

# Transnationalizing Critical Intercultural Communication

*Legacy, Relevance, and Future*



Edited by Ahmet Atay, Shinsuke Eguchi,  
and Gloria Nziba Pindi



PETER LANG

The research of international topics and writing about cultural identity formations does not automatically equate to transnationalizing intercultural communication. Studies often perpetuate a hegemonic and U.S.-centric way of doing research, and by default doing intercultural communication scholarship. Thus, intercultural communication and critical intercultural communication (CIC) has not yet fully experienced a transnational turn. Instead, by considering the ideas of nation-state, nationality, and citizenship through theoretical frameworks that are developed by non-U.S.-scholars and transnational scholars within U.S. academia, this book addresses the citationality politics present in the field.

While past studies of critical intercultural communication have been international in scope, with researchers from international backgrounds, their visibility and voice have remained limited in CIC. To achieve transnational inclusivity with CIC, the authors of this book advocate for the use of critical and cultural multi-methods or fusion of them or incorporation of new hybrid methodologies to answer complex, multidimensional, intersectional, and transnational issues and represent those lives and stories.

Collectively, the authors address different topics that help further conceptualize transnational critical intercultural communication. They all call attention to examining global cultural disparities, mediated transnationalities, and transnational oppressive cultural and political structures. Many chapters offer narrative-based writing or autoethnographic methods to unearth these issues and spotlight oppressive structures and inequalities. This book will be essential reading for scholars of CIC and those interested in how transnational cultural practices, regulations, expectations, and limitations continuously shape and reshape the lives of transnational individuals.

**Ahmet Atay** (Ph.D., Southern Illinois University-Carbondale) is Professor of Global Media and Communication at the College of Wooster. His research focuses on diasporic experiences and cultural identity formations; political and social complexities of city life, such as immigrant and queer experiences; the usage of new media technologies in different settings; and the notion of home; representation of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in media; queer and immigrant experiences in cyberspace, and critical communication pedagogies. He is the author of *Globalization's Impact on Identity Formation: Queer Diasporic Males in Cyberspace* (2015) and the co-editor of several books. His scholarship appears in a number of journals and edited books.

**Shinsuke Eguchi** (Ph.D., Howard University) is Professor in the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of New Mexico. Their research interests focus on global and transnational studies, queer of color critique, intersectionality and racialized gender politics, Asian/American studies, and performance studies. They are the author of *Asians Loving Asians: Sticky Rice Homoeroticism and Queer Politics* (Peter Lang, 2022). Their recent solo-authored and co-authored work will appear or has appeared for publication in *Communication, Culture, and Critique*, *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *Review of Communication*, *Western Journal of Communication*, *Women's Studies in Communication*, and *Journal of Homosexuality*. They are co-editor with Satoshi Toyosaki of *Intercultural Communication in Japan* (2017), coeditor with Bernadette Marie Calafell of *Queer Intercultural Communication* (2020), and coeditor with Bernadette Marie Calafell and Shadee Abdi of *De-Whitening Intersectionality* (2020). They are also book review editor of *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*.

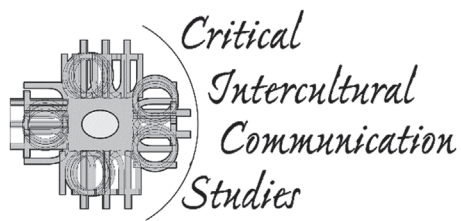
**Gloria Nziba Pindi** (Ph.D., Southern Illinois University) is Associate Professor of Communication Studies at California, State University San Marcos (CSUSM). Her research interests focus on critical intercultural communication, Black/Transnational feminism, performance studies, and auto/ethnographic methods. She attempts to examine various parameters that impact the performance of the self in transnational contexts around issues of globalization, migration, and identity negotiation with a critical approach to social justice. Her work has been featured in *Cultural Studies <> Critical Methodologies*, *Review of Communication*, *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, *Women's Studies in Communication* and *Women & Language*.

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Thomas K. Nakayama and Bernadette Marie Calafell  
*General Editors*

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# ***Introduction: Transnational Arrivals and Departures: New Directions in Critical Intercultural Communication***

AHMET ATAY, GLORIA PINDI, & SHINSUKE EGUCHI

## ***How and Why Did We Arrive at IC and This Particular Project***

In so many ways, this edited book is about arrivals and departures. It is about transnational journeys arriving at intercultural communication (IC), and this book is about departures, departures from IC's traditions, frameworks, and methodologies. There are also parts of this project that negotiates and renegotiates IC's history. While, to a degree, we honor IC's past, regardless of how contentious that past was, we facilitated much-needed departures. These departures are empowering because they are guiding us to our new academic destinations. These are welcome extensions since critical intercultural communication (CIC) scholarship has been facing some stagnation and trying to negotiate its borders and boundaries within communication studies.

Our arrival stories are different. First, we came to the U.S. chasing our dreams of obtaining higher education, and perhaps achieving the "American dream." We did not really consider ourselves as settler colonials at the time. We were international students trying to adapt, survive, belong, and somehow make it in a system that was not necessarily meant for us (hooks, 1994; Calafell, 2005; Pindi, 2020). We each took different academic journeys and faced different (sometimes similar) issues and obstacles. Our race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and location (and different intersections) shaped our academic and personal journeys. They were also shaped by the passports we carried and visas we held. Our nationalities uniquely shaped how we were

treated in the academia and legal system. Due to the types of passports we carried, our arrival and border control experiences were different. We were asked divergent questions, and our bodies were judged differently. The length of our visas was variant because of these passports. Same passports also provided different opportunities (or lack thereof) in the academic job market. Being an international student and international scholar presents both challenges and rewards. We faced and experienced both, sometimes individually and sometimes together. Our interests in intercultural communication grew because of the personal experiences we had, the situations we witnessed, and the types of questions we asked about ourselves and the world around us. They informed one another, shaping what kind of things we read and wrote as international students.

We also arrived at critical intercultural communication differently because we took different academic routes. We studied at different programs, or in the same program in different time frames (in Gloria and Ahmet's case) and focused on different sub-areas of our discipline. However, critical intercultural communication has been the invisible connector that linked us during the last two decades. While scholars we studied in our institutions left great and small impacts on our thinking, our experiences and curiosities led us to ask questions about our identities, cultures around us, and transnational, in-between, and hybrid experiences. In some ways, we were trying to make sense of ourselves and our transnational experiences in the literature we were reading, courses we were taking, and essays we were writing. But what kind of question were we asking? What were we after? The answer is simple but a complicated one at the same time. We were inquiring about in-between and hybrid experiences, transnational identity constructions and performance, transnational power structures, and political and cultural forces that were consistently influencing our experiences in the U.S., our home cultures, and other locations we were occupying. The questions we were asking were larger than our own individualized experiences. We were trying to make sense of transnational life-making. Simultaneously, we were also noticing the gaps in CIC scholarship about transnationality.

Our journeys of arriving at CIC, being part of it, experiencing or embodying some of its concepts and theories, and shaping it as transnational scholars reflect CIC's history over the last 20 years. In so many ways, we are the two-way mirrors reflecting how CIC was shaped but also how we shaped CIC's recent trajectory.

The seeds of this project were planted years ago. Since the 2000s, we have been individually writing about transnational issues, theorizing cultural identity from transnational perspectives, and articulating a need for CIC to

urgently take a transnational approach. Most of our previous research works towards articulating transnational approaches for CIC scholarship. Over the years we presented our work at various national and international conferences. First, our paths crossed at these conferences, and then our research began to intersect, overlap, and mingle. While we presented our work on the same panels, our scholarship began appearing in the same edited books or journal special issues. Along the way, we became friends and confidants who supported each other through the academic hurdles. We talked about our transnational experiences, our intersectional identities, and the challenges that we faced in the discipline and U.S.-higher education as transnational scholars. We spent years planting the seeds of this book, both academically and personally. Hence, it is the product of mutual frustrations, support, academic curiosity, and a desire to change the discipline to achieve more inclusivity. We wanted to make transnational scholars' voices be heard.

Although we work at different institutions in different states, we began using conferences as a place of arrival for our mutual and collaborative academic life-making. We became friends at these conferences. We listened to each other's presentations and sometimes presented our work on the same panels. We began connecting our mutual interests and weaving our stories to formulate the logics of this book. This book is about carving out an academic space for new arrivals and departures within the critical intercultural communication discipline.

### ***History of IC and CIC***

Intercultural communication (IC) has a long and rich history in the United States dating back to Edward T. Hall's 1959 book, *The Silent Language*. Our goal in this book is not to revisit this history in great detail. Instead, we provide a brief synopsis to explain why we are departing from conventional IC scholarship. IC as a subfield emerged closely tied to linguistics and allied with interpersonal communication, privileging face-to-face interactions among people from different cultural backgrounds. This is why, outside of U.S. academic circles, IC often falls within the domain of linguistics and communication programs. At the same time, researchers who employ critical theory, cultural studies, and continental philosophical traditions are mostly housed in media and cultural studies departments. In his book, *Critical Communication Studies*, Hanno Hardt (1992) discussed the different beginning points of communication studies, including "cultural" communication, in the U.S. tradition.

Instead of identifying the Marxist or critical theory tradition as the beginning of the history of IC, IC scholars often point to Hall's 1959 book as the starting point. In her foundational essay, Leeds-Hurwitz (1990) explains that IC emerged immediately after WW2 "from the occurrences at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the U.S. Department of State (DOS) between 1946 and 1956" (p. 262). At that time, the DOS trained diplomats and military servicepeople destined to serve at foreign posts, helping to acclimatize them to the cultures into which they were stepping. As Leeds-Hurwitz writes, "Because intercultural communication grew out of the need to apply abstract anthropological concepts to the practical world of the foreign service diplomats, this early focus on training American diplomats led to the later, now standard use of intercultural communication training" (p. 8). Hence, training approaches dominated most of the IC research of the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond. According to Leeds-Hurwitz, only with the work of Gudykunst (1983) did IC begin to discuss theoretical approaches. Although IC scholars such as Gudykunst and Yun Kim developed cultural theories, they operated within the social scientific paradigm. Therefore, most of their work was focused on the cultural adaptation of immigrants, U.S. sojourners' experiences in different countries, or the experiences of international students within U.S. higher education. Even though some of this research employed ethnography of communication methods, most researchers utilized quantitative research methods.

The social scientific foundations of traditional IC research were not particularly concerned with notions of power, oppressive structures, intersectionality of cultural identities, agency, or social justice. While some of these issues were addressed in the contexts of rhetorical texts and speeches, none of this work was based on narrative or performance methods, auto-methodologies, visual or media analysis, or critical ethnographies. During the late 1990s, a group of independent scholars, some trained in rhetorical studies or ethnographic traditions, such as Thomas K. Nakayama, Alberto Gonzalez, Lisa A. Flores, Victoria Chen, and others, advocated for a much-needed paradigm shift in IC. The history of this movement might be traced back to Molefi Asante and his arguments about the notion of culture within communication studies. As Halualani, Mendoza, Drzewiecka (2009) write:

Interestingly, Molefi Kete Asante (then Arthur Smith) was part of an earlier push by U.S. rhetorical scholars in the 1970s and 1980s who examined rhetorical speakers, discourses, and contexts primarily through the lens of cultural and historical context. This movement in rhetorical studies overlapped with and informed the arguments made by Asante (1980) and other intercultural scholars

(Gonzalez & Peterson, 1993) to engage the historical contextualization and formation of culture and intercultural communication (p. 20).

Following Asante's call, several scholars began adopting contextual and historical approaches to study culture within the domain of IC. Some of this work was published in *Our Voices: Essays in Culture, Ethnicity, and Communication. An Intercultural Anthology*, edited by Alberto Gonzalez, Marsha Houston, and Victoria Chen (1994). In some ways, this collection marks the beginning of the critical turn in IC. Soon after the publication of this book, IC scholars at Arizona State University (ASU), namely Thomas K. Nakayama, Judith N. Martin, and Lisa A Flores, began charting new directions within IC. Besides their collective work, the work of their students generated new discussions and directions. Dreama Moon's (1996) work on historical contextualization of culture in communication, Lily Mendoza's (2001, 2002) work on power, history, and diasporic Pilipino experiences, Rona Tamiko Halualani's (1998, 2000) work on intersections between culture and ethnicity, Jolanta Drzewiecka's (1999) work on cultural identity formations, and other work emerging from ASU began shaping the direction of critical intercultural communication (CIC). During this time, *Readings in Intercultural Communication* (1998) was published, edited by Nakayama, Martin, and Flores, which featured the work of several of the abovenamed scholars and others.

The first generation of CIC scholars called attention to the importance of studying history in relation to culture. Specifically, they were interested in interrogating the notion of power within IC. They also studied racial and ethnic minorities, their struggles, and their cultural identities (Alexander, 2006; Harris, 2003). Complementing this important historical perspective, contemporaneous scholars, such as Mary Jane Collier (1998) and Gust Yep (1998), examined cultural identity formations through an IC lens. Halualani, Mendoza, and Drzewiecka's (2009) words capture the collective work of the first-generation CIC scholars. They postulate:

These works at this critical juncture underscore how historical context constitutes and shapes the very foundation and formation of culture, cultural identity, and the communication practices and expressions situated within cultures. The central and powerful role of history is foregrounded through specific examples set in specific historical and political moments. (p. 23)

While their collective voices shifted the terrain of IC, they also inspired a new generation of scholars. During the 2000s, these young scholars came to CIC with differing interests and ideas.

Throughout the 2000s, a new crop of CIC scholars was connecting IC with other fields not only to build transdisciplinary bridges but also to answer various and deeply layered questions by applying different methodologies. For example, Bernadette Marie Calafell's (2005, 2007) work on race and Latina/o/x communication drew upon performance methodologies. Similarly, Bryant Keith Alexander (2006, 2010) combined performance studies methodologies, critical ethnography, and autoethnography to examine Black identities. Additionally, Radhika Gajjala's (2002, 2004, 2006) work on new media, diaspora, and feminism pushed the boundaries of CIC toward media and diaspora studies as she made the case for cyber ethnography. Hence, this new generation of CIC scholars advocated for not only a paradigm shift but also methodological multiplicity and interdisciplinary cross-pollination. In many ways, they were introducing cultural studies, diaspora studies, Latinx studies, Black studies, intersectionality, and other critical frameworks into IC's discourse while conscious of the perspectives bequeathed to them by the founding generation of CIC scholars.

Although the late 1990s and 2000s witnessed exciting developments in IC, and the paradigm shift gained visibility in the key areas of the discipline, these scholars faced criticism from traditionalist social scientific IC scholars. Furthermore, few communication studies journals were receptive to the type of work being produced by CIC scholars. Some faced rejection from the National Communication Association (NCA) journals (Gonzalez, 2010) and others, while others decided to publish their work in interdisciplinary journals or edited collections. In 2008, the National Communication Association's *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* was launched under the leadership of Nakayama, its editor-in-chief. In 2010, Nakayama and Halualani (2010) brought these discussions and voices together in *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication*. This edited volume is, in some ways, the crown jewel of their collective effort and showcases the impact of the critical turn.

Although this critical turn provided a new path for IC scholars and facilitated the inclusion of newer voices, certain perspectives and issues were still missing from the discussion. Hence, the second generation of CIC scholars began to fill this void. Karma Chavez's (2009) work on immigration bridged CIC with border studies and Latinx studies. Chavez, like Calafell, also called for methodological expansion that blended intercultural work with performance studies methodologies. As Chavez (2013) and Yep (2013) argued, the absence of queer voices, and diverse queer voices, in particular, was also striking in IC. First, Chavez and Yep, and then scholars, such as Atay (2015, 2020), Eguchi (2009, 2015, 2021), and Eguchi and Calafell (2020), responded to



this call by focusing on intersections of sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality. Although research on cultural identity employed intersectionality to a degree, Yep (2016) called for thicker intersectionalities to highlight the importance of nationality. In some ways, these scholars were also responding to Yep's call.

### ***Why There Is a Need for a Transnational Turn***

Most of the scholars working within the critical paradigm in IC research were U.S. scholars of color. There was some visibility of international scholars within CIC; however, most were still using social scientific methods and frameworks. There are several possible reasons for this scant representation. First, few international students were admitted to doctoral programs where CIC was the main focus. Second, there was cultural pressure on international students to use quantitative research methods and social scientific paradigms to obtain academic positions in their home nation-states. Depending on the country of origin, these might have been the preferred research approaches. Third, narrative-based and autoethnographic research often calls for vulnerability on the part of researchers, and some are unwilling to display such vulnerability before a predominantly U.S. academic readership. Lastly, most of the performance-based and autoethnographic research throughout the 2000s was published by predominantly white U.S. scholars. Hence, only a particular type of writing was encouraged by scholars who were using performance methodologies and autoethnographic writing. Moreover, the hegemonic dominance of the English language and fear of being seen as not highly competent in English silenced many international scholars.

A transnational turn in CIC is necessary. Although CIC has facilitated the inclusion of domestic diverse voices and, to a degree, achieved different layers of intersectionality, it has failed to systematically unpack nationality and citizenship. Hence, in some ways, it is still true to its 1940s origins in intercultural training. Of course, current training is not like the training of the 1940s, although in today's cases, the training happens in the form of storytelling. The difference is that modern training often tells a story to educate and make a difference instead of providing a list of practices, customs, and beliefs one should learn about a country before one visits. Therefore, the goal remains the education of U.S.-mainstream academics and students about different cultures, bodies, and lived experiences. There is nothing wrong with that. However, it is seen as a limited perspective because it decenters the U.S. version of IC. Instead, it invites and allows the participation of international and transnational scholars; however, their participation is

only permitted if they are complicit in replicating U.S. ways of conducting CIC. Again, although it is intersectional, nationality still sits on the periphery of CIC. In order to decolonize and transnationalize CIC, we need to simultaneously incorporate multiple methodologies and theoretical frameworks, which might derive from non-U.S. scholars or a fusion of U.S. and non-U.S. academics. At the same time, we should depart from conventional U.S.-academic writing to incorporate other forms of written expression to represent in-between or hybrid experiences. Moreover, we need to question the hegemonic dominance of English and the compliance of transnational scholars who work in U.S. academia. The transnational turn needs to create anew, be reflexive, embrace contradiction, understand catastrophe in culture, including academic culture, be bold and not apologetic, and embody thicker intersectionalities and thicker interdisciplinarity. Only in these ways can we decenter U.S.-centric CIC.

Despite the challenges they faced, transnational scholars such as Asante (2015), Atay (2018), Chen (2018), Eguchi (2020), Pindi (2018, 2020, 2021), Prasad (2017), Toyosaki (2013), and others began using different methodologies to adopt thicker intersectionalities and address issues regarding immigrant lives, oppressive structures within U.S. academia and in larger society, queer and trans lives, home and belonging, and other critical issues that are relevant to transnational worldmaking. They employed fusions of critical and cultural methods, postcolonial and decolonial theories, Black feminist thought, queer theory, queer of color critique, or other frameworks. Collectively, they not only call for a transnational turn within CIC but also boldly push against conventional academic writing to make space for accented voices.

This book tries to encapsulate the transnational turn that we have been calling for. Therefore, it aims to decenter U.S.-centric ways of conducting CIC and instead centers on transnationality and transnational experiences.

### ***The Goal of the Book. What Are We Offering to CIC?***

When we began this project, we had serious concerns about the direction of intercultural communication research. We felt even though we achieved a critical turn, critical intercultural communication reached a point of stagnation. We were also observing that topics of critical intercultural communication were also being addressed by critical rhetorical studies, perhaps taking us back to the “rhetorical” orientation. Since rhetorical studies is very white and U.S.-centric, this poses a larger problem. After serving on the leadership of NCA’s International and Intercultural Communication Division and

attending several panels about intercultural communication research, we began to wonder about our next disciplinary trajectory. As we observed the state of IC and CIC, we asked the following questions:

1. What is the future of CIC research?
2. What are the future directions of CIC work, which pathways need to be continually revisited, and which pathways have been sorely neglected (Nakayama and Halualani, 2010)?
3. How do the current political climate impact CIC research and its agenda?
4. What are the avenues and directions of IC/CIC knowledge production and dissemination?
5. What is the relevance and legacy of CIC studies to other sub-areas of communication studies (e.g., Critical Cultural Studies; Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Communication Studies; Feminist and Women Studies, etc.?).

These discussions and these questions lead us to develop this project. We know that we cannot answer all of these questions through one book project, but our hope is that this book project paves the next direction and destination of critical intercultural communication research.

The goal of this book is to call for a transnational turn within critical intercultural communication and generate a discussion to facilitate this turn. Here, we argue that IC and critical intercultural communication did not fully experience a transnational turn. Although topics of inquiry might have been international and the researchers themselves might have been international scholars, their visibility and their voice remained limited in CIC. Moreover, researching international topics and writing about cultural identity formations do not equate to transnationalizing intercultural communication. Often, this scholarship perpetuates the hegemonic and U.S.-centric ways of doing scholarship, and by default doing intercultural communication research. Instead of replicating these types of research, we advocate for several things:

- 1- Decentering the U.S. perspectives on intercultural communication.
- 2- Using non-U.S.-theoretical perspectives to achieve a broader engagement with the idea of transnational within intercultural communication.
- 3- Employing narrative-based, autoethnographic, and performative methods (and other critical methods), to interrogate the oppressive systems and structures, power dynamics, and conventional research.

- 4- Utilizing inter/transdisciplinary methods, frameworks, and scholarship to articulate layers of complexity in transnational lives.
- 5- Challenging the dominance of the English language and conventional U.S-centric writing by experimenting with other styles.
- 6- Researching topics that are personal, political, and cultural by using transnational approaches.
- 7- Rearticulating the dialectics, contradictions, and binaries between “here” and “there,” “citizen vs. immigrant” and “home and nation-state.”
- 8- Focusing on thicker intersectionalities and rethinking the notion of the nation-state.

In this book, our goal is not to rewrite the history and the development of intercultural communication scholarship in the U.S. Instead, in this project, our goal is multi-part. We intend to revisit the history of IC to identify the gaps and silenced and absent voices in our field. We also hope that the essay in this collection fulfills some of the gaps and offers some much-needed “other” perspectives.

Therefore, in this book, we have the following goals. We call for a transnational turn within critical intercultural communication. We envision this turn to be intersectional, and it should reconsider the ideas of nation-state, nationality, and citizenship. The transnational turn will include non-U.S. perspectives and topics. This approach also uses theoretical frameworks that are developed by non-U.S.-scholars and transnational scholars within the U.S. academia. We recognize that even critical intercultural communication has citationality politics. We see this as a serious concern. Often the works of transnational scholars are not cited by the CIC scholars. To achieve transnational inclusivity with CIC, we advocate for the use of critical and cultural multi-methods or fusion of them or incorporation of new hybrid methodologies to answer complex, multidimensional, intersectional, and transnational issues and represent those lives and stories. Finally, we argue that the transnational turn is inter/transdisciplinary, and must borrow from Latinx studies, Black studies, feminist studies, ethnic studies, queer studies, humanities disciplines, art, and other areas.

### ***The Outline of the Book***

The structure of our book and our authors in each section, in so many ways, responds to different calls for creating new paths in critical intercultural communication (CIC) research. Likewise, it embodies some of the latest trends

and focuses on topics that, as CIC researchers, we should pay closer attention to. Hence, we divided our book into three sections. In each section, our authors engage with critical and timely issues about CIC. Although these sections are distinct, the essays in each section complement each other in multiple ways. Collectively, the authors argue that CIC research should be concerned with mediation, narratives, power, agency, and the impact of transnational politics and how the notion of “difference” is articulated in the political arena.

Because of the advancements in media technologies, we interact with people, products, texts, and ideas from different parts of the world more than before (Atay & D’Silva, 2019). Hence, most of our contemporary interactions are transnational and mediated. We believe that as critical intercultural communication scholars, we should examine mediated experiences. We suggest that mediation is one of the pathways of transnational critical intercultural communication scholarship. Some of our work already embodies this new direction. Therefore, the first section of our book focuses on transnational mediated experiences and representations. Collectively, in this book, the authors in this section argue that transnationality is mediated, and we should closely examine different facets of these interactions and exposures.

The first section of our book is titled Transnationalism is Mediated. In their essay, *The Spaces of Spanishes: AOC’s ‘Latina thing’ and/as Language Fetishism*, Martinez Guillem and Blankenship theorize the relationship among language, racialized bodies, and space. Through discourse analysis, they analyze the U.S. Latina politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC)’s rhetoric and the use of Spanish. More specifically, they focus on the representation of her language. In their analysis, they discuss how certain bodies fit within or outside the U.S. national imaginary, and the role that language plays in this process. Through Sarah Ahmed’s notion of “stranger fetishism,” they explore how Spanish is being used as a signifier of difference in AOC’s cultural and media representations. Therefore, Martinez Guillem and Blankenship’s essay shows how cultural and mediated representations of the “other” bodies cultivate a particular imaginary and cultural acceptance or rejection of these bodies.

Similarly in their essay, *Japan’s Postcolonial Ambivalences: Anti-Korean Sentiment and Korean Admiration in the Reception of the Japanese K-Pop Group NiziU*, Ha and Oh also examine the use of language in the context of media. They recognize Korea’s colonial past and explain that Korea was seen as inferior in the Japanese post-colonial imaginary. Building on these historical contexts, in their chapter, they analyze the reception of NiziU, all-Japanese idol group that is co-produced by Japanese and Korean

entertainment companies. Ha and Oh analyze Japanese speaker users' language, framing, and anti-Korean hate speech patterns. Through a postcolonial analysis, they interrogate how the colonial past influences NiziU's reception.

In both chapters, Martinez Guillem and Blankenship and Ha and Oh focus on the usage of language in mediated environments. They also analyze how historical and colonial pasts influence how language is used to cultivate "us" vs "them" logic to frame current political or entertainment personas.

In many ways, Zhao Ding's essay, "Same Joy, *Same Happiness*"? Examining a Desiring and Desired China Negotiated via CCTV 2018 Chinese New Year Gala, carries on the discussion of transnational and transcultural representations in media that previous essays started. After situating the comedy sketch "Same Joy, Same Happiness" in the theoretical framework of critical intercultural communication, Ding investigates macro conditions and power structures in play in the show. Ding adopts a transnational framework and closely examines how Chinese mainstream media has been portraying Africa and China-Africa relations. Like the previous chapters, Ding's essay also grapples with the "us" vs. "them" dichotomy that media often employs to cover different cultural groups or practices.

Bernadette Marie Calafell's essay, *Cannibals, Wrestlers, and Coyotes: El Gigante and Horror at the Border*, proceeds Ding's chapter, and focuses on transnational mediated representations. In this chapter, Calafell analyzes Gigi Saul Guerrero and Luke Bramley's film *El Gigante*. As a transnational film, co-directed by Mexican-Canadian diasporic filmmaker Guerrero, *El Gigante* focuses on the Mexico-U.S. border. Therefore, by employing transnational intercultural lenses, Calafell critically analyzes representations in the film. Specifically, she focuses on how violence is portrayed on the Mexico-U.S. border and how Mexican bodies are "othered" and cannibalized. In doing so, Calafell closely examines the transnational flow of Mexican and Chicanx identities as they are depicted in a mediated text. Like the previous chapters, Calafell focuses on culture, language, and identity in a transnational context.

In the last chapter, "Streaming Transnational Subjectivities: Towards Unpacking Performative Representations of Inclusion, Strategic Whiteness, and Portrait of Muslims on TV," Fatima Zahrae Chrifi Alaoui and Shadee Abdi examine transnational mediated representations of minority Muslims in U.S. television. Utilizing a transnational critical intercultural communication framework, they unpack the way through which the hegemony of whiteness in the U.S. entertainment industry continually reproduces negative portrayals impacting the lives of Muslims. Like previous chapters, this media analysis demonstrates how stories of transnational communities of color continue to

be exploited in the U.S. media industry to promote a politics of whiteness leading to problematic portrayals of “us” vs. “them.” Positing theories of the flesh and intersectionality as strategic tools to challenge this hegemony, they demonstrate in their media analysis —of shows such as *Ramy*, *Master of None*, *Grey’s Anatomy*— how streaming platforms offer room for counter-narratives for depictions of Muslims on U.S. TV. The authors welcome this shift as an era of change to advocate for more nuanced stories and positive media portrayals produced by creators of color.

The second section of the book is called Transnational Connections and Narratives, and the authors in this section use narrative-based research to examine transnational communication. Narrative-based research has been used in critical intercultural communication since the mid- 1990s to examine issues of difference, power, and agency. Similarly, scholars also used narratives and autoethnographic and performative methods to articulate our intersectional cultural identities. In this case, the authors in this section use narratives to examine transnational connections. We believe that narratives, auto-methods, and performance methodologies are instrumental for the empowerment of continually oppressed or silenced transnational voices. Hence, we argue that the embodiment of these methods will allow critical intercultural communication scholars to articulate their complex and multi-layered transnational experiences.

In their collaborative autoethnography, *Interrogating Transnationalities: Collaborative Autoethnography of Becoming and Being “International”* in the Academic-Industrial Complex, Oloruntobi, Nguyen, and Eguchi, employ autoethnographic writing to critique oppressive academic structures and practices. Specifically, they interrogate what it means to be a transnational scholar in U.S. higher education. They reveal various oppressive politics in play that impact the lives of transnational students and faculty. Through their collaborative autoethnography, they also explore the meaning and the processes of coalition building for transnational scholars.

In the essay, “They don’t belong: Unsettling the master’s house,” Santosh Chandrashekar examines how settler colonialism continues to negatively impact the lives of Indigenous people within U.S. academic institutions. Relying on his lived experience as an immigrant of color and “witnessing” as heuristic, Chandrashekar explores how Indigenous people have been target of extreme violence resulting in various forms of unbelonging and exclusion, mainly literal Indigenous homelessness, and racist anti-Indian rhetoric. Equally important, the author highlights various episodes of the Indigenous community’s relentless activism in the face of adversity within these institutions. This chapter eloquently draws attention to the ongoing systemic



oppression of Indigenous people despite the “so-called” U.S. academia’s commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion.

In the piece, “*Doing* Transnational Critical Intercultural Communication within U.S. Academia? Autoethnographic Reflections and Conversations Between Two Scholars of Color.” Yea-Wen Chen and Godfried Asante use their lived experiences as critical intercultural scholars of color to explore how they do transnational research across three countries: the U.S., Ghana, and Taiwan. Relying on autoethnography, they demonstrate how the transnationalization of critical intercultural communication scholarship within U.S. institutions is a complex process shaped by unequal geopolitical discourses/structures, particularly for immigrants of color. Positioning their embodied experiences of transnationalization as a counter-discourse and decolonial approach, they call for resistance to the hegemonic discourse of neoliberal multiculturalism within intercultural communication studies.

In a similar way, in their collaborative autoethnography, “Teaching while Black, teaching while White: An autoethnographic experience of teaching Intercultural Communication at an HBCU and a PWI,” Elizabeth Whittington and Gina Castle Bell use critical autoethnography to explore how teaching intercultural classes in a transnational society impacts their respective identities as Queer Black/Nigerian American woman and White heterosexual woman. They position the intercultural classroom as a transnational space where to decolonize and decenter white perspectives to (re)center marginalized identities. Comparing each other’s lived experiences, they turn to cultural contract theory to reflect on how their teaching performances impact their sense of belonging in the academia with regards to how they engage with students as well as colleagues within their institutions (an HBCU and a PWI). Whittington and Castle Bell’s lived experiences reveal that issues of identity, relationality, and belonging can serve as avenues for students to better understand transnationalism in intercultural communication courses.

Elizabeth M. Lozano’s essay, *Becoming Other and Another: Storying the Self Across Institutional Borders*, concludes this section. By using her own lived experiences as a transnational scholar, she examines challenges that international and transnational scholars often face in U.S. academia. Her moving critical autoethnographic accounts demonstrate how identity, communication, culture, and power often intersect and overlap differently in the lives of transnational scholars. Hence, in this chapter, while she examines the oppressive structures within higher education, she also shows ways to resist and also work towards to goal to recreate just and equitable academic spaces for transnational bodies.



Finally, the last section of our book titled, *Transnational Politics of Difference*, concentrates on how cultural and identity differences are articulated in various transnational political contexts. Hence, the authors in this section examine the transnational politics around mixed race and ethnicities, the domination of the English language and its social and political impacts, and the transnational interactions in various contexts, ranging from religion to health. Therefore, together, the authors in this section ask us to engage with politics around transnationality in different cultural contexts.

In “Transnational(izing) Politics of “Mix” Body: A Critical Autoethnography of Hafu Identity and Performance,” Keisuke Kimura explores his “hafu” identity as mixed-race/ethnic Japanese and Chinese in inter/transnational context. Applying Critical intercultural Performance and Japaneseness to his lived experience, Kimura provides autoethnographic accounts of how he engages in multi-layered and transnational performances of the self at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth. In so doing, he attempts to unpack the complexity of hafu identity politics within structural systems of power and privilege in a transnational context, mainly Japan, China, and the U.S.

In her piece, “Creating, Maintaining, and Elevating Intercultural Bridgework: English Teachers’ Performance of Strategic Hybridity in Taiwan,” Sharon Chuang examines the impact of English hegemony in Taiwan’s education system. Turning to strategic hybridity as a theoretical framework, she explores how English teachers— both native-English-speaking and Taiwanese— navigate the power dynamics imbued in English education. Relying on qualitative interviews, she discusses how these English teachers engage in various forms of hybrid performances to create, maintain, and elevate intercultural bridgework. This hybrid identity performance, argues Chuang, exemplifies the transnational turn of critical intercultural communication.

Along the same lines, in their essay, “Understanding Silence in Religious Discourses on Sex Work in Ghana and Brazil,” Eric Karikari and Aleisha Ringer illuminate how religious organizations deliberately use silence to propagate morally deterministic conservative ideologies on sex work across two postcolonial nations: Ghana and Brazil. Utilizing silence as discursive framework and positing texts as ideological documents/narratives, they compare Christian religious organizations’—mainly Catholic, Evangelical, and Neo-Pentecostal— discourses on sex work in the two countries to understand how colonial power is deployed through weaponizing silence to override secular and pre-colonial ways of life. Their critical textual analysis reveals how colonialism remains a contested site of transnational intercultural

communication, where conservative colonial discourses of government as moral head of the nation, sex work as a threat to the traditional family, and conflating sex work and human trafficking are deeply embedded within religious organizations in both Ghana and Brazil.

We conclude this section with Sun and Almalki's essay, *Disparities, Inequalities, and Stigmas in Transnational Health Communication*. Sun and Almalki's essay was significantly influenced by disparities and inequalities we have been observing due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, they conceptualized the idea of transnational health communication by using critical and cultural lenses to explain the negative outcomes and inequalities that are caused by the pandemic. Specifically, they focus on cultural and transnational stigmas associated with health disparities. Moreover, in this chapter, Sun and Almalki address the importance of interrogating the digital divide, which is shaping the health and well-being of minorities globally, especially in recent global health crises.

Collectively, the authors in this book offer different topics to help us further conceptualize transnational critical intercultural communication. They all call our attention to examining global cultural disparities, mediated transnationalities, and transnational oppressive cultural and political structures. Many offer narrative-based writing or autoethnographic methods to unearth these issues and spotlight oppressive structures and inequalities. We see this book as a way to generate a new and much-needed discussion on transnationality but we also hope that it will chart a new direction for critical intercultural communication scholarship. We must continue to examine the transitional movement of bodies and ideas and how transnational cultural practices, regulations, expectations, and limitations continuously shape and reshape the lives of transnational individuals.

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*Section 1 Transnationalism Mediated*







# *1 The Spaces of Spanishes: AOC's 'latina thing' and/as Language Fetishism*

SUSANA MARTÍNEZ GUILLEM & CHRISTINA BLANKENSHIP

**Abstract:** In this chapter, we theorize the intrinsic relation among language, (racialized) bodies, and space, grounded in an analysis of discourses by and about U.S. Latina politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC). Building on Sarah Ahmed's concept of "stranger fetishism" (2000), we show how disputes between AOC and conservative pundits over what it means to do the 'latina thing' rely on a fetishized understanding of the 'Spanish' language, both in AOC's and her supporters' rhetoric, and that of her opponents. Such fetishizing, we argue, obscures the investments in the interconnected ideologies of racism, monolingualism, and nationalism that shape who gets to speak, and in what ways, when it comes to the US public sphere. We conclude with some reflections of the implications of our study for a simultaneous reclamation and rethinking of transnationalism in critical intercultural studies.

**Keywords:** Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, language ideology, Latina/o/x identity, monolingualism, nationalism, political discourse, Twitter discourse, racism, space, Spanish, US politics

Linguistic anxiety is the new proxy for racial anxiety.

(Mary J. Matsuda)

## *Introduction*

There were many moments during the 2020 US presidential election campaign that we will all remember for different reasons: Rallies in cars and/or

wearing masks; a candidate, Donald Trump, who bragged about defeating the coronavirus, but could not accept his defeat at the polls; the first woman, and woman of color, to ever be elected as Vice-president of the United States. Surely you, dear reader, have your own to add to the list.

Among all these memorable pictures, there is one that may not be etched in most people's retinas, but that stood out and remains with us, the authors of this chapter: It was the moment when Democratic candidate Joe Biden danced to "Despacito" while the song played on his cellphone (Cummings, 2020). Some may see this as an almost irrelevant anecdote, or just one more (cringy) example of the ways in which the different campaigns tried to appeal to so-called "Latino voters." And there is that, certainly. But there is also more, especially when we place this episode alongside other, constructed-as-controversial attempts to bring the Spanish language into the forefront of the U.S. public sphere.<sup>1</sup>

It is this kind of tension, with its roots and consequences, that we want to tackle in the following pages. As our opening example shows, Spanish has the potential to productively cross spheres within U.S. national boundaries, provided that it is (s)lightly attached to white bodies without challenging their supremacy. On the other hand, when racialized bodies within the U.S. rely on Spanish to (re)claim a more central space, their practices are immediately contained, redirected to the private or seen as informal spheres, as the language of 'relaxed' family gatherings or 'entertaining' music styles, which are conversely constructed as less prestigious cultural practices (Urciuoli, 1995). In short, when understood in the context of a struggle for racial equality, Spanish in the U.S. is often not even allowed to 'travel' from one neighborhood to the other, let alone to the public realm of schools, workplaces, or politics.

All of this tells us that there is a need to theorize the intrinsic and co-constituting relation among languages, (racialized) bodies, and space. In this chapter, we take a small step in this direction, as we trace and analyze different discourses by and about U.S. politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC). We are interested in exploring, first of all, the instant and contradicting effects of "corporeal materiality" (Butler, 2015; Flores, 2016) when it comes to situating some *bodies* within or outside of the U.S. national imaginary. Second, we aim at highlighting the role that rhetorical constructions of language play in these dynamics.

Building on Sarah Ahmed's (2000) notion of "stranger fetishism," we show how disputes between AOC and conservative pundits over what it means to do the 'latina thing' rely, first of all, on a simultaneous marking and exclusion of Spanish (pronunciation) as a signifier of difference that, at

the same time, white speakers loosely appropriate and mock to reinforce the supremacy of English. Second, our analysis of the different exchanges also reveals AOC's strategic embracing of some of these 'latina' signifiers. Such embracing works through a reappropriation of Spanish as a sign of authenticity that serves as a form of resistance to the normalization of "whitespeak" (Law & Corrigan, 2018) just as it invests in normative uses of appropriateness and 'proper' speaking that mitigates their transformative potential. In this simultaneous adoption and domestication of 'the Latina thing,' AOC discursively mobilizes commodifiable Spanish words and expressions and frequently relies on memes to adopt an overall light and humorous stance that advances cultural presumptions about Latin@ homogeneity.

Based on our analysis, we argue that all of these constructed 'Spanishes,' although in different ways and to different degrees, reveal language fetishistic moves that fuel different aspects of what Ahmed (2000) describes as a "close stranger" figure, thus obscuring the investments in the interconnected ideologies of racism, monolingualism, and nationalism that shape who gets to speak, and in what ways, when it comes to the U.S. public sphere. In our view, these links point to the need for a simultaneous reclamation and rethinking of transnationalism in critical intercultural communication studies that emphasizes the pervasive but also precarious connection between (bounded) race, language, and space.

### ***Strangers, Fetishism, and Language***

In her book *Strange Encounters*, Sarah Ahmed (2000) advances a theory to explain the paradoxes involved in projects of inclusion that are, by definition, based on marking those to be included as 'known' strangers (Ahmed, 2000; Martínez Guillem, 2015). Instead of placing strangers in the realm of the unknown, Ahmed's framework pushes us to acknowledge that "the stranger is produced *through* knowledge, rather than as a failure of knowledge." Paradoxically, as she puts it, "it is by 'knowing strangers' that the 'we' of the epistemic community is established, even though that 'we' is called into question by the very proximity of 'the strangers' through which it comes to know" (p. 16).

Ahmed's contribution remains key in its centering on the *effects* of the "power-knowledge-difference" triangle (Hall, 2017) on the production, not of marginalized, distant 'others,' (Anderson, 2006; Said, 2014) but perhaps more importantly, on the (re)production of *close* strangers. Such shift thus allows us to understand how otherness is not always necessarily located outside of a particular group's constructed borders but is instead incorporated as

a way of knowing (ourselves as well as others)— a differentiation technique that facilitates key cultural practices such as “the demarcation of spaces of belonging” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 99).

Our position is that a very important but often overlooked technique to ‘know’ strangers, thus allowing “the familiar to be established as the familiar” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 3), is to ‘know’ the strangers’ language. As we show below, the dominant, rationalized understanding of languages as pre-existing realities attached to particular bodies is deceiving. Rather, in the same way, that the stranger is produced *through* knowledge, so is her language. The two elements thus work together so that strangeness produces (marked) ‘language,’ which, in its turn, allows us to recognize and ‘tell’ who a stranger is based on how they sound. This marked speech, notably, is not an objective, ‘known’ reality, but the result of a subjective hearing that emerges from the interaction between particular bodies and places (Butler, 2015). And still, we routinely naturalize ‘strange’ ways of speaking through commonsense notions such as ‘accent’ or ‘appropriateness.’ As Flores and Rosa (2015) have argued, such processes often function to explain away unequal social structures and relations.

Turning strangers (and their languages) into mere isolated objects, deprived of their histories, is thus a fruitful way to obscure different material dynamics. Drawing on Marx, Ahmed (2013) terms this habit “stranger fetishism,” which “invests the figure of the stranger with a life of its own insofar as it cuts ‘the stranger’ off from the histories of its determination” (p. 5). Similarly, the persistent investment in languages as self-evident, detached from social relations, ‘things,’ or what we term here ‘language fetishism,’ conceals the fact that languages are not effect-producing, but resulting *effects* of social relations. This concealment, as our analysis exposes, enables certain privileged speakers to stigmatize, (re)appropriate, and commodify others and their languages to serve their own interests, and is thus a key component of the ways that those at the margins are routinely positioned and contained as “strangers.” It is at this juncture that the intrinsic connection between languages, racialized bodies, and spaces becomes apparent.

### *Spatializing Language, Languageing ‘race’*

The notion of language fetishism allows us to consider both the symbolic (ideological) and material (embodied, spatial, affective) aspects of languages, such as ‘English’ or ‘Spanish,’ and thus question a series of assumed articulations between language, race, and nationality— among others—that create different meanings and material outcomes. Not surprisingly, in our