CHAPTER 5

(Un)becoming the I: A Duoethnography of Displacement

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Heading North (DJ)

If you were born in Corpus, the saying goes, you can never leave. I had left three times already, and was now preparing for my fourth exit. "You'll be back," my friends promised me. It's a languid combination of the weather and culture swirling about the brackish bays and estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico that slowly draws you back. Sitting in my office now in Virginia, a -5 degree February wind pounding my window, I feel that pull. I just did a weather check … its 70 degrees back home … in mid-winter during an Arctic blast. A friend posted a picture on Facebook of a sunny birthday party at the park along the bay, kids in shorts beating a piñata.

That summer in the sweltering south Texas heat, I was excited about the move. Finally, I was done with being a student, done with being a grad assistant. I had a real job, with benefits and health insurance. The next step in my career was calling. Assistant professor sounded pretty cool.

My family gave me clothes to brave the winter, some sweaters and jackets, shoes. Long john underwear, which at the time I thought was a joke (I actually wear them). I boxed up our house, and loaded everything into

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R.D. Sawyer, J. Norris (eds.), *Interdisciplinary Reflective Practice through Duoethnography*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-51739-5_5

a moving truck. It was going to be a long drive … three days to the north. Somewhere at a restaurant in North Carolina, I made the mistake of telling a cashier I was moving north to Virginia.

Heading South (Aaron)

"Congratulations, Dr. Bodle!" Their words came almost in unison and a flow of hugs and firm handshakes followed. I had plenty of doubt about my defense, countless sleepless nights, pacing back and forth. What followed this brief celebration was a long and arduous list of required revisions. That was late June. My "to do" list included several unchecked items: "Find free boxes on Craigslist, rent house, read something by William Styron, pack boxes, rent truck, load truck, submit finalized dissertation," and looming last on the list was my first faculty retreat in Virginia in early August.

The moist air from the Great Lakes tends to keep Michigan breezes cool and light, even when the heat reaches the 90s. That summer, however, was one of the hottest and driest on record. I struggled to imagine summer in Virginia, humid, sticky, Southern anxiety hanging in the air. Growing up in the North, my images of Virginia were a collage of slaves working in tobacco fields, angry white people resisting school integration, Southern gentry beating the heat with large umbrellas and cocktails in hand, and bloody Civil War battle scenes. I had little to no understanding of the modern South, the dissensus of political opinions, the tensions, and so on. I had generated a picture of myself as an outsider before I ever arrived in my new home.

Wouldn't it Be Easy if Displacement was Only About Geography?

We made the decision to share and discuss several personal stories dealing with displacement at various points in our lives. We need to provide a caveat: in some of these stories, language is used as a weapon. This language had to be included to honestly examine displacement using ourselves as the sites for study. The excavation of these sites can be a risky endeavor.

DJ: Displacement is an inherent part of our education system. In higher education, as our stories above illustrate, new faculty often physically displace themselves as we move to find those rare tenured-track jobs. In elementary through high school

education, the system displaces students and teachers from their homes and familial notions of the world into classrooms. So what do we want to say about displacement and its role in our educational practices?

AB: Since moving to Virginia and taking my first academic position, I've been struggling to understand my own positionality as a member of a new academic community, but also the social environment of the area.

DJ: The move here definitely initiated my reflections on how I fit into both the social and academic communities in my new home. As a professor at an institute of higher learning, and as a parent participating in the everyday routines of life in Virginia, I feel like I have to restructure my concepts of education to fit the area …

AB: What do you mean by "restructuring your concepts of education to fit the area?"

DJ: Going back all the way to when I was in kindergarten, I have moved around a lot and experienced different forms of education, from a Jewish community center, to a public Zambian school in 2nd grade, to home schooling through middle school, to a private British school in Botswana, and a public high school in south Texas. In my undergraduate work, I learned how to be an "American" teacher, but started my teaching career in Central America. At each stop along the way, teaching and learning took new shapes. I realize I must understand local contexts to be an affective educator, which is the challenge I face as displaced college professor working with displaced students in a small town in the Appalachian Mountains.

AB: I am intrigued by the idea that teaching and learning take new shapes in relationship to local contexts. Though most of my teaching experiences have occurred in the United States, I have taught in rural, urban, and suburban contexts across levels from 7th grade to graduate school. Each experience challenged me to rethink teaching and learning. The experiences also challenged me to rethink how I positioned/was positioned by my students and colleagues.

DJ: This is the restructuring, the reforming of the I/Thou (Buber, 1958) educational relationship often maintained by public schools, into a mutually reciprocal relationship during

teaching and learning processes. I don't mean to say that I abandon my own notions of education and of home, but that I reflect on my understanding and teaching practice to intertwine them with what I learn in my new place. So, my answer to my initial question is that it's essential to explore how one displaces/is displaced and the inherent pulls and pushes as we reflect upon our educational practices in a new place. In the case of our moving stories, we must remember this is an empowered displacement, a displacement we chose for a variety of reasons related to lifestyle and career.

AB: Of course. As highly educated, white, male, heterosexual westerners it is difficult to imagine contexts in which we would not be coming from a position of relative privilege and power. This is particularly relevant to our most recent relocation stories. We have, however, experienced contexts in which our sense of belonging is thrown into question or even met with direct opposition. I think this is exactly why it is necessary to interrogate those displacement experiences as we reflect on our teaching practices.

DJ: I recall my teaching experiences in south Texas right after Katrina, illustrating a very different type of displacement. Corpus Christi received a couple thousand refugee children from New Orleans. They were housed on the floor of a conference center. These students were transported, much to teachers' chagrin, to various schools throughout the city. These students became scapegoats for disciplinary and academic issues. A common refrain became, "Oh well you know, I have to work with those students from New Orleans." A couple of months later, another hurricane appeared in the Gulf. The city stated a mandatory evacuation, much earlier than ever before, and the refugees had to be shipped to another city. The hurricane never approached Corpus Christi, and the city didn't have to deal with the students from Katrina anymore.

AB: I argue that human experiences like the ones you are describing are precisely why it is worth the effort to interrogate our own lived experiences of displacement and belonging as teachers and learners. We will never have the capacity to experience what those displaced by Katrina and post-Katrina policies experienced. That said, our experiences offer glimpses,

gaps in the walls created by the I/Thou dichotomies so prevalent in discourses of teaching and learning.

DJ: That's why the I/Thou relationship is so important to consider in this type of work. In our case, we displaced ourselves. The language used in that Katrina story is key. For example, the students were housed, were transported, were shipped, they were referred to as refugees. In the eyes of many, they lost their humanity and became just a problem to be solved, and by that I mean gotten rid of.

AB: I agree. I see and hear the same types of dehumanization in discourse associated with the civil war in Syria, refugees and immigrants in the USA and Europe, and really any other group of people who are displaced globally and locally. Rather than perpetuating efforts to "get rid of" or further displace our fellow humans, I see our duoethnographic work on this issue as an opportunity to examine points of intersection and our points of departure with one another. We are at home in the ways in which we are positioned by our privilege. These conversations can disrupt the numbing comfort our privilege generates for us.

DJ: That reminds me …

The classroom was a windowless red brick rectangle, with a beige laminated floor. One of the florescent lights in the bank dividing the moldy ceiling tiles flickered. Rows of computers on long folding tables snaked through the room. A tenth grade design class using an autocad program taught us how to create blueprints for houses.

I was working on the master bedroom. Every day after school, I worked with my dad trimming new houses. My dad was a carpenter. One of my jobs was installing the internal doors, particularly closet doors. I was used to reading blueprints and enjoyed making them in the design class. The teacher, smelling of cigarettes and old coffee, hovered over me a moment.

He pointed at the screen. "That closet door is too small."

"*Excuse me.*" *I said, my concentration broken.*

"*They don't make doors that narrow.*" *He said walking off.*

I had just installed five doors exactly that width in a new home, the previous afternoon. I didn't get a chance to make my case. He was already at his desk, feet perched on the desk, reading a newspaper. I didn't change the closet door. In the blueprint notes,

I added the door manufacturer and the door's specs for the necessary rough opening as well as the door itself.
I notice my classmates next to me were gathered together, hunched over, snickering.
"*She's so hot,*" *one of them said.*
Another boy glanced over his shoulder. His eyes locked on to mine. He whispered something to the group. They turned to me.
"*What do you think?*" *they asked.*
"*About what?*" *I said.*
"*Dude, he's been doing the work.*" *One of the boys said to another. The first boy said,* "*Are you gay?*"
I didn't know what to say.
"*Dude, you better not say you're a fucking fag!*"

DJ: In that moment, we can say I was displaced by both the teacher and my classmates. That teacher displaced me from my personal funds of knowledge and experiences; he assumed I was just some kid who didn't know anything. To my classmates, I was an Other and since I was white and [a] male who looked like them, but I didn't check out the magazine. So the only explanation they could come up with for my Otherness was that I was gay. Neither the teacher nor my classmate perceived my humanity, my life story that was just as complex and complicated as theirs. I am reminded of the term *sonder* created in the *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* (Koenig, 2015):

> sonder: n. the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own—populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness—an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you'll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk. (n.p.).

To them I was that extra sitting in the background.

AB: I think you were an extra to them. But that doesn't limit how threatened you must have felt at that moment. Schooling creates an environment that often reinforces otherness. Classrooms are populated by a mix of students, often

assembled via computer algorithms generated by various factors, including test scores and GPAs, or even worse by gerrymandered school district lines. Teachers and students are forced, if only for a limited time, to find ways to negotiate these contexts the best they can. Unfortunately, what tends to get lost in the mix is the humanity of each person involved.

DJ: I was threatened. In my story, lost to them, I was the loner in that room dealing with having just moved to that city. I was new to the American culture of high school. I must admit that the reason I didn't engage in their conversation at that time was simply a lack of awareness and understanding of how to engage in American "bro-ness," not because I was standing up to normative discourse around women.

As a teacher, years later, that experience informs how I interact with my students and how I try to encourage them to interact with each other. Each of us are the center of complex narratives. I forgot this early in my teaching career. As a fifth grade teacher, I was getting frustrated with a student who was perpetually two to three hours late. Until I realized, that the student was waking up himself up each morning, waking up his two younger siblings, fixing breakfast for them, and getting them out the door and to school. In his shoes, I would have never made it to the school building.

AB: In your story about the boys in the autocad class and in your story about your student, the common thread seems to be our assumptions about others who appear "normal" to us.

DJ: I agree. By appear "normal," I take that to mean look and act like me. We often fall into the trap of placing "those who look and act like me" within a specific narrative of what life is and should be. In this way, we displace each other as insiders and/or outsiders of the status quo.

AB: That reminds of a moment that displaced my normality.

When I was a high school senior, I could easily be described as "popular" with friends from various levels of the clique-social strata. I had never lived outside my hometown and had built a good reputation with most of the people I encountered, even those outside my close group of friends. At some point during my senior year, I befriended Nick, a freshman kid who had grown up rough, seen a lot, and had a beautiful view of life as result.

Fair or not, I remember thinking of him then as a "diamond in the rough." As a freshman, I'm sure Nick looked up to me as a senior, but I doubt he knew that I admired and respected him equally. One morning, on the way to school, the driver of the car Nick was in blew through a stop sign and was hit broadside. Nick was killed instantly. Needless to say, I was crushed to hear of his death and wandered through the remainder of the day in a sort of haze. That evening, I stood around a campfire with friends, reflecting on the tragedy of Nick's untimely death. Somewhere in the midst of my teenage eulogy to Nick, my friends, devout Protestants, all held hands and prayed for the salvation of Nick's soul. Raised Catholic and rapidly becoming agnostic, I was uncomfortable with their outward expression of their faith, but I kept my discomfort to myself. Toward the end of their prayer, one of my closest friends prayed that Nick had avoided eternal damnation by accepting Jesus Christ in his heart. The words burned me deeply, and I could hold my silence any longer.

"What makes you think God would send a kid like Nick to burn in hell? You didn't even know him." My friend's response rattled my being.

"If he has not accepted the Lord, he is destined to eternal hell."

"Well," I hissed, "I guess that means I'm right behind him, then!"

"We worry about you, Bodle. I love you and I see the good in you, but I pray for you, too. I don't want you to end up like Nick."

The words confirmed for me that for 18 years I had been silently marginalized by my friends who saw me as an "Other" in need of saving. A lifelong resident of the very ground I stood on, I had been outcast.

"Fuck you." I said with resignation. I kicked some dirt into the fire and walked away. Their words reinforced what I had come to know already. It was time to leave for good.

What Does It Mean to Be From a Sociocultural Place?

DJ: Both your story and mine illustrate the ubiquity of displacement. As white males, we both looked the part. In your case, you were a long-term member of your community. In mine,

I was a recent arrival. I had wanted to feel like I was "from here," and I initially thought I could perform in such a way that would gain me entry into a mutual relationship with those around me. There was a disappointment about coming to what I thought was home; I looked like them but I wasn't one of them. When I consider your story, I can't blame my displacement on the fact that my family moved every couple of years.

AB: The ways we use the phrase "from here" has always been interesting to me. We take ownership of spaces based upon our time and experiences within them. In my story, I felt strongly that I was "from here." How dare my friends displace me from my home. That said, I had always felt slightly marginalized in my hometown. My family was not particularly religious, so I was somewhat different from the vast majority of my peers. Your story and mine are inherently different, however. We were almost the same age, experiencing the challenge of belonging associated with adolescence and early adulthood in western society, but you were walking in and I was walking away. It was easy for me to turn around and walk out.

DJ: That was the challenge for me. Coming back to the States as a 15-year-old boy, I had not expected to be displaced. In my mind, I was being re-placed, that is returning to the place where I belonged.

AB: During your time in Botswana, did you ever develop a sense of belonging? In that context you were visibly different from many people you must have encountered on a regular basis.

DJ: It's interesting. In hindsight, I belonged. I had my group of friends and classmates. My teachers understood who I was. I lacked a long-term presence in that community. I looked different, spoke with a different accent, so difference was expected. My classmates engaged with me, and when I was displaced by those around me, I expected it and understood why. At the time, I did not understand what "coming home to America" meant and the sociocultural implications for me. I had to deal with being labeled, weird, racist, or fag. Worse yet, I began labeling those perceived as Others. In the context of my community in Botswana, what I did not understand at the time was that I was an Other in a community of others.

No one had the same language or culture. I made the mistake of displacing everyone into the same group and myself outside it.

Jamal's family owned a fast food restaurant. When school was out, he would work with his dad wrapping orders and placing them in small paper bags with plastic ware and napkins. It was one of the few restaurants in the small desert town in Botswana. At lunch time, a line of people would form, stretching from the cashier out the double doors onto the sidewalk.

One afternoon, Jamal and I were going to play squash. We made plans for me to meet him at the restaurant. The typical line had formed during the short lunch break. I walked beside the line, past all the hungry people and up to the double doors. As I reached for the door handle, a shout rang out behind me.

"*Hey!*"

I turned. A man in his late twenties towered over me. His white shirt was blotched with sweat and his worn tie was thrown over his shoulder.

"*Don't think you can cut just because you're white!*" *he said.*

The others in the line murmured agreement.

"*Uh,*" *I stammered*, "*I am just going to meet my friend.*"

"*Well, you need to wait just like everyone else to get your food.*"

"*I'm not going to eat …*"

"*Don't try to bullshit me, boy …*"

Fortunately, Jamal came striding out the door. We grabbed our bags and walked away. I walked rather quickly. I heard the man chuckling as I crossed the street.

AB: Your story illustrates how colonial history, media, and culture inform our perceptions of those we perceive as others, who belongs, who doesn't, and why. We are all guilty of these misunderstandings on a regular basis, we forget that our different experiences, viewpoints, and histories do not have to divide us. There are limits to this "togetherness," however. For example, extremist ideologies and hegemonic power can limit our opportunities to see humanity across our differences.

DJ: This brings to mind Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) and her talk on the *Danger of a Single Story*. These single stories founded on history and reinforced through the media can reinscribe I/Thou relationships as we interact with others.

On my first trip to Namibia, my family had to pass through United Nation peacekeeping checkpoints stationed outside every town. White armored vehicles with a giant, black "U.N." painted on the side patrolled the roads. Tensions were high, I could tell by the way my dad gripped the steering wheel with strained knuckles. Soldiers in camo fatigues and blue berets waved at me when I stuck my head out the back window of my family's Land Cruiser. Further down the road, South African troops in their maroon berets were not quite as friendly. Namibia was gaining independence from that apartheid government.

The heat stiffened my T-shirt, caked with desert dust. It had been a long journey down simmering caliche roads. The wheels of the Land Cruiser tossed plumes of white dust into the air and into the open windows of the truck. The air conditioning had stopped working years before. Sweat evaporated instantly. When we finally arrived at the small Namibian town hot and tired, and probably dehydrated, I convinced my parents to let me go to the local swimming pool. It was a short walk away.

The small blue pool, surrounded by a chain link fence, had a whitewashed, cement block bathhouse to one side. Faded letters proclaimed "whites only." But the times had changed … recently … and a small group of young, black, African boys clustered together in one corner. I entered the pool and dove in. The water streamed across my skin and washed away the salt and dirt. Swimming to the edge, I hauled myself out, and sat alone, eyes closed with my legs dangling in the cool water.

"Where are you from?"

I opened my eyes, a group of three Afrikaner boys stood over me. They were in their mid-teens, slightly older than me.

"What?" I asked.

"You American?" they countered. The question contained a hint of hostility.

"Um … yes."

They looked at each other.

"What part? Where are you from?" the oldest one asked.

"Texas." I replied, getting to my feet.

"Texas? … That's in the south?" another boy said.

"The south? Yeah …"

Smiles started to bloom across their faces, "You got screwed."

I was confused, "*Screwed*?"
"*Yeah*, *you know*, *your civil war. Just like us. You guys in the South*, *you knew how to treat kafers.*"
They patted me enthusiastically on the arm. The black boys were looking at us. They gathered their things and hastily began walking for the gate.

Does Displacement Rewrite How You Think of Yourself? In Other Words, Did You (Un)become the I? Or, Do Others (Un)become it for You?

DJ: In that moment, I was displaced by each of the groups in that setting. It was also a moment when my own personal narrative was disrupted. Until that moment I hadn't considered my sociopolitical, geographic placement.

AB: It can be unsettling when people identify something about us they feel reflects them. This is particularly unsettling when we see ourselves as different from that other person. After my first year of teaching, a year that, despite my best efforts, led to my reversion to authoritarianism and traditional methods, I had a similar unsettling encounter. I can remember packing up a few things on my last required teacher workday and heading toward the classroom door. On my way to the car I ran into my principal, a man who believed strongly in the merits of corporal punishment, humiliation, and other reprehensible methods of student interaction. Needless to say, I had little respect for him. He explained that he had made a point to catch me before I left for the summer. He wanted to tell me that he was disappointed with many decisions he had made that year, but he was so pleased with his decision to hire me for he saw something of himself in my approach to my work. I was crushed. I felt I had become the very thing that I had entered the profession to avoid. I can honestly say that conversation sparked a lifelong process of self-reflection and slow but certain growth as an educator, but also as a human being.

DJ: The moment I realized I was participating in the colonial project forced me to consider how I was placing myself and displacing my students in the educational process.

The school house was a blue cinderblock building with a tin roof. The windows didn't have glass and the Caribbean sea breeze would begin to blow the humid air through at about 10:00 a.m. every morning. It rained at 4:00 p.m. almost every day. My classroom consisted of 20 wooden desks and a chalkboard. The lights no longer worked.

Class began at 7:00 a.m., and my students were typically inside waiting for me. I enthusiastically began my English lessons, envisioning how I was teaching them skills to improve their lives. The polite students stared at me. Other students did what young students typically do when they are bored and see no point to the lessons being handed down to them. They chatted or threw paper wads at each other. Those students did not consider me their real teacher. I was just some guy, some foreigner, passing through.

This went on for a couple of months, and I began to feel disappointed in myself.

I knew I wasn't reaching those students in the way I wanted. But I shouldn't have been surprised. I wasn't letting them reach me anymore than I reached them.

I figured, if nothing else, I would get as much out of the experience for myself as I could. I began to play football/soccer with the young men who gathered every evening on the beach. That led to me playing with the local team as they traveled to other villages on the weekends. Friendships developed.

In a life changing conversation situated on an empty beach as the sun sank, one of my new friends asked me a series of questions. "What are you doing here?" he asked, followed by, "Why do you think you need to teach us that?" My ineffective response prompted him to ask "How would that help our life?"

DJ: He was content in his story. He was a fisherman, son and grandson to fishermen. Early, every morning, he sailed his small boat with his father out into the shimmering blue waters of the Caribbean and returned to shore with his family's meal for that day. Really, why did I presume he needed my knowledge? In that jungle, I needed what he knew and understood, not the other way around. I wouldn't last very long without this community. After that conversation, we developed a relationship of teaching and learning as our roles reversed and

reversed again. As I learned from him, he began to learn from me. We were both learners and somewhere in that relationship, a teacher existed. As I became a public school teacher in the United States with lists of standardized content piled on my desk, that conversation has replayed in my head. But this time, it's my American students asking me, "Why do you think I need this?" "How will this help my life?" And I remember that blurring of teacher and learner roles and how much that fisherman and I learned of the world from each other.

AB: The help narrative is prevalent across contexts in education. My students regularly fall victim to this narrative when they talk about the desire to help children learn, especially when they hope to work with children of marginalized backgrounds. I recognize this so readily because, through my teaching practice, I also maintain the discourse of Othering embedded in the help narrative.

Though I had substitute taught at Central several times before, this was my first long-term gig since leaving my first teaching job two years prior. My triumphant return to the classroom meant far more to me than it did anyone else in the room. I was beaming as I walked into the room, eager to meet Mrs. Brown's English class, no, my English class. I had greeted several students as they wandered in and found their seats, laughed it up, or beat boxed through the bell and after I walked in and faced the group. Things quieted a bit and I happily introduced myself as their new English teacher, Mr. Bodle. I explained what little I knew of Mrs. Brown's medical situation and her uncertain return. I shared a little about me, and how I had fortuitously ended up in their classroom. Nothing I said seemed to change the quiet resignation on their mostly brown faces. I asked them to introduce themselves and had no volunteers, so I called on a young woman sitting at the front of the room, who I later learned was named Natalie, who had appeared to be listening intently to my smiley introduction.

"*They didn't tell you why we're in here*?"

"*No. This is Junior English, right*?" *I replied.*

"*It's English R*," *came from the back of the room.* "*Remedial!*"

"*None of us passed I-step tests last year. They put us dumb kids together. When did you say Mrs. Brown was comin' back*?"

"*I don't know, I know about as much as you do at this point.*"
"*We're in trouble then!*" *someone shouted at the back of the room to a flood of laughter.*
I made it through the rest of the day of introductions and a short activity. I feared I was in over my head but I was determined to get this teaching assignment right. The next day I was to introduce our first class reading, a play called "Monster" by Walter Dean Myers. Knowing the book and its themes well, I felt it would be a great way to get students interested. I spent some time unpacking some key issues in the book, and trying to spark some discussion so students could make personal connections to the reading. When I felt we were ready, I called on Sam to pass out the books to his classmates. Sam was a tall, lanky young man who sat slumped at the front of the room. He reluctantly unslumped himself from his desk and slowly made his way around the room dropping a book on each desk, talking with friends and cutting up along the way. Earlier that day I had overheard Sam talking with a friend about how Mrs. Brown often led discussions by throwing a ball to students and allowing them to throw it to others who wanted a turn to speak. I decided to follow Mrs. Brown's example and try this for our first round of reading in Monster.
I tossed the ball to Sam to get us started. As it floated toward him, I watched his eyes track it all the way to the gold numbers on his Pacers jersey. His arms remained motionless, never attempting to catch the ball. He looked up and stared in my eyes.
"*You ain't Mrs. Brown. You ain't never gonna be her, either.*"
The ball dropped. It bounced lightly on the reddish carpet and rolled to an awkward stop where the leg of Sam's desk met the floor.

AB: The help narrative had informed my enthusiasm for this temporary position, the choices I made to embody Mrs. Brown's teaching style, and my failed efforts to connect with my students. These weren't conscious decisions at the time, the hegemony of the help narrative made it almost impossible to realize what I was doing. By approaching the people in Mrs. Brown's class as Others in need of help, I had already reinforced the I/Thou relationship before I ever walked through the door on the first day.

DJ: Our stories reveal the hegemony of the help narrative. As I reflect on our conversation, I see the prevalence of the outsider/insider discourse reinforced by teacher education. Our experiences suggest that the insider/outsider dichotomy is not always neat and tidy, but rather fluid and dynamic as we often adopt both status simultaneously. In Africa the assumption was that I was always the obvious outsider because of the way I spoke and looked. When I came to the USA, I seemed to be an insider initially. The Americans I interacted with approached me as an insider, but when I didn't live up to their expectations of "American-ness," their placement of me switched to default reasons for me being different.

AB: The moment the ball hit Sam's chest in Mrs. Brown's room it was obvious to me I was an outsider. I had a lot of work to do to convince my new students that I was worthy of them placing me within their community. In stark contrast, the moment I stood around the fire with my friends, I had spent a lifetime believing I was an insider. I always felt I was a bit different, but never realized that others perceived me that way. In that instant, my understanding of who I was in that place was changed forever. I was an outsider in my own home. Through reflecting on these experiences, I've come to view them as moments when I forged a critical lens.

DJ: Would you say that you forged the critical lens as your experienced these stories? Or, would you say that those experiences forged the lens within you? As we tell our stories, I wonder how much agency I had in the way I responded. In the lived-in moment of our stories, we made small choices that over time lead to the development of certain ways of looking at the world.

AB: The memories of those moments thread themselves into new experiences, forming a braid rather than a lens. We don't look through our memories as a lens, we experience them as lines of thought weaving together, unraveling, and rebraiding.

DJ: Our agency comes in as we, as you say, unravel and rebraid our memories and related perceptions. When we write about memories of our stories, we assert our privilege and power

over our experiences. We attempt to craft who we are to place ourselves, as Geertz (1998) recommends, as the convincing I with a sharply focused lens.

AB: Probing these experiences gives us the opportunity to rethink and reconsider ways we are displaced and displace others in our everyday practices as researchers, educators, and people. What does it mean to be a convincing I? For me, becoming a convincing I results from having reflected deeply about who I am in a given physical and temporal context. When I'm able to convey the complexity of my placement within a context, I have become a convincing I to my audience.

DJ: Before you become a convincing I, you have to unbecome the I. When I reflect on my roles I think about my actions, my ways of thinking and being, and then I make adjustments to those things. You deconstruct in order to reconstruct another I. Every moment of displacement presents an opportunity to unbecome the I and critically investigate who we are to ourselves and others. In teaching, we ask our students to (un) become the I when we ask them to reflect.

AB: It's one thing to voluntarily take this process on for yourself, but its another when as educators we require our students to displace who they believe themselves to be. I'm uncomfortable with how easily I slip into seducing my students into accepting my critical epistemology. I don't buy the idea that we are just creating contexts where students voluntarily take part in disrupting their previously held beliefs, I think lines of power frame the reflective process in the classroom context.

DJ: I think the use of the word "seduction" applies perfectly to this situation. This comes back to the common critique of public education as a tool for brainwashing students. My response to your point about the reflective process is that reflection is an integral part to learning. Learning is not just about gathering information, it is constructive and involves interacting with ideas and people. But as I consider this conversation, I must ask myself: is it ethical to persuade someone to (un)become the I?

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