

The Brown Babe's Burden

TRACY LLANERA

I am an assistant research professor of philosophy at the University of Connecticut. When I was offered the job in February 2018, I shared the good news with Dilek Huseyinzadegan, a philosopher at Emory University. Happy for my success, she recommended a book titled *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure—Without Losing Your Soul* (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2008). Describing it as “great for all under-represented people,” she thought the work might be useful company in my postdoctoral life. When I was notified that the library had shelved the book, I went to Macquarie University to borrow it. But it wasn't there. The library staff could not find it either, so, after officially classifying it as “missing,” they triggered a formal search procedure to find it.¹ In my experience, navigating the academic market feels like being in a relentless search for a missing book. Your self-confidence is like that book: sometimes, right when you need it the most, you can't find it. When you are looking for an academic job, you try and tick all the boxes: deliver a decent thesis, get the publications out, take part in conferences, teach well, build your webpage, expand your network. But while going through the motions of “revise and resubmits” like everyone else, something nags from deep within. It is something academics call various things: *social anxiety*, *academic stress*, *impostor syndrome*. First, you suspect you don't fit in the right slot. Second, you doubt if you are worthy of a space on the shelf. Third, you wonder if you're the wrong kind of book.

These feelings are familiar to early-career academics. Jobs are few, continuing positions are rare, work is underpaid and overburdened, and competition is cutthroat. An entry-level job in an Australian philosophy department attracts a minimum of 200 applications, with over half of the applicants overqualified for the position. Small wonder that professors often advise: “*An academic career? Keep your options open.*” In short, it's justified to have these anxieties when you're on the job hunt. However, for some people, these anxieties are compounded by other sets of anxieties and vulnerabilities. I'm talking about the anxieties of women in philosophy, and of other individuals who remain underrepresented in the academy, such as philosophers of color, LGBTQI philosophers, or philosophers with disabilities. Their vulnerabilities, which are inextricable from their self-identities, usually make the academic rat race even more alienating than it already is. In the last two years, I have been reflecting on my intersectional identity. I am a Filipino, a woman, and a nonnative English speaker. I am a product of the lower-middle-class stratum of the Philippines, a developing country that needs to decolonize its imagination and overhaul its budding authoritarian

Hypatia vol. 34, no. 2 (Spring 2019) © by Hypatia, Inc.

politics. My first taste of Western education started in 2012, when I began my doctorate in Australia. Today, I specialize in male- and Anglo-dominated areas in philosophy: philosophy of religion, social and political philosophy, and pragmatism. There are others like me, but we remain few and far between.

This short piece deals with being an intersectional philosopher in Australia. I take what I hope to be the noncontroversial view that, in solidarity with improving women's participation in Australian academia, there's more to do to address diversity in philosophy. More than ten years after the Australasian Association of Philosophy (AAP) project on "Improving the Participation of Women in the Philosophy Profession" (Goddard 2008; hereafter IPWPP project), it's time to evaluate issues and experiences that emerge at the intersections of race, sex, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and age in the region. This article is not by any means an authoritative evaluation of the state of philosophy and intersectionality. Treat it as a contribution by a philosopher who, in good faith, has much at stake in diversifying the academic culture. In part I of the article, I briefly describe the state of women's participation in Australasian philosophy and philosophy in general. In part II, I refer anecdotally to experiences that have compelled me to think about my nontraditional profile as a philosopher. In part III, I focus on the mentoring resources that have been helpful after my PhD. In the conclusion, I explain the title of my article, "The Brown Babe's Burden." Although provocative, the meaning behind it reveals that it is not as self-indulgent as it sounds.

I. MORE NEEDS TO CHANGE

In August 2009, the Australian National University held a symposium on the status of women in philosophy in connection with the IPWPP project. This symposium inspired the collection *Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change?* (Hutchison and Jenkins 2013). The book acknowledges that at present, "fairness in the workplace through legal measures and codes of conduct seems to have largely been won" (3). Academic institutions aim for fairness and equity, and they can address problems of sexism and overt discrimination. However, the book asserts that professional philosophy remains problematic in terms of gender representation. Although at the undergraduate level, men and women begin to study philosophy in equal numbers in Australia, few women remain in the program by the time they graduate or go on to take up higher studies. Hutchison and Jenkins point out that women philosophers don't get hired "in proportion to their representation in the population"; that women tend to "drop out at high rates"; and that women often "get stuck at low levels of the profession with careers that are 'going nowhere'" (Hutchison and Jenkins 2013, 4). The book investigates the reasons behind these phenomena, ranging from the conception of philosophy as masculine-coded, adversarial, and elitist (see chapters by Marilyn Friedman, Helen Beebe, and Fiona Jenkins), the perpetuation of implicit bias and stereotypes that undermine women's credibility (see chapters by Jennifer Saul and Katrina Hutchison), and the presence of gendered micro-inequities or "small

harms that fall beneath the radar detecting discrimination” that work to promote feelings of exclusion (see chapter by Samantha Brennan).

Like many young scholars today, I have benefited from the courageous work of feminist philosophers. It feels good to graduate from a philosophy department where half of the permanent staff are women, with some in senior positions. I am grateful that Macquarie philosophers support female postgraduates and researchers. The AAP, the largest and oldest philosophy association in the region, is committed to addressing the gender imbalance in the profession. In the last three years, it has hosted the Annette Baier Prize, an annual prize for an outstanding philosophical publication by a woman in Australasia. Last April, the AAP released their “Statement on Insecure Work,” which points out that most philosophers in casual and limited-term employment are women. It recommended best standard practices to senior philosophers and philosophers involved in hiring and administration. *Radical Philosophy*, a community radio program based in Melbourne and hosted by Beth Matthews, regularly interviews women philosophers, in response to what it perceives as a bias toward male philosophers (3CR n.d.). Following these achievements, I suggest that we should broaden the feminist agenda by engaging the experiences of philosophers from nontraditional backgrounds in Australasia. As Audre Lorde quipped in her brilliant speech “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” we must not divide and conquer, but define and empower.

Things have shifted dramatically in the last fifty years. Today, from the point of view of academic politics, no one can get away with saying that men and women are hard-wired to reason differently, as argued by Immanuel Kant (Kant 2011, 249), or that women are “big children,” courtesy of Arthur Schopenhauer (Schopenhauer 1970, 81 [cf. Hutchison and Jenkins 2013, 2]), or that Black people adapt better to the European culture than Native Americans, according to G. W. F. Hegel (Bernasconi 2002, 61). These sexist and racist attitudes are taboo in modern philosophy departments. From the point of view of theory, if we take human experience as the point of departure for philosophical reflection, then feminist philosophy, critical philosophy of race, LGBTQI philosophy, and non-Anglo/non-European philosophy are areas that have emerged from the womb of the historically marginalized and nondominant groups. The richness of philosophical thought rests, to a large extent, on these fields of inquiry that reflect, criticize, and when appropriate, dismantle the assumptions of dominant Anglophone and continental approaches. Although not without political resistance, these perspectives have been inching their way into philosophy syllabi. From the point of view of representation in philosophy, women and persons from nontraditional backgrounds are increasing in number. However, their professional presence remains scant. In North America, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, most humanities departments are gender-equal in terms of representation today; yet, in philosophy, women comprise only around 20–25% of the profession, with women of color comprising a meager number. Kathryn Sophia Belle maintains that in North America, fewer than thirty Black women hold PhDs in philosophy and work within philosophy departments (Belle 2011, 435). Adriane Rini points out that

from 2005 to 2013, philosophy departments in New Zealand hired twenty men and only one woman (Rini 2013, 127–42).

Given these examples, Kristie Dotson rightly wonders whether there is something about the professional culture of philosophy that is keeping women and diverse practitioners of philosophy away (Dotson 2012, 3–29). Some philosophers think so. Here's an example close to home: after the 2017 conference of the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy (ASCP) in Hobart, Tasmania, Bryan Mukandi, an African philosopher from the University of Queensland, wrote about what he observed as the neglect of a localized philosophical reflection of "place" in Australian continental philosophy in favor of a white, colonial, Euro-Australian way of philosophizing. He also noted with embarrassment how the conference has not had an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander keynote speaker since its inception. Unsurprisingly, his post generated commentary and rigorous fact-checking (see APA 2017; 2018a). I want to point out two things. First, bringing these controversial issues up required admirable courage from Mukandi, given his status as an early-career philosopher and as a person residing at the margins of Australian philosophy. I thank him for trying to initiate a difficult conversation about the state of racial diversity in the association. Second, it is not clear to me that the response in defense of the ASCP was productive. For example, the suggested remedy to the whiteness of continental philosophy in Australia is "for Black and Indigenous philosophers who are interested in European Thought to take seriously the ASCP's formal and publicly expressed commitments to equity and diversity; to hold the Society accountable to these principles; and to become actively involved in its governance and development." But is it fair to place this burden primarily on people who are already finding the professional culture of philosophy alienating? Shouldn't the onus of this task be placed on institutions that are keenly aware of their privilege, and on philosophers who already have the rank, power, and influence?

These issues deserve more serious consideration than I can offer in this short piece. But I hope they paint a picture of the status of the discipline if you are not a traditional practitioner of philosophy in Australia; that is, if you are not a white, heterosexual, CIS-gendered, middle-class, and able-bodied man. To continue the conversation, I'll now share anecdotes from my early career experience and hope that what I say resonates with the experience of others from a similar background.

II. INNOCENT EXCLUSIONS

I first became anxious about my intersectional identity when I taught at Macquarie while doing my PhD. Initially, I was confident. I had already taught philosophy classes in the Philippines and competed in debate tournaments as an undergraduate at my university. I enjoyed teaching and I liked arguing. Philosophizing with students regularly was not only a complementary activity to research but also a good break from the isolating nature of thesis-writing. Besides, philosophy's supposed to be neutral. As a discipline, it is in pursuit of truth, clarity, and rigorous thinking. It doesn't

matter who makes the argument; the best argument always wins. A week before teaching started, my philosophy lecturer ended our first meeting by giving me good, well-meaning advice: “Students are generally good and receptive,” he said, “but there will be some difficult ones. First, remember that across the board, women don’t get as good feedback on their teaching evaluations compared to men. It’s a well-documented bias. Don’t take it personally. Second, you look young and have a distinct accent. Some male and older students might try to intimidate you. Assert yourself.”

I’m lucky that my lecturer was sensitive to what was in store for me as a philosophy tutor. In my second class, an undergraduate student stood in front of everyone said: “wow, for a person like you, your English is really good!” Caught off guard, I could only muster a “thanks.” Fortunately, although my teaching has rated well in evaluations, some students have tried to undermine my authority. As anticipated, they were male and older. I remember being confronted by a student who told me that his essay, which I failed, deserved a grade of high distinction (in the United States, the equivalent of an A). He requested that another teacher, who happened to be white and male, re-mark it (he was failed again). Whenever I share these experiences, peers and authority figures respond with understanding and empathy, given the well-documented concerns of female university instructors. However, it is hard not to notice that comments peculiar to my ethnic identity are the ones that people either ignore or dismiss. When I narrated this story to another doctoral student, she said, “Why are you annoyed? Your English is good. It’s a compliment.” Never mind the part where the student felt entitled to judge my ability to speak her language, or that what she did was irrelevant to the unit content, or that her comment exposed a vulnerability publicly and unabashedly! I encountered a similar attitude when I commented on the racist nature of the writings of some Enlightenment thinkers. I received a curt reply from a famous male philosopher: “but they were all racists then.” That’s it? No substantiation, no interest in confronting the issue, nothing at stake in teaching them more critically? On more than one occasion I have mentioned to other academics that being a woman of color makes me anxious about my chances in the job market, since there are so few philosophers in the Australian region with a similar profile. More than once, I’ve received dismissive retorts from white women to the tune of “well, it’s hard for all women.”

I mention only a few experiences (there are others I am uncomfortable sharing or I am not at liberty to share) but I hope they suffice to make the argument. These conversation-stopping behaviors—unreflective, matter-of-fact, and seemingly harmless—perpetuate a culture of exclusion in the space where philosophers with intersectional identities teach and work. They add an extra layer of strain to an already high-pressure environment.² If what I assert here is correct, that is, that the anxieties of diverse practitioners of philosophy are at risk of being overlooked or ignored, then it makes sense to develop tools to acknowledge and manage them. A decade after the IPWPP project, it is time to institutionally assess more diverse issues and experiences. The most obvious things to ask are these: how diverse is Australasian philosophy now at all levels, and how are the intersectional philosophers and diverse practitioners of philosophy faring? These are questions we cannot engage properly,

since there is no intersectional diversity data available to begin with. Eliza Goddard, the executive officer of the AAP, confirms that although the association has collected data on gender, it does not have data on intersectional diversity in the profession; gender was the only diversity factor considered in the IPWPP project.³ Albert Atkin has added that collecting diversity data came up when he was chairing the AAP Diversity Committee. This project did not push through due to the potential issues that collecting personally sensitive data may bring to the fore.⁴ There are no concrete plans in place to collect diversity demographics across the Australasian region, but there is interest. At present, Krushil Watene (Massey University, NZ) chairs the AAP Diversity Committee. The committee has been researching course diversity and planning a diversity symposium in 2019.⁵ In terms of diversifying philosophical teaching, it must be noted that the AAP hosts an annual prize for Innovation in Inclusive Curricula; however, according to a member of the Diversity Committee, it attracts only a few contributions from philosophers in comparison to other prizes based on scholarly merit and the promotion of public philosophy.⁶

It is imperative to start thinking more about intersectional issues and the ways to go forward institutionally, given the observable changes in the contemporary Australasian demographic. There are more foreign students taking up philosophy than ten years ago. There has been a visible increase in Masters of Research and PhD students from diverse backgrounds in the fold; at Macquarie University, for instance, three Filipinos have already finished their PhDs and two are about to hand in their theses. How are these nontraditional philosophers faring in the academic market now? How will they fare beside other candidates? What identity-based biases and prejudices are in store for them in the early phase of their careers? What support networks do they have? It would be great if, soon, tools and resources were to exist to answer these questions. Collecting diversity data is not infeasible; for instance, the American Philosophical Association publishes reports on APA membership demographics in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, LGBT status, disability status, type of employment, and tenure. The data is collected voluntarily and the statistics are available to the public.⁷ This database has helped form networks among diverse groups and has opened opportunities for teaching and research fellowships, publication prizes, conference-panel presentations, funding grants, and most important—at least for me, for reasons I outline in the next section—mentoring. Collecting diversity data in the Australasian region is a good start toward showing a stronger commitment to the changing needs of the AAP's membership. I advocate for this move. I believe that without it, the struggles of the most vulnerable in the profession will remain as they have always been: invisible and negligible. Without empirical data, strong institutional support, and policy changes in place, statements on Australasian equity and diversity are, at best, lip service.

III. MENTORSHIP

In the beginning of this article, I mentioned Dilek Huseyinzadegan. She is an assistant professor of philosophy and an expert in Kant and German Idealism, political

philosophy, twentieth-century continental (European) philosophy, critical philosophy of race, and feminism. She is also a person of color, a nonnative English speaker, and an immigrant to the US from Turkey. I was matched with Dilek by The Job Candidate Mentoring Program for Women in Philosophy, a program endorsed by the American Philosophical Association that connects job candidates with junior philosophy scholars who have been on the market recently and have volunteered to become mentors.⁸ Dilek understood my fears and my vulnerability. She was up front about the realities of the job market in relation to my gender and ethnicity. Her advice last year was invaluable in making sense of the North American philosophy hiring culture and improving the quality of my job applications. It was also after traveling away from Macquarie that I met more philosophers able to give me advice not only on my research, but also the kind of academic career to commit to with integrity. Meeting Lewis Gordon, an Afro-Jewish existentialist philosopher at the University of Connecticut, was galvanizing: he told me that whatever I did, I needed to be engaged. My work in philosophy couldn't be only instrumental or strategic, it had to deeply matter to me. I attended some of his undergraduate and postgraduate classes during my 2017 research fellowship at the UConn Humanities Institute. It was energizing to see him command the enthusiastic attention of students with East/West existentialist philosophy and Fanonian thought, proof that one could intermarry diverse philosophical discussions in a lecture. I consider both Dilek and Lewis as purveyors of wisdom and grounded advice in terms of my experience as a philosopher of color. I am happy to add them to my growing list of mentors, most of whom already work in my areas of expertise.

There are two points worth underscoring in my experience. First, I initially didn't think that engaging with philosophers with nonmainstream identity profiles would be so empowering, but it truly was. During my doctoral research, I rarely met philosophers of color. I adopted lecturing and teaching styles of white philosophers that, although effective for them, were unnatural to the way I moved and spoke. It was crucial for me to witness philosophers of color in action. The Sydney visit of Latinx philosophers Linda Alcoff and José Medina comes to mind: in their papers and talks, they married their "visible identities" in their discussion. From them, I learned never to underestimate the persuasive power of a gentle voice and accented speech in delivering a philosophical argument. Second, diverse mentorship is important. I'm not advocating for identity-based mentorship over topic-based mentorship or cross-group mentorship. I'm advocating for mentorships of different kinds. Establishing healthy professional relationships with many kinds of philosophers is important when you have an intersectional identity. A graduate student starts with one mentor—the thesis adviser—and the number of mentors grows throughout the career. To be clear: a mentor doesn't always have to be interested in your philosophical area to be useful. Neither should a mentor's identity be parallel to your own to give great advice. A mentor doesn't have to know everything about you, nor should you overburden them. In my experience, the best mentorships are not mandatory; they arise organically as a form of academic friendship. I acknowledge that women of color may have more difficulty than others in developing these academic friendships, for systemic and

personal reasons. But I hope that the more established members of the philosophical community would consider these underlying reasons when they interact with early-career research scholars who are most in need of their professional expertise and guidance.⁹ My point is that mentoring relationships are integral to the success of early-career philosophers; they help habituate a young scholar into academia, a context in which I hope all of us will eventually feel right at home.

IV. THE BBB

I'll end by illuminating the idea behind the article's title. The phrase is from Uma Narayan's essay entitled "What's a Brown Girl Like You Doing in the Ivory Tower? Or, How I Became a Feminist Philosopher" (Narayan 2003). Her academic story explains the concept of the Brown Babe's Burden best: "as the only woman of color and often the most junior person at more panels and events than I want to remember, I have also felt the stress of the recognition that my public performance and philosophical acuity would likely be, whether I like it or not, a measure of whether 'women of color can do philosophy'" (Narayan 2003, 91–92). As an early-career philosopher writing about my experience for the first time, I cannot help but become anxious about what I am fighting for in terms of recognition and representation. Placing the spotlight on micro-inequities and injustices I have experienced means dealing with the risk of alienating friends and professional contacts unsympathetic to these concerns. It puts me in an ongoing position to keep proving that despite the color of my skin, or my accent, or my class, I can do philosophy too. It also invites political and institutional burdens that can be hard to bear when one is at the center of social change.

It would be great to have this burden lifted someday. But to make a difference, I have to do what I can.

NOTES

I delivered this talk on May 31, 2018, at the Women in Philosophy event of the Macquarie University Platonic Society, organized by philosophy graduate students Marianne McAllister and Ellen Konza. I thank Yves Aquino, Katrina Hutchison, Mianna Lotz, Wendy Rogers, and the members of the society for the lively discussion. Finally, I thank Darlene Demandante and Adam Hochman for their comments on the draft.

1. Since I submitted this article to *Hybatia*, Macquarie University Library has acquired a new copy of the book.

2. For a great essay on microaggressions against women of color in philosophy, see Fatima 2017. In relation to the "your English is so good" episode, see Czopp, Kay, and Sapna 2015 for an analysis of the psychological impact of positive stereotypes and racist compliments.

3. Email from Eliza Goddard, May 22, 2018. I thank the second anonymous reviewer for asking me to emphasize why this situation should be attended to, since being silent on this matter risks reinforcing the view that we can address the problem of gender diversity separately from matters of racial (and other) diversity.

4. Email from Albert Atkin, May 22, 2018. Katrina Hutchison highlights a risk in particular: “It is also more sensitive to talk about these issues in small populations than large populations as people are more likely to be identifiable (e.g. Australian philosophy vs. US philosophy). This came up as an issue when we were working on the stats chapter at the end of the women in philosophy book. Some individuals were identifiable by their role and country alone” (email, June 5, 2018).

5. Email from Krushil Watene, May 23, 2018.

6. See AAP 2018. The other prizes are the AAP Media Prize, Media Professionals’ Award, Australasian Journal of Philosophy (AJP) Best Paper Award, Postgraduate Presentation Prize, AAP Most Promising Philosopher Prize, Australian Legal Philosophy Prize, and the Annette Baier Prize.

7. See APA 2018b. I thank Eliza, Albert, Krushil, Katrina, Michael Olson, and Andrew Dunstall for their replies to my inquiries about diversity data.

8. See Job Candidate 2018. See also Philosophers’ Cocoon 2018, a complementary mentoring initiative that prioritizes candidates with special job-market challenges.

9. I thank the first anonymous reviewer of this article for inviting me to think more about this issue.

REFERENCES

- 3CR n.d. *Radical philosophy*. Radio Program. <http://www.3cr.org.au/radicalphilosophy>.
- American Philosophical Association (APA). 2017. *Black issues in philosophy* blog, entry by Bryan Mukandi. <https://blog.apaonline.org/2017/12/26/black-issues-in-philosophy-australian-continental-philosophy/>.
- American Philosophical Association (APA). 2018a. *Black issues in philosophy* blog, responses from Lewis Gordon, Simone Bignall, Bryan Mukandi. <https://blog.apaonline.org/2018/01/09/black-issues-in-philosophy-response-to-australian-continental-philosophy/>.
- American Philosophical Association (APA). 2018b. Data and information on the field of philosophy. <https://www.apaonline.org/page/data>.
- Australasian Association of Philosophy (AAP). 2018. Prizes and awards. <https://aap.org.au/prizes>
- Belle, Kathryn Sophia (published under the name Kathryn T. Gines). 2011. Being a Black woman philosopher: Reflections on founding the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers. *Hypatia* 26 (2): 429–37.
- Bernasconi, Robert. 2002. Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti. In *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. Stuart Barnett. London: Routledge.
- Czopp, Alexander M., Aaron C. Kay, and Sapna Cheryan. 2015. Positive stereotypes are pervasive and powerful. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10 (4): 451–63.
- Dotson, Kristie. 2012. How is this paper philosophy? *Comparative Philosophy* 3 (1): 3–29.

- Fatima, Saba. 2017. On the edge of knowing: Microaggression and epistemic uncertainty as a woman of color. In *Surviving sexism in academia: Feminist strategies for leadership*, ed. Kirsti Cole and Holly Hassel. London: Routledge.
- Goddard, Eliza. 2008. Improving the participation of women in the philosophy profession, on behalf of Susan Dodds, Lynda Burns, Mark Colyvan, Frank Jackson, Karen Jones, and Catriona Mackenzie. <https://aap.org.au/Womeninphilosophy>.
- Hutchison, Katrina, and Fiona Jenkins, eds. 2013. *Women in philosophy: What needs to change?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Job Candidate Mentoring Program for Women in Philosophy. 2018. <https://jobmentoringforwomen.wordpress.com/>.
- Kant, Immanuel. 2011. *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime and other writings*, ed. and trans. P. Frierson and P. Guyer. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Narayan, Uma. 2003. What's a brown girl like you doing in the ivory tower? Or, how I became a feminist philosopher. In *Singing in the fire: Stories of women in philosophy*, ed. Linda Alcoff. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Philosophers' Cocoon Job-Market Mentoring Project. 2018. <https://sites.google.com/site/cooonmentoringproject>.
- Rini, Adriane. 2013. Models and value: Why did New Zealand philosophy departments stop hiring women philosophers? In *Women in philosophy: What needs to change?*, ed. Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Rockquomore, Kerry Ann, and Tracey Laszloffy. 2008. *The Black academic's guide to winning tenure—without losing your soul*. Boulder Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. 1970. *Essays and aphorisms*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin.