groups. In such ways is academia made difficult for the immigrant, the minority, the woman and many others.

In her essay “Woman Out of Control,” Ng (1993) revisits these concerns, through the description and analysis of a particularly painful personal experience as a woman migrant minority professor. Ng refuses to separate out race, class and gender, since the social encounter is shaped by the simultaneity of all these relationships. Yet, describing this is difficult, since as Bannerji might observe (1987, p. 12), language fails to cope with the simultaneous, not separate and sequential experience of ethnicity, class and gender – here, misleadingly separated out by commas. Specifically, Bannerji (1987) observes that she does not enter a room first as a woman, then as a professor and then as a person of colour – in everyday experience, these social relationships are produced through the simultaneity of race, class and gender. In the same way, Ng analyses her experience in an account that challenges analytical distinctions that misrepresent the lived realities of gender, race and class inequalities as somehow separate.

As Ng recounts, during one of her classes on minority groups and race relations, a self-identified white male immigrant student formally complained about her teaching and threatened legal action, arguing that her course was being used “as a platform for feminism” (see also Ng, 1994, p. 41). He observed that half of her readings referred to gender and women’s issues and

so did not match the course description.⁴ He further complained that she had marginalized him in the classroom as a white male. And, he suggested that her meditative exercises, about which more in the next section of this paper, were inappropriate in a graduate classroom and that she was pursuing “a particular political agenda” (Ng, 1993, p. 192), this last apparently juxtaposed to the possibility of a nonpoliticized academic curriculum. In a meeting about the complaint with Ng and the student, a member of the university administration remained carefully “neutral,” later suggesting that Ng take seriously the student’s criticisms of her course (Ng, 1993, p. 192). In her essay, Ng takes apart this incident as an example of much broader processes, to show how racism, sexism and class inequalities unfold in everyday social relationships, including those which are apparently explicitly guided by commitments to fairness, or if not fairness, neutrality.

In particular, Ng observes that the university administrator’s neutral stance at the meeting with Ng and the student who complained about her class, was based on a fiction: that she and the student were equals. That is, the administrator bracketed consideration of race, gender and class, as if they were not present in the classroom and meeting. Yet by remaining neutral, even when the student called Ng “a woman out of control” on three separate occasions (Ng, 1993, p. 197), the administrator *de facto* sided with the student in undermining Ng’s professorial authority, and indeed in questioning her reasonableness. More broadly, the administrator’s neutral stance meant that the assumption that Ng’s feminist and anti-racist teaching were the product of an unmanageable personality, went unexamined. In contrast, standard teaching, which leaves patriarchy and racism unanalysed – for instance, under the assumption that feminist and anti-racist scholarship is marginal and outside of the canon hence not central to university learning – was implicitly reaffirmed as normal and reasonable. “But I don’t have problems with any other courses! I only have trouble with yours,” is how the student put it (Ng, 1993, p. 192). The fiction of equality, unexamined, leaves sexism and racism intact in such interactions. The administrator’s neutral stance also obscures power within the professor-student relationship and the ways that a professor’s apparently straightforward power over the student is complicated by race, gender and other unequal social relations.

As Ng observes, the realities of power are inscribed in bodies and they are much more complex than straightforward professorial domination of any student. This is not to say that professors have no power, only that this is complicated by inequalities irreducible to professorial authority. As Ng explains:

Each time I stand in front of the classroom, I embody the historical sexualisation and racialization of the Asian female (who is thought to be docile, subservient and

⁴ Note here the apparently exclusive construction of feminism as necessarily separate and distinct from analyses of racism. Ng observes, “I was pleased that unwittingly I had achieved a balanced curriculum...” (1994, p. 41).

sexually compliant) even as my class privilege, formal authority and professional qualification ameliorate some of the effects of this signification. (Ng, 2006, p. 98)

In other words, gendered, racialized, and classed power is formed through moments of social interaction in the classroom, as well with in interactions with the administration and among colleagues. The racist and sexist stereotypes that shape those interactions are themselves indissociable from larger histories and political economies, including the exercise of white colonial power over Asian bodies and associated, gendered fantasies of Asian women's submission to the White male, colonial person.

In recounting this, Ng's point is that her experience, repeated in variations over the years, if not always culminating in the threat of legal action, is not unique to her own university career or to the individuals involved. Rather, it is illustrative of the ways that the university classroom – like all social spaces – is saturated with relations of power. Hence, the apparently personal and idiosyncratic encounter between Ng and the student is in fact (also) political. Indeed, the encounter reveals the ways that inequalities are institutionalized, for instance governing what is considered standard, acceptable course material and what is not. As Ng insists, this has implications for the ways that racism, sexism and more are tackled within and beyond academia.

In particular, the insistence on inequality and power as social, not individual, suggests that it is not enough to treat racism and sexism, for instance, as an attitude problem held by an individual. This is the perspective that informs increasingly ubiquitous prejudice awareness workshops (Ng, 1993, p. 191-192), which are supposed to sensitize individuals and so create more tolerant and equitable social relations. But such attitudinal shifts are inadequate to dealing with inequalities that are not only in people's heads, but institutionalized. Hence, to truly begin to address the social reproduction of inequality requires “a fundamental re-examination of the structures and relations of universities” (p. 191).

Such a thorough going re-examination would entail, for instance, a serious re-appraisal of what can be admitted as scholarship and what constitutes competent, useful teaching. This would require an examination of deep assumptions, including ontological assumptions about the nature of being and epistemological assumptions about knowing and learning, that shape expectations of what constitutes not just standard but best-practice university research and teaching. It appears likely, for instance, that the student's assessment of meditation exercises as inappropriate in the university classroom, for instance, are rooted in unexamined radical Cartesian mind/body dualities that imagine actual, physical bodies as more or less irrelevant to learning, as if knowing is a matter of a disembodied intellect. It would also mean, at a minimum, recognizing the sometimes contradictory power relations that come into play among administrators, colleagues and students at the university, all of whom bring race, gender, age, class and various status attributes to the academic setting. It would require recognition

of the ways that existing unequal social relations are naturalized, hence depoliticized, while ideas and movements that challenge a naturalized, unequal status quo are cast as political or biased and therefore inappropriate in a classroom imagined as a neutral space where politics can – and should – be bracketed.

In short, Ng insists that inequality and discrimination are not only about attitudes, or what happens inside people's minds. Rather, they are about social relationships, institutionalized rules of neutrality ultimately rooted in fictions of social equality. Often, they are legitimated by common sense ideas, for instance, the assumption that it is both possible and desirable to create the classroom as a neutral space devoid of political content. Beginning from this observation, it is possible to imagine a thorough going programme for the re-evaluation of dominant forms of scholarship and academic relationships, which have become normalized and institutionalized.

Challenging Oppression from the Standpoint of Traditional Chinese Medicine

If this is true inside the university, it is also true outside of it. Again, despite the apparent separateness of Ng's research concerning working class immigrant Chinese women, and her own experiences in the classroom and concerns with pedagogy, common social dynamics underlie these seemingly distinct domains. Not least is Ng's concern with inequality, how it is produced and reproduced; this critical stance is an entry point into informing transformative struggles that will challenge unjust inequalities.

In her own words, Ng formulated the central question of her research and teaching practices this way: "How do the oppressor and the oppressed co-participate in acts of oppression?" (Ng, 2009). By co-participation, Ng was not suggesting that the oppressor and the oppressed participate as equals in the reproduction of unjust inequalities. Clearly they do not. Walmart makes profits from the cheap clothing produced by Chinese garment workers in Canada, for instance, while these women earn very little. Walmart is relatively mobile, including internationally, even if such mobility has some costs, while the Chinese women migrant workers are formally if not practically limited in their mobility. This is both because of immigration rules specifically limiting (legal) working class movement across borders and because of practical obstacles to both legal and undocumented movement, including racist attitudes and behaviours that make mobility socially difficult. Nonetheless, following from Gramsci (Ng, 1993, p. 194), among others, it was obvious to Ng that dominated and oppressed peoples and individuals do incorporate dominant ways of thinking and doing into their everyday lives, often if not always conforming to these even at personal cost. Of course, challenging dominant practices imposes other costs, as we have already seen

with respect to teaching anti-feminism and anti-racism in societies and universities characterized by systemic sexism and racism.

Increasingly, in answering her own question about the *how* of reproducing relations of oppression, Ng adopted the standpoint of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). In particular, she mobilized the meditative practice of Qi Gong, against the Cartesian privileging of the mind-intellect over the body-spirit that dominates Canadian society, Western countries generally and academia as well (Ng, 2011, p. 344). Instead, Ng argued that it is critical to understand both oppression and anti-oppressive politics and teaching as simultaneously about the intellect, body and spirit.⁵ One insight from this is that confrontations of power are marked in the body (Ng, 2011, p. 346). In other words, she wrote, the experience of unequal power does not occur only in the mind: rather, mind, body and spirit are all implicated. But this approach also insists that human liberation is not simply a matter of mind-consciousness, rather, the body and the spirit are likewise inevitably implicated in struggles for social justice.

Central to TCM is the idea of Qi. Ng says that Qi is commonly translated as “energy flow” (Ng, 2011, p. 349), but she suggests that Qi is perhaps better understood more simply as “what animates life” (p. 349). Qi is simultaneously material and immaterial, a “quality we share with all things” (p.349) so connecting the microcosmos and the macrocosmos. The free flow of Qi is important to a healthy mind, spirit and body, with disease understood as a blockage of the free flowing of Qi (p. 350). From this perspective, critical reasoning, both learning and teaching, require the free flow of Qi. Otherwise, as Ng experienced as a graduate student, the intense intellectual effort required for research and teaching may inhibit the flow of Qi, resulting in physical discomfort and even illness (p. 344). When Qi is freely flowing, Ng argues, the body-spirit is healthy and mindfulness is possible. In turn, this embodied mindfulness enables the kind of critical reflexivity that is necessary to challenge the routine reproduction of inequalities in the mind-body-spirit among the oppressed.⁶

⁵ To be more precise, Ng differentiates the intellect, which she says is often confused with the mind in Western cultural and medical traditions, from the body-spirit (2006, p. 95). Elsewhere in the same chapter, she emphasizes that she knows simultaneously in her “heart, gut and mind” (2006, p. 97), once again refusing the Cartesian dichotomy in which only the mind (and ultimately, the mind as guaranteed by a Christian god) is the only source of legitimate knowledge. Still later, she observes that in Traditional Chinese Medicine, the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of bodily organs, where organs are a Western concept that has no exact TCM equivalent or meaning, are indissociable (2006, p. 104).

⁶ For those who think this approach far-fetched, it is worth recalling that even classical theories insist on the human experience as always-also a bodily one. Thus, for instance, Karl Marx was concerned with the physical and psychic toils that working class labour imposed on the worker, as in his 1880 *Workers’ Inquiry* (Marx, 1997), which included questions on “muscular and nervous strain.” His condemnation of capitalism as unequal, exploitative social relations that reduce too many human to being mere “appendages to the machine” is an observation about the body *and* mind of the worker, both deformed through the repetitive physical and psychic labour of much factory work. Likewise, in his early works he emphasized, in masculinist language,

By mindfulness, Ng means the ability to stand at one remove from taken-for-granted ideas that are embodied in practices and relationships that become automatic. Ng (2011, p. 352) observes that the woman or babysitter who looked after her pets when she was away, for instance, gobbled down her food within minutes at mealtimes. When Ng asked about this, her babysitter rationalized her behaviour as a consequence of her job in a hospital, where she had very little time to eat (p. 352). Yet, the babysitter continued to wolf down her food, decades after retiring. In this way, she continued to embody her earlier status as a worker, when she was considered insufficiently important even to be allowed the time to eat properly. Ng argues that mindfulness, encouraged through regular practice of Qi Gong meditation, is a form of critical reflexivity that allows us to see and feel behaviours – like this woman’s automatic gobbling of food at mealtimes – that are too often unthinkingly repeated. It is not enough to know this intellectually. Clearly, Ng’s babysitter did know where her mealtime behaviour came from as she was able to explain it. However, this did not enable her to change her behaviour. To allow for this change, Ng emphasizes that we require a specific kind of mindfulness that is a mind-body-spirit consciousness. It is only when we are self-consciously aware of our mind-bodies-spirit that we are able to begin to challenge oppressions that are not just in our minds but inscribed in our bodily habits.

Importantly, in emphasizing the potential liberatory power of Qi Gong, Ng was not arguing that oppressed individuals are responsible for their own liberation, as if liberation from unequal social relations could be resolved through a personal, individual act. But Ng never subscribed to the idea that the oppressed are solely victims, a view that arguably comforts the status quo by encouraging paralysis among the oppressed. Beginning with the experiences of the oppressed, and then taking a mindful distance from those experiences – since experience never speaks directly but is inevitably filtered through dominant ideologies and unequal social relations that inscribe themselves in bodily habits – oppressed peoples and individuals can learn to critique their own oppression and then begin to undo at least their own implication in that oppression

Ng quotes a student experiencing significant health concerns, for instance, who was having difficulty maintaining a journal required for Ng’s class on embodied learning. Eventually, she moved from asking “why can’t I just write?” to the more helpful, more “compassionate” question: “what is this resistance about?” (Mathew, Wong, Ng, Woschuk & Patton, 2008, p. 358).

“real, corporeal *man*, man with his feet firmly on the solid ground, man exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature...” (Marx, 1964, p. 180, emphasis in original). I would venture that this breathing in and out of the “forces of nature” would not be unfamiliar in TCM, with its stress on self-conscious awareness of breathing as a way of becoming aware of connections between the microcosmos and the macrocosmos. Ng might have argued that a footnote like this repositions a masculinist Western theory as canonical, as if TCM can only be accepted against the standards of Western theory.

Rather than intellectually dismissing her resistance, she instead took seriously that gut refusal. In other words, the student was able to come to new self-understandings by being attentive to her embodied resistance to writing, asking what this resistance revealed and therefore what it might teach her about herself. The stubborn refusal to write, being stuck, became a source of knowledge and “possibilities,” as the student put it. Arguably, a more purely intellectual approach might see such resistance as irrational, therefore not worth investigating but only worth mastering. This hinders rather than helps a reflexive, embodied understanding of the self.

The broader implication is that through collective and personal self-reflection at once bodily, intellectual and spiritual, “consciousness can be changed” (Ng, 2011, p. 354). Hegemonic consciousness, that is, consciousness that justifies existing oppression, is not destiny. Against dominant actors who maintain that the unjust status quo is necessary, inevitable or desirable (often out of self-interest), the possibilities for social change are reclaimed. Such processes of consciousness raising are often, perhaps even usually, uncomfortable (see e.g., Mathew, Wong, Ng, Woschuk & Patton, 2008), precisely because they often challenge taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world that are widely accepted. They demand new ways of knowing and new ways of seeing.

Ng maintained that Qi Gong meditation, in particular, is a useful way of enabling individuals to recognize the construction of knowledge by embodied subjects. This is because Qi Gong facilitates the sensuous awareness of the mind, body and spirit, in particular moments and particular spaces. Given this, Ng argued that there is a natural sympathy between the practices of Qi Gong and critical, feminist theories, which like historical materialism stress the historically and spatially specific nature of dominant ideologies (2011, p. 354). This insistence on the profoundly *situated* nature of social relations, bodies and ideas, challenges common sense understandings that present existing relationships as natural and eternal, hence impervious to challenge and change. This is not, however, unique to perspectives informed by Qi Gong and TCM. Ng observes that some Indigenous feminist approaches emphasize that healing among abused Indigenous women requires songs, meditation, ceremonies and other forms of embodied practices (2011, p. 355). Oppression is experienced in the mind, body and spirit. It follows that human liberation requires a consciousness that engages not just the mind but the body and the spirit.

From the Local to the Global and From the Personal to the Political

Taken together, what do these three aspects of Ng’s research suggest? If Ng’s research particularly concerns the Canadian capitalist political economy, inevitably, given the embeddedness of these social relations within worldwide historical relations, her insights stretch beyond national borders.

In particular, as I describe above, Ng sought to unpack the everyday, intertwined – exploitative and unjust – relations of class, race, and gender within contemporary nations and within world capitalism. She was interested in the *how*, that is, in the concrete ways that these unjust relations are articulated through migration, nation, citizenship and the workplace, including in the specific workplace that is the university, at any given historical moment.

At the same time, Ng was concerned, pragmatically and politically, with ways to raise consciousness against taken-for-granted inequalities. At an individual, personal level, Ng called for a serious appreciation of Traditional Chinese Medicine as necessary to creating an embodied mindfulness. Ng argues that such embodied mindfulness is necessary, if not sufficient, to moving towards an unalienated human agency, which inevitably involves the body-spirit, as well as the intellect. Put another way, if oppression is written into the body-spirit and its habit, then liberation must include an appreciation of the body-spirit and mind. In short, Ng's sociological imagination, the linking of biography and history (Wright-Mills, 1959), is not just an intellectual, imaginative leap, but at the same time one involving consideration of the whole person, as body, mind, and spirit. Indeed, as Ng insisted, the researcher herself is body, mind and spirit, working best when she is conscious of this unity and seeks to encourage the free flow of the life force against its fragmentation.

Liberation is never, however, only an individual, personal act. Rather, inequality is social, often produced and reproduced among those committed to equality as individual persons. Therefore, it takes collective struggle to transform relations of domination. In thinking strategically about how garment workers' might obtain better working conditions within a more equitable global political economy, for instance, Ng refers to NGOs, unions, public citizens and researchers as necessary to the creation of alliances worldwide to bring about social change (Ng, 2002a, pp. 79-80). Embodied individual consciousness may be necessary for social change, but such individual-level enlightenment is not sufficient either. Rather combatting unjust inequalities is a concrete, material, that is, social activity.

In her theoretical, epistemological and methodological approach, Ng builds on Smith's institutional ethnography, with its emphasis on the ways that exploitation and injustices are reproduced in everyday social relations (Smith, 2004). This approach firmly sets social relationships at its centre, in contrast with more individualistic and behavioural approaches that emphasize unjust inequalities as (solely or mainly) the consequences of prejudiced or biased individual attitudes and behaviours. In this sense, Ng's work was firmly sociological, rather than psychologising and behavioural, even while – drawing on Gramscian definitions of hegemony – she acknowledged the powerful ways that racist and sexist common sense damage human relations (Ng, 1993, p. 194). On this latter point, Ng followed Gramsci in emphasizing that hegemonic ideas frequently arise from dominant classes and groups, in

their interests. The fiction that Chinese immigrants to Canada are uniformly wealthy, for instance, obscures the realities of working class Chinese men and women, especially undocumented workers. These workers are formally free but actually captive to poorly paid, oppressive workplaces. Attending to the lived experiences of these workers unmasks such stereotypes.

Often, unjust inequalities and oppressions exist systemically or objectively in bureaucratic categories and processes. In other words, in everyday social relations “we are not made equal” (Ng, 1993, p. 196), even if many of us – to use a problematically general term – are committed to human equality in our deepest held beliefs. The employer who pays Chinese immigrant women less than Chinese men for their work may be hewing to standards of “fairness” given that Chinese men supposedly do relatively more skilled work, in a garment industry marked by sharp, gendered divisions of labour. Such apparently neutral, objective processes mask the ways that definitions of skill are themselves gendered, while taking for granted gendered divisions of labour.

Similarly, the university administrator who refuses to support either professor or student in charged encounters between a racialized women professor and a white male student may do so in the name of neutrality. Yet such understandings of neutrality and, implicitly, fairness depend upon the social fiction that human beings hold equal status in power in the university and in society. Likewise, rejecting Qi Gong in the classroom, to instead privilege learning through texts and oral exchanges alone, may appear to be a matter of providing a good, rigorous and serious learning experience. Yet the supposed obviousness of such claims ultimately depends upon privileging Euro-centric ways of knowing, themselves dependent on culturally specific mind-body dualities. Undoing racism, sexism and other unjust inequalities therefore cannot be accomplished by focussing singularly on personal beliefs and attitudes around racism, sexism, the working class and the unemployed. Rather, they will require social scientists and activists to carefully investigate *how* such inequalities are reproduced objectively through mundane social interactions and seemingly objective institutional processes – not only subjectively, in the minds of social actors.

In undertaking such investigations, Ng rejected the idea that social science speaks, god-like, from an objective “nowhere” (see also Smith, 2004, pp. 45-69). Too often, objectivity is ideology dressed up as science. Thus, ideas supportive of dominant classes and groups seem self-evidently true, while the ideas of dominated classes and groups, who have relatively weaker access to the means of diffusing their ideas, including in the university, appear highly contestable. A graduate course on health citing Michel Foucault is acceptable, but one centering Qi Gong meditative practices will be subject to challenge, reflecting the relative power of European versus Chinese modes of thinking within the Canadian university. Certified economists describing globalization are respectable, expert and citable sources, but the lived experiences of workers who circulate across borders are merely anecdotes – by definition

inexpert and therefore, less credible sources, including in both academic literature and the mass media.

In her own work, Ng refused to take for granted this social organization of knowledge. Instead, she sought to analyse and describe the world and human relations by taking seriously the standpoint and experiences of those who are dominated and oppressed, as we have seen, particularly investigating the lived experiences of migrant women workers in Canada (on feminist “standpoint” theory see Harding, 2004). Hence, Ng’s analysis was informed by her commitment to begin with and work from the experiences of those who are often ignored and silenced because of their relatively dominated social positions.

Of course, taken together, Ng’s contributions are not without their tensions. Notably, for instance, Ng calls for us to centre the experiences and perspectives of the oppressed. The lived experiences of dominated classes and groups are important sources of knowledge about actual social relationships, often challenging common sense ideas about social world. At the same time, Ng reminds and cautions us that the oppressed do not necessarily experience their domination in straightforward ways. Rather, they may repeat and embody dominant ways of knowing, doing and being, even at a cost to their own wellbeing. In other words, they may not recognize their oppression as such. Instead, as Marx (1978, pp. 173-175) would have argued, they may accept their own oppression as natural, inevitable, and even, to reference a contemporary mask for much oppression, merited if not desirable. Indeed, Ng would argue that even those who reject the normalization and legitimation of unjust inequalities cognitively, may not be able to escape the embodied reproduction of their own oppression and domination. Hence, social justice minded researchers need to attend to the experiences and perspectives of the oppressed, but this does not mean that we suspend what we know, as researchers, about the reproduction of unjust inequalities and uncritically accept their interpretations of the world – especially insofar as these merely echo dominant ideologies. Researchers have time for reflection that many ordinary workers do not, and that reflection and analyses informed by scholarly (as well as practical) learning from prior struggles deserves to be taken seriously. At the same time, researchers might work to create spaces in which subaltern classes and groups may learn from and with each other, so that space and time for reflection – as well as struggle – are not reserved for scholars and the well-off, but made possible for each and all.

Finally, as briefly observed earlier, Ng’s work is motivated by a commitment to socially just change. Arguably, this commitment informed her efforts towards analytical rigour and clarity, since the stakes of social change do not allow for sloppy analyses that might mislead solidarity work with and for the exploited and oppressed. This rigour included a reflexive awareness of the personal costs of social change, since struggles with and for dominated actors inevitably face the countervailing powers of dominant actors whose interests are threatened by the possibilities of fundamental social

transformation. Sometimes, Ng observed, even forms of civility are dangerous for social change, as when empathetic desires to maintain harmonious relationships with “those close to us” lead us to mute our critiques of social justice (Ng, 1993, p. 200). Likewise, Ng examined the ways that dominated actors – and even we who think of ourselves as working for social justice – may reproduce unjust inequalities and relations of exploitation, despite our best intentions.

If Ng warned that living and working “against the grain” (Ng, 1993, pp. 198-201) entailed personal risks and costs she was, however, never a fatalist. Rather, she maintained that political commitments to social justice were possible and necessary. Ultimately, her work in the academy and outside of it was premised on the thesis that social justice is potentially achievable through collective struggle, even if the successes of social justice movements are never inevitable and never permanent.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for careful readings, Monique Deveaux for clear editorial advice, and David Butz for his useful recommendations throughout the review process. Your suggestions have strengthened the paper. Finally, I hope that this review encourages those who are not familiar with Roxana Ng’s contributions to read her work.

References

- Bannerji, H. (1987). Introducing racism: Notes towards an anti-racist feminism. *Resources for Feminist Research: A Canadian Journal for Feminist Scholarship*, 16(1), 10-12.
- Bannerji, H. (2000). *The dark side of the nation: Essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press.
- Campbell, M., & Gregor, F. M. (2002). *Mapping social relations: A primer in doing institutional ethnography*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press
- Collins, P. H. (2009). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Eichler, M. (1985). And the work never ends: Feminist contributions. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 22(5), 619-644.
- Gustafson, D. L. (1998). Embodied learning about health and healing: Involving the body as content and pedagogy [Qi gong]. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 17(4), 52-55.
- Hacking, I. 2002. *Historical ontology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Harding, S. (Ed.). (2004). *The feminist standpoint reader: Intellectual and political controversies*. New York: Routledge,
- Li, P. S. (1992). Race and gender as bases of class fractions and their effects on earnings. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 29(4), 488-510.
- Mackey, E. (2002) *The house of difference: Cultural politics and national identity in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Marx, K. (1964). *The economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*. D. J. Struick (Ed.). New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, K. (1978). The German ideology. In R. C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx-Engels reader* (2nd ed.) (pp. 146-200). New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

- Marx, K. (1997). A workers' inquiry. First published in *La Revue Socialiste*, April 20, 1880 (C. Price, Trans.). Retrieved from www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/04/20.htm
- Mathew, A., Wong, J., Ng, R., Woschuk, L., & Patton, M. (2008). Learning, difference, embodiment: Personal and collective transformation. *New Horizons in Education*, 56(1), 43-61.
- Ng, R. (1981). Constituting ethnic phenomenon: An account from the perspective of immigrant women. *Canadian Ethnic Studies/ Etudes Ethniques au Canada*, 13(1), 97.
- Ng, R. (1986). The social construction of immigrant women in Canada. In R. Hamilton & M. Barrett (Eds.), *The politics of diversity: Feminism, Marxism and nationalism* (pp. 269-286). London: Verso.
- Ng, R. (1993). 'A woman out of control': Deconstructing sexism and racism in the university. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 18(3), 189-205.
- Ng, R. (1994). Sexism and racism in the university: Analyzing a personal experience. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 14(2), 41-46.
- Ng, R. (2002). Freedom for whom? Globalization and trade from the standpoint of garment workers. *Canadian Women's Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme*, 21/22(4/1), 74-81.
- Ng, R. (2002b) Training for whom? For what? Reflection on the lack of training opportunities for immigrant garment workers. *New Approaches to Lifelong Learning Working Paper No. 66*. Retrieved from <http://nall.oise.utoronto.ca/res/6Roxana%20Ng.pdf>
- Ng, R. (2003). Toward an integrative approach to equity in education. In P. P. Trifonas (Ed.), *Pedagogies of difference: Rethinking education for social change* (pp. 206-219). New York: Routledge.
- Ng, R. (2006). Exploring healing and the body through traditional Chinese medicine. In J. E. Kunnie & N. I. Goduka (Eds.), *Indigenous peoples' wisdom and power: Affirming our knowledge through narratives* (pp. 95-116). Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
- Ng, R. (2007). Garment production in Canada: Social and political implications. *Studies in Political Economy*, 79, 193-211.
- Ng, R. (2009). Embodied learning and Qi Gong: Integrating the body in graduate education. In O. Oulanova, I. Stein, A. Rai, M. Hammer & P. A. Poulin (Eds.), *Within and beyond borders: Critical multicultural counselling in practice*. Toronto: Centre for Diversity in Counseling And Psychotherapy, OISE, University of Toronto. Retrieved from www.greeneconomics.net/Embodied_Learning_and_QiGong.htm
- Ng, R. (2011). Decolonizing teaching and learning through embodied learning: Toward an integrated approach. In R. Foshay (Ed.), *Valences of interdisciplinarity: Theory, practice, pedagogy* (pp. 343-345). Athabasca: Athabasca University Press.
- Ng, R., & Ramirez, J. (1981). *Immigrant women in Toronto*. Toronto: Immigrant Women's Centre.
- Ng, R., & Shan, H. (2010). Lifelong learning as ideological practice: An analysis from the perspective of immigrant women in Canada. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 29(2), 169-184.
- Razack, S. (1998). *Looking white people in the eye: Gender, race, and culture in courtrooms and classrooms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Rezai-Rashti, G. (1994). The dilemma of working with minority female students in Canadian high schools. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 14(2), 76-82.
- Shahjahan, R. A. (2014). Being 'lazy' and slowing down: Toward decolonizing time, our body, and pedagogy. *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, 47(5), 1-14.
- Sharma, N. R. (2001). On being not Canadian: The social organization of 'migrant workers' in Canada. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 38(4), 415-439.
- Sharma, N. R. (2006). *Home economics: Nationalism and the making of 'migrant workers' in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Smith, D. (1992). Sociology from women's experience: A reaffirmation. *Sociological Theory*, 10(1), 88-98.
- Smith, D. (2004). *Writing the social: Critique, theory, investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Stasiulis, D. K., & Bakan, A. B. (2005). *Negotiating citizenship: Migrant women in Canada and the global system*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- The Economist. (2007, February 8). Mutiny in the ranks. Retrieved from www.economist.com/node/8679931/print
- Thobani, S. (2007). *Exalted subjects: Studies in the making of race and nation in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Vorst, J. et al. (eds.). (1989). *Race, class, gender: Bonds and barriers*. Toronto: Garamond Press.
- Wright-Mills, C. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.