UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

VOICES OF A FEMALE WHITE/NON-WHITE BRAZILIAN EDUCATOR

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

By CLÁUDIA COLLA DE AMORIM

Norman, Oklahoma

2019

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VOICES OF A FEMALE WHITE/NON-WHITE BRAZILIAN EDUCATOR

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Mirelsie Velazquez, Chair

Dr. Neil O. Houser

Dr. Sabina Vaught

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To my sons, Felipe and Gabriel,

who taught me how to read the world.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my committee for their continuous support and motivation throughout my Master's project. I express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Mirelsie Velazquez for her patience with my initial denial, her commitment to my *testimonio*, her guidance, encouragement, and wish to hear my multiple voices; Dr. Neil O. Houser for sharing with me his knowledge and passion about education and always believing in ways of encouraging me to expand my viewpoints; and Dr. Sabina Vaught for motivating me to reflect upon my roles and share my voices.

Nobody has been more important to me in the pursuit of this project than my sons Felipe and Gabriel. I wish to thank them for providing me with confidence, love, and inspiration throughout my life. I thank them immensely for believing in and committing to my plan to come to the United States to live and study.

This work would not have been possible without the support of Escola Móbile, in São Paulo, Brazil. I am especially indebted to Daniel Bresser, who has believed in my career goals and who provided me with space and time to pursue those goals.

I thank my fellow friends, all the educators from Escola Móbile, Período Estendido & Inglês Móbile. They've been constant sources of professionalism, commitment, and belief in the importance of education. Maria Helena Camarero, Paulo Rodrigues, Laiza Lee, Cláudia Boni, and Elaine Miguel, I wish to thank them for backing me up at school in Brazil while I was studying in the United States. I'm forever grateful for your partnership and friendship.

I would like to express my gratitude to Letícia Galizzi and Paulo Moreira for being my family in the United States and adopting me into their own family while I worked on this project. Their kindness and generosity have sustained me throughout my stay in the United States.

My sincere thanks go to Natalie Haywood who shared her personal stories and views of race in the United States. Her benevolence made me pursue this theme as my own.

I am particularly grateful to Eduardo Campbell who has always spoken up and shared his racial concerns. His wise words have given me courage to share my own voices.

I cannot find words to express my gratitude to all the Brazilian community in Norman (there are some non-Brazilians, but Brazilians at heart, included in this community). Without your friendship, this process would have been more difficult and painful.

I do wish to thank Maria Rita Correa Vieira for generously proofreading this thesis and giving me valuable suggestions.

I hold a special appreciation to all the international students I had a chance to meet while studying at the University of Oklahoma. The possibility of meeting people from all over the world is one of the most fascinating things that someone can experience. International students bring life, color, taste, and spices to campus.

Finally, thanks to all the educators and students who have been part of my life all these years, and to all the people who continuously pushed me out of my comfort zone and challenged me to fulfill my dreams.

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Abstract

In this thesis, the author employs *testimonio* to present her voices as a female Brazilian educator who has always been considered white in her home country, and who comes to study at a university in the United States of America. This move re-articulates her identity as she is now considered non-white. Throughout her decolonizing journey among race, nationality, and gender, she will analyze her narratives of race and white privilege both in Brazil and in the United States. By expressing her voice as a woman of Color in the United States, the author will review her Brazilian identity and ethnicity, intertwining her personal, academic, and professional experiences. The *testimonio* methodology is grounded in critical race theory and critical consciousness studies by Paulo Freire to emphasize the need to focus on denouncing dehumanizing social structures and to announce social transformation. By sharing her voices, the author intends to contribute to the understanding of how educational institutions mediate their educational experiences for white and non-white students.

Keywords: testimonio, critical race theory, critical consciousness, Brazilian

Chapter 1

Introduction

> I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So, I have begun in an un-tutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. (McIntosh 1989)

This thesis is narrated by multiple voices that urge to be heard. Some of the voices that you will encounter here were developed throughout the first fifty-two years of my existence while living in Brazil. Other, newer, voices were brought to life in the last sixteen months living and studying in the United States of America. These voices are the products of my experiences as a female middle-class Brazilian educator but, more so, my moves across gender, race, and class identities, through life experiences.

The objective of this thesis is to identify the multiple perspectives of my decolonizing journey through race, class, nationality, and gender, by reflecting upon my own story as a woman of Color in the United States. Grounded in critical consciousness studies by Paulo Freire that focus on denouncing dehumanizing social structures and announcing social transformation (Freire 1970, 125), I unpack my white Brazilian identity and ethnicity. In addition, and central to my work, I utilize Critical Race Theory and *testimonio* to help unpack white privilege and differences between the social construction of race in both countries. The planned outcome of this study is to be able to provide educators with a reflection that may contribute to the

understanding of how schools mediate the experiences of white and non-white students, as well as how to disrupt racial inequalities in educational settings.

As a researcher, I first had to engage with my own decolonized journey to better unpack my questioning and struggle to answer the following questions:

1. How is race constructed in the United States and in Brazil, and what are its historical implications in both countries?
2. How am I racialized in the contexts of both Brazil and the United States?
3. By looking at concepts of white privilege and race in both countries, how can critical consciousness studies enable us to improve education from a racial perspective?
4. How are white privilege and race presented in a white upper-class school in São Paulo, Brazil?

Utilizing *testimonio* as methodology allows me to be a subject of this study and create a space where my perspectives of race and identity could be brought to the table and be part of the conversation. This being said, I start my *testimonio* from the beginning, my birth. I was born in the huge city of São Paulo, Brazil in 1966, two years after the coup d'état that established the cruel military dictatorship period that ruled my country for twenty-one years[1]. In addition, I was raised by a typical white middle-class Italian-Brazilian right-wing family who migrated to Brazil in the beginning of the twentieth century. Italian families at that time were authoritarian and

[1] Military dictatorship ruled Brazil from April 1st, 1964 to March 15th, 1985, when the first civilian was elected. It began with a coup d'état led by the Armed forces. The military initiated the coup d'état by saying that there was a communist threat in the country. The government used various forms of torture to gain information, intimidate, and silence people that were considered enemies. Brazilians were arrested, raped, murdered, and tortured. Artists and Intellectuals were sent to exile abroad. Freedom of speech was limited. Media of communication and artistic expression were censored. It was a time of silence. Speaking up was considered dangerous. For a detailed account of Brazilian Military Dictatorship, see The Brazilian Military Regime, 1964–1985 at https://oxfordre.com/latinamericanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.001.0001/acrefore-9780199366439-e-413?print=pdf

patriarchal. Women, children, and teenagers didn't express their voices. Throughout my childhood, we never talked about race, politics, feminism, sexuality, gender, diversity, inclusion, or anything that questioned or subverted the status quo of the traditional immigrant family. From my early childhood memories, I recall the presence of my father's family. As Europeans who moved to Brazil, they were product of the whitening project that was present in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Brazil. White immigrants from Europe were encouraged to seek a better life in Brazil with the purpose of whitening the population that was composed of whites, Indigenous people, and descendants of former African enslaved people (Schwarcz 2011, 228). On the other hand, my mother's family was not present in my life as a child or adult, since my mother died when I was a baby and I didn't grow up close to them. All I know is that they were of Portuguese, Spanish, and Danish descent.

When I was approaching college at the age of seventeen, I realized I wanted to be an educator. Making a difference in people's lives has long been one of the reasons for my pursuit of a career in education as an international language teacher. Since the very beginning of my teaching practice in the 1980s, acting in the global world has been one of my goals. The idea that reading the world precedes reading the word (Freire 1985, 18) has been the focus of my profession throughout my life. Teaching, in my point of view, has always started from a social context that is relevant to students in order to lead them to a critical thinking action and to function better in our world. I've always believed in helping students learn through questioning and interacting with information and the world. This implies that my career in education was rooted in those principles. However, the role of race has never been part of my pedagogical and educational concerns. This is because when you're a white Brazilian, you learn at a very young age that in Brazil there are numerous shades of white and Black skin, a spectrum of light to dark.

According to the 1976 Census, Brazilians attributed to themselves one hundred thirty-five different shades or skin colors[2]. Additionally, you learn not to doubt the different colors you see, and you take races for granted. Consequently, I was born and raised as a white person and I have never questioned my race, color, and privileges related to being white and middle-class. I was socially racialized to be colorblind in my country and I grew up believing the fantasy that race did not limit one's opportunities to have good education, career, and life, as we were socialized to see ourselves through the lens of meritocracy[3].

For the past twenty-three years, I have been working at a private upper-class school in São Paulo, Brazil, where most of the students and teachers are white according to the beliefs of miscegenation in Brazil and the accompanying innumerous shades of skin color. Throughout all these years, I have questioned privileges related to class and sex, and the effects and consequences they have on education. However, I have never doubted race or my role as being considered white in my own country. However, in August 2018, I came to the United States of America to study at the University of Oklahoma and live in Norman. From the moment I arrived in this country I learned that race was seen differently here than it was in my lifetime of experience in Brazil.

When I stepped into classes in the college of education, I at first denied the new racial perspectives that I was facing. It was a very disturbing process to face and comprehend after being white in Brazil for so many decades. For the first time in my life I was considered a woman of Color. With this being said, after living in Oklahoma for sixteen months and studying

[2] Document created by IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. "Características Étnico-raciais da população." Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – 2013 https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv63405.pdf

[3] For a detailed account on Meritocracy in Brazil, *see Brazil Is a Flawed Meritocracy in More Ways than Just One* at https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/internacional/en/brazil/2018/05/1967769-brazil-is-a-flawed-meritocracy-in-more-ways-than-just-one.shtml

the History of Education in the United States, Racism in Education, Global Education, Teaching English Language Learners in the US, and Contemporary American Education, I decided to dig into my own denial and learn from it. I began to research how race is socially constructed in both countries. I learned and internalized that in the United States I am considered a woman of Color, while in Brazil I am considered a white woman. Consequently, this made me feel inclined to learn and reflect on how white privilege presents in both countries, and how education can be improved from a racial perspective. For this reason, throughout this thesis the reader will hear both my voice as white in Brazil and my voice as non-white in the United States.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter provides a review and analysis of literature in two sections: 1) Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its implications to the concept of race in Brazil and in the United States, and 2) Critical Consciousness and its implication in education. Both sections offer insight on how to disrupt inequalities in educational settings.

Critical Race Theory

> He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face. (Du Bois 1902, 4)

As soon as I arrived in the United States, I was forced to contend with the concept that race is all around us. Not only does it relate to physical differences but also to the way cultural, economic, and behavioral diversities are perceived. It also refers to power structures, how society is organized, and how people see themselves within a social structure. In any given society, race refers to a construct that has the power to categorize and judge, elevate and downgrade, include and exclude (Kendi 2019, 38). Likewise, López (2013, 240) states that race is a social phenomenon and serves as a connection between physical features and personal characteristics. In the same way, according to Omi and Winant, race is a socially constructed identity (2015, 36-37), and it is rooted in the ideals of a nation (2015, 8).We can say that race can be seen as a social construct that is based on physical and genetic characteristics. It can change roles

depending on the social system in which it is embedded, it is related to social stratification and social relations, and it defines privileges, ideologies, and practices (Omi and Winant 2015, 106-107). Race plays a very important role both in the United States and in Brazil, and race inequalities are seen in both countries, since they still suffer the effects and consequences of slavery[4]. Based on this premise, critical race theory (CRT) is applied in this thesis as a way to interpret how racial roles are seen and constructed.

CRT is a movement that was established in the twentieth century by legal scholars, and activists, most of them, scholars of color. They were engaged in studying and transforming the relationships between race and power, as a way to explain how society and culture function, as well as how the forms of subtle racism are present (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 27). In order to sustain power, members of dominant groups oppress minority groups in a way that they internalize the stereotypic images of racial oppression. This way, power is guaranteed (Ladson-Billings 1998, 14). CRT attempts to explain how racism affects society and tries to understand and explain how white supremacy has been created and maintained in the United States (Creenshaw et al. 1995, xiii).

Sustaining racism is beneficial to white elites, and this is clearly seen in the Action Research Project - Project FUERTE, developed by Jason G. Irizarry and his team of scholars and students[5]. In this Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project, Latino and Latina students who grew up being marginalized and excluded in American schools speak up their voices of oppression. Through texts written by these students it is described how racism is

[4] Slavery was abolished in 1888 in Brazil and in 1863 in the Unites States of America.

[5] Project *FUERTE* (Future Urban Educators conducting Research to transform Teacher Education) is an Action Research project that aims at improving the achievement of high school students and the professional development of future teachers. It gives voices to Latino and Latina students who grew up being marginalized and excluded in American schools.

present in K-12 public schools and how Brown bodies are oppressed within these spaces. The students who are part of this project, and so many other marginalized students throughout the United States, grew up being constantly told by white teachers that they were not smart enough to succeed, a notion historically supported by U.S. schools. The schools where they studied are vehicles of white supremacy, racism, and American assimilation. This is seen in the ways that schools praise only Anglo-Saxon values and norms, encouraging Latinos and Latinas, and other students of color to erase their cultural identities. The invisibility of these microaggressions represents a subconscious world of exclusion, inferiority, and abnormality derived from colonialism (Sue 2015, 119), and it is present in American society on a daily basis, as well is in public K-12 schools.

Since I am focusing on how racial inequalities happen in both countries, CRT gives me the tools to understand and question how races are constructed, how white privilege is maintained, and how racism affects society. It also helps me understand how social inequalities give Brazilians a false sense of privilege. There has always been social inequality in Brazil, and the benefits of white privilege give middle class Brazilians a false idea that in Brazil we don't see color. The social distance and inequality in Brazil result not only from race prejudice, but also from class consciousness, the myth of racial democracy, a refusal to look at racism the way it is, and from the idea that Brazilians do not think of themselves as a people composed of distinct "races" but as a multi-colored national race (Stum 2004). There is fake decolonization that can be expressed by the way many cultures nowadays state they are colorblind; however, they need race to rule (Omi and Winant 2015, 10). With this being said, I argue that this is a dissonance related to white supremacy, a doctrine of racial superiority that makes white privilege possible (Sue 2015, 175). White supremacy is the basis of education in the United States and in Brazil, and

Brown and Black children have been socialized to believe that white people deserve better education. This belief is grounded in power and it maintains an institutionalized exclusion of Black and Brown bodies from society. It is pervasive within all institutions and policies. In both countries, to be white is to be socialized in a world of white supremacy (Sue 2015, 178). Since race can be operated in a fluid and shifting way (Ladson-Billings 1998, 9), one can become whiter depending on the class and social position he/she belongs to. Becoming whiter reveals aspirations to social ascent and power (Schwarcz 2015,70), as it can be seen in both countries.

From the very beginning of my stay in the United States, I saw myself surrounded and immersed in discussions related to education, race, power, injustice, inequity, segregation, and neglect. After the initial moment of denial in which I refused to accept that race was socially constructed and meant to exclude marginalized populations from society, I started to question myself and my roles in both countries. As a result, I began to reflect upon the power that race in the United States had on me, a Brazilian female educator. First, I questioned my racial identities. I use the word identities in the plural because I soon noticed there were two completely different racial identities being expressed through my body. In Brazil, I'm a white woman. This is my Brazilian identity, the way I identify myself, and how Brazilian society sees me. This is the identity with which I had been born and raised. In the United States, I'm racialized as a woman of Color. This is my identity in this country. Nevertheless, the ability to navigate and unpack both identities has been one of my major challenges while a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma.

Critical Consciousness

> The reading and writing of words come by way of the reading of the world. Reading the world is an antecedent act vis-à-vis the reading of the word. The teaching of reading and writing of the world to a person missing the critical exercise of reading the world is, scientifically, politically, and pedagogically crippled. (Freire 1992, 78-79)

According to Freire (1974, 30), education enables us to discuss global problems that belong to our social and cultural contexts, as well as to intervene critically in these contexts. This assumption proposed by the author has always been the underlying principle of my career. By reflecting, discussing, and acting, we are able to evaluate and reevaluate processes within our social reality and, consequently, make meaningful changes in our communities and in the world. Nowadays, my deepest reflection is on how to find ways of intervening critically in social contexts when society sends messages of exclusion on a daily basis. For me, education should be a safe space of growth and inclusion. It should promote reflection and action towards change through critical consciousness, a concept that is present in modern education. It's a way of having a deep understanding of the world in which we live, and how to take actions in order to change the world, or at least part of it. Changing a context in your own classroom, even if it is a very small change, is a starting point in transforming the world. For example, this concept is present in Paulo Freire's work when he created a literacy methodology to teach Brazilian peasants how to read and write in the 1960s. Freire stated that learners should be able to read the world around them, and that happened through reflection and critical thinking. According to him, teachers should challenge students to apprehend the object (Freire 1985, 17) and establish relations between the discourse and the reality (19).

My initial thought when I started learning about public education in the United States was to name it an unfair and individualistic school system based on the principles of banking

education, as stated by Paulo Freire (1970). By excluding marginalized populations, there is no egalitarian education, no education for freedom. Students are seen and they behave as 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher, whereas the goal of being a critically conscious educator should be to educate active, critical citizens that belong, question, and act in a social world. In order to change this, teaching and learning ought to be viewed as multiple acts of cognition, and not by ways of transferals of information (Freire 1970, 72-79). Throughout my sixteen months in the United States, I have been thinking of what needed to be changed in order to introduce critical consciousness studies and practices, as well as to improve education from a non-white perspective. The importance of engagement within a community is vital to students' acquisitions. In addition, critical consciousness can reduce the possibility of marginalization because it increases the sense of engagement among students. The outcomes of being in a critically conscious environment can have transformative implications in adolescents and their corresponding communities (Seiders et al 2017, 1176). However, engagement is not seen in most schools in the United States, as schools still teach a hidden curriculum that rewards some and punishes others, perpetuating social inequalities to some and privileges to others (Collins 2009, 4). Students are not meant to engage in a community, they are supposed to vanish and not become part of the educational institution.

In order to change the perspectives of exclusion and inequality, a critical consciousness approach that requires a reflective educator is needed. It is a lifetime process, and patience is vital. It is not a three-hour workshop that will transform a teacher into a critically conscious educator. As Freire (1997, 7) stated in his book "*Educação como prática de Liberdade*"[6], education is an act of love that requires courage. According to the author, the only way to learn

[6] "Education as practice of freedom", translated by the author.

how to discuss and debate is by having an educational process that promotes the sharing of ideas. As I have studied teacher development programs in the United States, it has become clear just how vital it is that reflection is included. Jacobs et al (2015) reinforced the importance of including the topics of diversity and equity in pre-service teacher programs that are also related to developing a critically thinking educator and, consequently, critically thinking students. According to the authors' study, this is a way to develop culturally responsible teachers (14-15). On the whole, the process of developing a critically thinking educator who embraces diversity and inclusion is a way to achieve social transformation in educational settings.

Watts, Diemer, and Voight (2011) analyzed the future directions of having a critically conscious approach to teaching and learning. According to the authors, critical consciousness is a way to describe how oppressed or marginalized people learn to critically analyze their social conditions and act to change them (44). The authors brought a transformative approach to learning when they stated that critical consciousness leads to social and political engagement (59). Teacher development programs based on problem-posed methodology are an urgent need all over the world. According to the study of Smith-Maddox and Solórzano (2002, 80-81), by using such methodology teachers are able to explore their knowledge of race, racism, and culture. It is also a way of examining moral dilemmas of teaching and learning. Borden (2014, 232) states that teachers should invest in best practices policies in order to advocate for their ELLs[7], as well as create spaces to present a culturally responsive curriculum. According to Graman (1988, 447), it is of extreme theoretical relevance that we reflect on challenges in teacher development programs. The author discusses students' perception when they recognize a teacher who brings problem-posing methodology to class. When the students refer to the choices

[7] ELL - English Language Learners.

the teacher makes and that the teacher is not expecting them to reproduce knowledge that is 'deposited' in their minds, students become engaged in the discussions and in the critical questions brought to class. Problem-posing education is a starting point to start dialogic communication between educators and learners. My experience as a Brazilian Educator shows me that this communication is the key to consciousness (Freire 1970, 79). An example of this is the development of a project with 5th grade students in a private K-12 school in Brazil. While working with teachers on a critical consciousness approach to teaching English as an international language, a group of educators proposed a reflection to students based on the principles that music can change people's lives. In addition, they provided students with tools to create an animation based on a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that brings sports, culture, and music to children and adolescents in the suburbs and slums in São Paulo[8]. Students learned about the NGO through a visit they made at the school. They researched the organization, got together in groups, and created a script and a video to be shared with the school community. When researching for the classroom project, students were able to question their values about what an NGO is and how it functions. As students who live in a middle class/upper class neighborhood and study at a predominantly white private institution, they do not have contact with other students who live in the suburbs or in the slums. Teachers and students shared dialogic communications that led them to critical thinking discussions. By talking about other challenges that unprivileged children and adolescents may face, considered a controversial issue, the project gave students and teachers a repertoire to think critically using a culturally responsive curriculum.

[8] NGO in São Paulo, Brazil: *Gerando Falcões* at https://gerandofalcoes.com/.

In problem-posed education, students are taken as critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher (Freire 1970, 81). Educators and students are co-authors in the process of achieving learning, development, and growth. This certainly leads to social transformation. Students are introduced to problems, issues that reflect the world they live in, and they are challenged to reflect and act upon those problems. Learners are encouraged to think critically and reflect on how they act upon this world, their ability to transform it. Freire (1974, 136) states that problematization is related to the human being, the world, and its relations. It is not the human being isolated from the world, but rather the idea of people transforming the world. According to the author, no teaching program can exist if it is not connected with the work of human beings and their view of the world (138). Education, through the concept of critical consciousness, is viewed as the practice of freedom, and not as a practice of domination as it is seen by Freire in Banking Education (1970, 81). It is how we can be transformed into critical thinkers, a manner of learning to look ahead to the world and roles in society. Problem-posed education is a way of allowing teachers and students to become the subject of the educational process(86). Seider et al (2017, 1163) proposed that problem-posed education should encourage the development of students' critical consciousness. According to their study, students who were faced with problem-posed methodology showed growth in intellectual character strengths, while students who were faced with less democratic schools showed growth in the civic character (1165). The authors concluded that students attending schools that include problem-posed education developed more critical thinking skills than those attending schools which use other methodologies (1174). This relates to the study proposed by Houser (2007, 47-48), in which the author states that problem-posed education is not just a methodology, but a relationship between quality and trust. According to the author, it is a way of humanizing relationships. However, the

question that guides my thoughts throughout this thesis is related to the real meaning of education in the context of schooling. Although the purpose of schools should be to educate citizens, schools can be vehicles of dehumanization and devaluation of students through civilizing and colonizing students and imposing white culture upon them.

The purpose of this review is to describe the concept of race as a social construct utilizing a critical race theory framework. It also aims at discussing the principles of critical consciousness in teachers' practice from the level of the students' and teachers' development. It's clear from the research reviewed that critical consciousness can lead to more meaningful learning. As Freire (1992, 151) stated, it's necessary to have unity in diversity and, without this, minorities could not even struggle for the most basic rights. Along with this, it is also clear that more research is needed in order to show the intentionality of critical consciousness in classes and teacher development programs. This area of knowledge is of great importance and relevance in creating education programs that emphasize and develop the critical thinking skills which are so important in everyone's lives. Being a critical thinker can lead us to become an agent of change in a transformative and inclusive world. Teachers have assumptions and beliefs regarding how they view their own teaching practice, their roles as responsible professionals, and how they function as educators in the world. There are numerous paths to follow. Some believe in practicing principles of education that function as acts of depositing content into students, with students being the depositories and teachers being the depositors. On the other hand, others believe in education as the practice of freedom (Freire 1970, 72-81). These beliefs express the level of critical consciousness that is present in the educator's mindset.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 2) described the study of narratives as a way by which people experience the world. According to the authors, education has the role to construct and reconstruct personal and social stories. Freire (1970, 88), likewise, supported the idea that in speaking and naming the world, people can change it. It is through dialogue that we can achieve significance as human beings, and we can get transformed in a positive way. He also advocated for the kind of education that engages students and teachers in critical thinking (75), a dialogue that sometimes a teacher teaches learners, while other times teachers learn, a process that allows both educators and learners to grow (80).

However, how can we bring critical consciousness into the teaching and learning processes in a way to fight white privilege and contribute to inclusion and equity ? It's hard to believe that whites will give up their power and surrender their racism-granted privileges. (Bell Jr. 1995, 22). This thesis is an attempt to resist and talk about things that make us feel uncomfortable. It also talks about resistance and how to transform students and educators into antiracist human beings. It certainly aims at sharing what it means to be white in one country and racialized as a woman of Color in another one.

Even being immersed in a white elite private school in Brazil and its white benefits, I have always considered myself a critically thinking educator. I have been a professional that took into consideration inequalities based on class, culture and gender. However, I've never acknowledged inequalities based on race as focal points of my teaching assumptions and practice. Therefore, I have always thought of education as an instrument to help us achieve the formation of critical citizens who transform realities and change the world. As a woman of Color in the United States, when I started reading the world in this country I challenged myself to apprehend the educational context around me. By doing so, I found out that education here is a

method of excluding minorities, the opposite of what critical consciousness suggests. I quickly found myself deeply immersed into learning about dehumanizing social structures and endeavoring to come up with ideas for creating social change in both Brazil and the United States. This is part of the process of my decolonization journey, when I, having learned about and faced inequalities in the United States, began thinking about my transformational role as a global educator.

Methodology

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you (Maya Angelou 1969).

This thesis articulates my perspectives as a female Brazilian educator who is self-questioning power and engagement in the world. It's a reflection of my various processes and the role that race inequalities play in my life as an educator. I chose the genre *testimonio* to be able to share the narratives of my voices as a white and Brown woman who has been questioning why white privilege is still present in our lives. A *testimonio* is a first-person account that intends to narrate a person's voice that needs to be heard. It is a genre that functions as a powerful instrument of empowerment by non-dominant groups (Hueber 2012, 377). This methodology emerged from Latin American critical race scholarship and it moved to other fields of knowledge, such as anthropology, education, ethnic studies, psychology, and women's and gender studies. Since it incorporates histories of oppression that may bring reflection and social transformation (Bernal, Bruciaga e Carmona 2012, 364), *testimonio*s are based on a social , cultural, or political urgency that may give voice to injustice and raise awareness of oppression

(Huber 2009, 644). *Testimonio*s name and denounce injustice and oppression and can be narratives of liberation because they show power and resistance (Reyes and Rodrigues 2012,525). In here, I use *testimonio* as a way to tell my narratives of decolonization as being both a white and a non-white person. It is through the methodology of *testimonio* that I can reflect and act on how I inhabit these two different cultures, Brazilian and American, and produce new forms of empowerment aimed at denouncing a collective and oppressive condition and social transformation (Flores Carmona and Luciano 2014, 78-79). As this genre is a conceptual and methodological tool to change cultural, social, and personal narratives into critical analysis (Fuentes and Pérez 2016, 8), through this *testimonio* I design my own change and denounce how I have lived with white privilege throughout most of my life. My Brownness in the United States has given me the tools to reject the white privilege I have had so far and to move forward to not desire to be a product of white privilege any longer.

Huber (2009) describes five areas of alignment of *testimonio*s: to reveal injustices caused by oppression, to challenge dominant Eurocentric ideologies, to validate experiential knowledge, to acknowledge power, and to commit to breaking down racial and social injustice. When I decided to write my *testimonio*, I wanted to share a narrative that could give me a voice to denounce inequalities and oppression, and question the white privilege embedded in white societies. My white and Brown voices were urging to be heard. Since a *testimonio* is a critical consciousness-raising document that brings stories of oppression to elicit social change (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Carmona 2012, 364), this thesis allows me to speak up my own voice as a woman who has to deal with different racial identities simultaneously. My interactions with the Brazilian community both in Brazil and in the United States allow me to keep being white, while my identity as a woman of Color in the United States forces me to reflect upon all the white

privileges that I benefited from and that I don't have while living here. It is a way I can break from oppressive traditions and become more empowered, denounce an oppressive condition, and produce social change (Carmona and Luciano 2014, 78-79). Through this *testimonio* I intend to get away from the Eurocentric perspective of white superiority, meritocracy, territorial expansion, objectivity, and individuality (Bernal 2002, 111). By reflecting upon my two opposite identities, I can share what it is like to gain advantage and disadvantage based on race, class, culture and ethnicity. I believe this can produce change in society, even if it's a small change.

This document is a call for more people of color to share their stories, thereby showing their knowledge and experiences, or shed light on their cultures that are misinterpreted or omitted in educational settings (Bernal 2020, 106). It's a call for reflexivity, collectivity, social awareness, and power imbalance (Carmona and Luciano 2014, 88). Unpacking my voices in a *testimonio* is a cry for resistance. In other words, people shouldn't have to be treated differently according to the color of their skin, their gender, sexual orientation, or their class. My deepest voice is the voice of an educator who wants to see people have equal opportunities for growth, development, and humane treatment.

Chapter 3

My path to race reflection

My decolonizing journey started when I decided to be a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma. At that time, I didn't know this was a predominantly white institution located in the Bible belt[9] white Christian south of the United States. Furthermore, thinking about race had never been a concern for me as a white person in Brazil, since I had never experienced race or ethnic prejudice in my life. It was only when I started the Master's program at the University of Oklahoma that I got in touch with racial studies. In my first semester as a student, in the Fall of 2018, I had to go through the adjustment of living in an international country alone, missing my sons and my life in Brazil, and having to read and get in touch with the inequalities of education in the United States. This process was very intense and painful. Many times, I thought of giving up and going back home to Brazil. However, at the same time that learning about inequalities hurt deeply, I felt an intense desire to have my voices heard. I had the feeling that I've always had voices that remained mute for decades and now were urging to be heard.

One of the first things I learned in my classes at the University of Oklahoma was that education in the United States is tied to and framed around whiteness. However, it has been very difficult for me to understand and accept that although the purpose of education should be to

[9] Region in the Southern United States in which conservative evangelical Protestantism plays a strong role in society and politics. Christian church attendance across these states is higher than the nation's average. States that constitute the Bible belt: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. For more information, see *The Bible Belt Extends Throughout the American South* at https://www.thoughtco.com/the-bible-belt-1434529.

educate and form communities of people who cooperate and learn together, it is not what is seen in schools in the United States. I spent my life in Brazil hearing people say that education in the United States was a model to be followed because that is what we hear about U.S. Education. However, I had an initial shock that deconstructed my image of public K-12 education in the United States. From the very beginning of my course when I started to study the History of U.S. Education, I learned that schools are meant to exclude marginalized populations. Furthermore, I learned that school was in the hands of white supremacists who tell students of color that American ideals are based on meritocracy, objectivity, and individuality (Bernal 2002, 111), while what is seen is that it is a way to impose oppressor ideas and views. In addition, I found out that the role of education in the United States since the beginning of schooling in the seventeenth century has been to remind people what their place in society is, and to perpetuate exclusion and subordination of people of color to white men.

In my first semester studying in the United States, I lived in complete denial. It was extremely demanding for me to accept that school is not meant to include, but to exclude Latinos and Latinas, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Native American people. I couldn't acknowledge that the American society is divided into white and non-white, so I refused to see what was in front of me. I ignored the number of times that I faced some kind of "different treatment" in coffee shops, restaurants, and supermarkets because of how I am racialized here. I rejected the times that white American people said that they were happy to have me here in this country, however nobody invited me to go out and have some coffee. I refused to believe that there were people who didn't want to be friends with me at work or in class based on the fact that I was not a white American. At first I got very angry at the American culture and society and tried to compare it to my own culture. I remember thinking and saying that in Brazil we don't see

color. I recall stating that although there is racism in Brazil, it was related to class and not color. However, with time, I had to face reality, and I started to look for similarities from my own country, as well as inequalities related to race prejudice. It was a difficult process that hurt me deeply many times. I wanted to find a way to do something to change racism by denouncing what I was experiencing and how people of color are seen and treated in the United States. This thesis is the product of my growth through those profound, hurtful reflections, now transformed into action.

In the Spring of 2019, I started to accept that my country has been as racist as the United States. I began to recognize that we also operate under a dominant ideology of whiteness. Throughout this process, I ended up reflecting that the white Eurocentric perspective is also the norm in Brazil and that white people, like me, don't see white privilege because this privilege is invisible (Bernal 2002, 111). By being able to see it, I noticed that I have always lived under white privilege, and I have never thought about it. The readings and the discussions I have had in class and with people on campus have made me start seeing and understanding how marginalized populations live in a world framed by racial oppression. And this includes my country, Brazil.

The first aspect I had to unpack was the fact that I am white in Brazil, while in the United States, I am a person of color. This has not been an easy task, after being white for fifty-two years. However, little by little, the whiteness that I've always belonged to was unveiled in front of me. This revelation made me see, feel, and understand my non-whiteness here in the United States. Being a person of color in Oklahoma made me free to comprehend racial hierarchy and social order designed by a dominant culture. And in seeing all these new aspects, I felt the need to be heard and to share my voices. When you are an optimistic person, as I have always been, someone who sees the power of education as transformation, you tend believe there is hope.

However, when I arrived in the United States I became skeptical of the idea of hope. One of my professors told me there was no hope and this made me feel devastated. At that time, I felt like going back home to Brazil because if there had been no hope, I would not have left my country, sons, family, friends, and life to come to the United States to study. The following class, this professor told me there was hope in resistance. And this made me see my role and my voices as resistance. I remember saying in class that if there was hope in resistance I would be resistant. Besides, this day changed my view of my participation in the Master's program. Now, one year out from this class, I am more convinced that there is certainly hope in resistance. And that is what I feel my role is in this world. I believe that education can have the power to form critical citizens who transform realities and change the world.

Paulo Freire is one of the greatest inspirations in my career. I strongly agree with his views of education and the world. Although there is some criticism that Freire didn't recognize gender and race in his work (Jackson 2007,210), we have to understand his theory through the lens of the historic period[10] he was living in when he wrote Pedagogy of the Oppressed[11] and the conceptualization that race in Brazil is determined by a combination of skin color, social class, marital status, education, and profession, while in the United States race is based on skin color (Krevh 2017, 25). To Freire, education brings us ways to talk about social, cultural and global problems. It also gives us the tools to make critical interventions in these contexts. It's only when we reflect, discuss, and act that we can make changes in our contexts and in our world (Freire 1974, 30). That's how I see my position as an educator and that's why I decided to write my

[10] Paulo Freire wrote the book Pedagogy of the Oppressed in Chile during the first years of exile from Brazil. His teaching and pedagogy were considered subversive by the military regime in Brazil. For more information, read Paulo Freire biography at https://www.freire.org/paulo-freire/paulo-freire-biography and at http://www.ibe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/freiree.PDF.

[11] For more information on the book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, read the entry on *Paulo Freire* at the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* at https://www.iep.utm.edu/freire/#H5.

testimonio, a document of resistance and action towards social change. Through this thesis, I intend to raise up my voices, the voices of a female Brazilian educator in the reconstruction of her own identity based on race, class, gender, and culture. Voices that were deconstructed and are currently being reconstructed while living in the United States, seeing Brazil from a distance and all the political issues we've been suffering in the year of 2019 after the election of the new far-right conservative president[12].

I took courses at the University of Oklahoma that really impacted my view of race, gender, and education. "History of the United States Education" was the starting point of my journey to acknowledging race and inequalities. However, it was also this course that made me go deeper in my initial denial. I remember leaving classes every Monday thinking that all Americans were passive and didn't want to change the educational system. I recall being angry at the U.S. society. Little did I know at that time that the system is meant to exclude the ones who don't belong - students of color. On the other hand, the course on "Global Education" made me see that although there are inequalities in this country, there is hope, and hope is achieved through education. This course made me start to feel like sharing my voice as an educator. However, at that time, I still considered myself only a white person. It was only in the Spring of 2019, when I took a course on "Issues of American Education," when, in conversation, a colleague taught me about race from a Black person's perspective, that I started to comprehend and accept that I was not considered white in the United States and that I was suffering the consequences of being a woman of Color. We had weekly written dialogues and debated how the

[12] In October 2018, Brazil elected a new President, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a former military officer and congressman. He is a member of the Social Liberal Party. Bolsonaro's government has been a threat to Brazilian democracy. He has adopted a logic dictated by religious values, moving away from agendas linked to human rights. He has been cultivating a relationship with the international far-right, mainly the one established by the United States. He has moved Brazil toward an authoritarian regime revealing a fascist bent, showing aggressiveness against minorities, such as Black, Brown and Indigenous people, LGBTQI, and women.

United States education is meant for whites only. This colleague helped me view and accept my non-whiteness and I started seeing things from a different angle, a more critical one. These courses and these interactions provided me with new perspectives to see the struggle of non-white people in the United States.

Race in Brazil and in the United States

> É impressionante que um país de escravidão tão longa tenha autoconcepção de que não é violento (Schwarcz, 2017).[13]

During an exchange with a classmate in January 2019, in the very beginning of the process of unpacking my denial, I started thinking and talking about how colonialism impacted both countries. Brazil has also suffered from a significant impact of colonialism, but at that time I still couldn't figure out why it was so different. I read a chapter of a book one of my professors recommended[14] and that's how and when I started to question my own history of race. I learned that the history of Brazil was written by whites for whites (Nascimento 1979, 2). Paulo Freire and Abdias do Nascimento[15] helped me understand how the oppressive colonialism was built and how racism was maintained in Brazil. Freire was exiled from Brazil during the military dictatorship period and he did a valuable work in educational projects in African countries[16] that have also been colonized. Through his work in Africa he tells us that education is the way to diminish the oppression of the dominant elites when it comes to racial issues (Freire 1970, 78).

[13] Translated by the author: "It's amazing that a country has been through a long period of slavery believes it is not a violent country". https://www.diariodocentrodomundo.com.br/e-impressionante-que-um-pais-de-escravidao-tao-longa-tenha-autoconcepcao-de-que-nao-e-violento/
[14] Do Nascimento, Abdias. *Brazil: mixture or massacre?* 1979.
[15] Abdias do Nascimento, African Brazilian scholar who fought against racism.
[16] He advised African governments of Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe and Angola.

Abdias do Nascimento, on the other hand has dedicated his career on reflecting upon racism in Brazil and how resistance is crucial to a better understanding of society. Both authors identify oppression and the false generosity of the dominant elite as a way to maintain the privileges of the ones who hold power. Through this reflection on power, domination, racism, and resistance, I decided I wanted to uncover some of these stories in my thesis. By looking at my own country, I would better understand education in the United States and the impact of colonialism. However, it is seen in different ways in both countries. At that time, it was difficult for me to understand if there are in fact many differences, or if the differences that I was seeing were part of the white privilege in which I have been immersed throughout my life in Brazil.

It's known that Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese, which makes a difference from the colonization in the United States. The Portuguese that colonized Brazil were Catholics and the English who colonized the United States were Protestants. However, both the United States and Brazil suffered deeply from the impact of slavery. If I say that racism in the United States is stronger than in Brazil, I would be hiding from myself that racism is strong in Brazil. It is strong, intense, and cruel, and for this reason I have been trying to understand why this is so different. So far, I have some ideas as to the reasons racism is more evident and present in the United States. One of the clues I have is that, in Brazil, we started having interracial marriages soon after the Portuguese arrived and started to colonize Brazil. As a result, Brazil has been a melting pot[17] for more than five centuries, much longer than the United States. Slaves from Africa, native Brazilians, and the Portuguese have been mixing since the very beginning of colonization in the sixteenth century. European immigrants became part of the fusion of cultures as soon as they migrated to Brazil. However, to use this metaphor of a melting pot as an explanation of

[17] The metaphor of a melting pot refers to a society where many different types of people blend together as one.

miscegenation in Brazil is to see things from an innocent point of view. While it is true that Brazilians mixed, people and races didn't blend together as one. There are certainly more facts to be unpacked.

When the Portuguese colonizers arrived in Brazil between the 1500s and the 1800s, around five million Africans were transported to Brazil to work as slaves. The number was much higher than the number of slaves who were transported to the United States, around five hundred and sixty thousand. Portuguese men didn't go to Brazil with families, as did the English who colonized the United States. They arrived in the country without wives and children. With this in mind, since there were Black slaves in Brazil, it's clear to see how the process of miscegenation started (Greene 2009, 150). It has been a characteristic of the Brazilian population since then. I grew up thinking that this miscegenation didn't do us any harm. I was told and taught that Brazilians liked to mix among different cultures and races, and in fact the mixing of races usually happened between white men and Black women through rape. The sons and daughters of this miscegenation were banned from white society. Nowadays, I still believe that we are a multicultural nation, however, the weight of racism is enormous in Brazil. The census in Brazil[18] shows us that the inequality is huge. In 2018, 3.9% of white people who are older than fifteen were illiterate, while 9.1% of Black and Brown people the same age are illiterate. If we consider people who are older than sixty, we have a more discrepant number. The number of illiterate white people is 10.3%, while the number of illiterate Black and Brown people is 27.5%. We can conclude that Black families have fewer opportunities to climb the social ladder and get an education, implying, for instance, decreased likelihood of attending good universities. These

[18] "Pesquisa Nacional por amostra de domicílios", IBGE Educação 2018, October 20, 2019, - https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv101657_informativo.pdf

statistics helped me unpack the concept of race in Brazil as compared to my role as a Brown woman in the United States.

It was when I had to face the facts of exclusion, inequity, and the feeling of not belonging in the United States, while belonging in Brazil. I've spent my whole life, more than half a century, in a social group that has always included me, and I've always had a sense that I belonged. This was not what I encountered when I came to live in the United States, and these new feelings and experiences scared me. It was difficult for me to see and accept that race defines who you are and who you will become. And this refers to both countries, not only the United States, as I had originally imagined. I noticed that my initial denial to accept how people are racialized in Brazil was also a watershed. In one part of me, there was the identity I have always been identified with: white. However, in one other part of me, there was the new identity I had just gotten in touch with: woman of Color. The first time I interfaced it and had to deal with this binary mindset was when I made a presentation in one of my graduate classes soon after I arrived in the United States. I shared with my colleagues that in the Brazilian presidential election campaign, in October 2018, a Facebook group called "Women United against Bolsonaro"[19] had been created and maintained by Brazilian women. As a woman I was really proud of this virtual community because it was a sign of women's resistance. Moreover, this social media group grew incredibly big in an extremely short period of time. It became powerful because in less than one week, the group had reached more than three million women all over my country. In my presentation in class, I had mentioned that the objective of the group was to make women all over Brazil join forces in order to fight against exclusion and prejudice that was suggested by the presidential candidate. More importantly, it had been the first time in history

[19] In Portuguese, *Mulheres unidas contra Bolsonaro*, translated by the author.

that so many Brazilian women got together to express their political views against a male homophobic racist candidate in the history of Brazilian politics. In the end of my presentation I became surprised because one of the students in my class, an African American female colleague, asked me if the Facebook group was composed of white or Black women. Undoubtedly, this was brought to my attention as a concern that was showing me clearly that the polarity between white versus Black has not been present in Brazil with the same deep intensity that it is seen here in the United States.

However, that was when I questioned myself about race and how races were constructed. I started reflecting if this polarity has not really been present in Brazil, or if I was the one who has not been able to observe it due to my whiteness and colorblindness as a white woman in Brazil. Through this question, I began to doubt whether both groups, Black and white women, have really been able to coexist, or if this coexistence is the product of my Brazilian whiteness. In conclusion, I was not sure about the co-existence any longer. In this moment I began to question the role of race in my own country and started looking at the power of race from a new perspective, a less white one. I doubted if my view of race in Brazil, the one I have built throughout my life, was accurate, if it included minorities and marginalized populations, or if it was the product of my own white privilege. There were moments in this self-analysis process that I felt guilty for not being able to see the white privilege through my fifty-two years of existence in Brazil and how I have always benefited from it.

Brazil and the myth of racial democracy

> Dare I speak to oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will take us away from the boundaries of domination, a language that will not fence you in, bind you, or hold you. Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to read ourselves - to reunite, to reconcile, to renew. Our words are not without meaning. They are an action—a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle. (hooks, 1990)

After my first semester as a graduate student, I began my second racial reflection phase: gaining an understanding of my own views of race and what it meant to be white in Brazil. Having courses that discussed race at the University of Oklahoma and getting in touch with colleagues of color who have suffered from racism all their lives, being able to hear their stories and learn from them, gave me strength to understand that I have always profited from the advantages and courtesies from being a member of the dominant race (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 112). Indeed, when you are white in Brazil, wages are higher, you have wider access to good education and cultural possibilities, streets are safer, you may live in safer neighborhoods, your chances of having better careers are higher, and you are treated in a more humane way. However, being conscious about those privileges was a feeling that caused much pain because it is a thought that I have never experienced before. In Brazil, if you are white middle-class, you are meant to believe that you live in a racial democracy, a concept brought by Gilberto Freyre when he stated that Brazil was a combination of diversity and unity (1963, 431). Freyre, a Brazilian sociologist, anthropologist, and historian, who did his undergraduate and master's studies in the United States, developed the idea of racial democracy in the 1930s. He said that

due to the fact that Brazil was a blend of European, Indian, and African, this mix of ethnicities created a society free of racism. Later on, in the 1940s, Freyre exchanged the term racial democracy for ethnic democracy, replacing the false notion of race (Telles 2004, 33), instead describing the Brazilian society as colorblind, a society that didn't see color or race. To Freyre, the mixing of the population[20] was a way to create a future of Brazilian racial democracy (Eakin 2017, 67).

In Brazil, there is a great number of Brazilians who are descendants of Africans due to miscegenation that started to occur in the colonial period (Greene 2009, 146). Additionally, miscegenation in Brazil had allowed a diffusion of racial difference and, consequently, a great number of white people believed there was no racism in Brazil. Although this myth is still present in Brazil nowadays because it is supported by the white Brazilian elite, it is now referred to as a myth by the majority of people who think critically. It's clear that there's much inequality between Afro-Brazilians and white Brazilians (Gladys Mitchell 2009, 31-32).

We white Brazilians have difficulty accepting that there is racism in Brazil. We consider ourselves a multiracial and multicultural nation. This feeling brought to white Brazilians some distance and opposition towards affirmative action and quotas. When we accept quotas, we have to admit that there are race inequalities. The racial democracy myth brings the idea that poverty and lack of social opportunity faced by people of color are not only due to class discrimination and the legacy of slavery, but also race discrimination (Htun 2004, 64). We also tend to say we do not see race, while in fact we are colorblind. We have an enormous reluctance to see racism and its effects on Black people's lives. We prefer to remain blind to racial identity and accept the existence of prejudice against Blacks and people of color instead of fighting against

[20] *Mestiçagem* in Portuguese, translated by the author.

discrimination. As examples of racism in Brazil, we see that the police are more likely to stop a Black person on the street than they are a white person, most white families do not approve when their sons or daughters date a Black person, Black people are usually mistaken for maids and servants, people of color suffer hostile relationships, and they are often mistreated.

The colorblindness and myth of racial democracy maintain the status quo of unequal racial interaction (dos Santos 2006, 43). On the other hand, for Americans, people of mixed ancestry are considered non-white, while Brazilians consider the appearance or descent as well as also social and economic status (Negrón-Muntaner 2017, 1-2). As a result of the myth of racial democracy, segregation didn't happen in Brazil as it happened in the United States. Although considered a racist society, Brazilians have always mixed. On the other hand, in the United States, interracial marriage was only legal after 1967. Furthermore, in the twentieth century in the United States, schools and public spaces were segregated. This did not happen in Brazil. Although it was not common, in Brazil both whites and people of color could move around the same spaces. As seen in Garcia (2018), colonialism brought white supremacy that is responsible for excluding minorities and marginalized populations. The author describes how schools in California were segregated in the twentieth century. There were no avenues of interaction between white students and students of color. They couldn't play together, and they had to be in different spaces at different times. Bathroom, recess, and the time school let out were different in some segregated schools. White parents encouraged segregation because they didn't want their children to be together with students of color (Garcia 2018, 52). Students were physically punished and certainly retained few positive memories of the school. The trauma they suffered throughout the years remained until adult life (Garcia 2018,104). White teachers were hostile and indifferent towards students of color. If they asked a question, they were punished.

Students of color had no voice. They were invisible in a space that was supposed to be a space of learning (Garcia 2018, 105).

When I was writing the previous paragraphs, I felt very uncomfortable to write "we white Brazilians" because I had to describe how white Brazilian society deals with white privilege and this includes having to look at the way I have always navigated my whiteness in Brazil. However, when going deep into the ideas of racism, not-racism and antiracism brought by Kendi (2019), I reflected that the main theme of racism is denial, while the main idea of antiracism is confession[21]. By reflecting and confessing racist ideas, we have a chance to make things different and to become antiracist. And this is my cry as a white Brazilian who is making things different.

The whitening process in Brazil

> Denial is the heartbeat of racism, beating across ideologies, races, and nations (Kendi 2019).

I am of European descent from both my mother's and father's sides. I don't have many details from my mother's side, since throughout my life I was not close to her relatives. All I know is that my great grandfather was from Denmark. He went to Brazil to work for the Danish consulate, but I still have conflicting information about him due to some mostly inconclusive heritage research that I have been doing. It is also conflicting because none of my brothers, sister and cousins have Scandinavian features, such as skin, eyes, and hair color. For this reason, I wish

[21] "Interview: Ibram X. Kendi Takes a Hard Look at Racism—and Himself", Washingtonian News, October 23, 2019, https://www.washingtonian.com/2019/10/23/iibram-kendi-how-to-be-an-antiracist/?fbclid=IwAR3mDW_cof9PY-ywjlobtQ6YSbvQIwg2bwTDTN5DrjAqkaLdGixyr5oLnOk

to concentrate my reflection on my father's side. My great grandfather was an Italian immigrant who went to Brazil with his wife and children to get a better life and work on coffee farms in the countryside of the state of São Paulo. My grandfather was still a toddler when the family immigrated to Brazil, and later on when he grew older he met and married my grandmother, the daughter of another Italian immigrant family. My Italian immigrant family is a typical family that immigrated to Brazil in order to contribute to the whitening of the Brazilian population[22]. They certainly didn't know it when they were on the ship to Brazil, but this was a government plan to eradicate Blackness.

Around 1810, the first European immigrants arrived in Brazil. First, Portuguese immigrants were brought to work on the farms. Later on, around 1825, German, Spanish, and Italian immigrants started to arrive. However, around 1880, nine years before slavery ended, a great number of European immigrants were taken to Brazil to eventually fill in for the slave workforce because the end of slavery was just around the corner. Since European immigration in Brazil had another very important purpose, to whiten the Brazilian population, the white Brazilian government and elites started to bring white European immigrants. They said they wanted to improve the quality of workforce, but in fact there was an intention of whitening the population, since the immigrants were supposed to mix with the Brazilian population and in future generations the population would be whiter (Telles 2004, 29).

European immigration was encouraged by the Brazilian federal government and a program was created that brought two million immigrants to Brazil. Their ship ticket to

[22] The whitening ideology believed that through generations of miscegenation, the Black population would become lighter and vanish. In Brazil it was spread through the doctor and anthropologist João Batista de Lacerda who believed that in the beginning of the twenty-first century the population of Brazil would have become white.

immigrate to Brazil was paid by the São Paulo[23] state government (Mitchell 2009, 30). Two million, five hundred thousand Europeans migrated to Brazil between the years of 1890 and 1914 (Andrews 1997, 97). Whitening has been a way of thinking and acting to produce lighter-skinned people. It's a denial of racism. (Mitchell 2009, 40-41). My family is a product of the attempted whitening of the Brazilian population. This attempt was clearly unsuccessful, as the Brazilian population hasn't become whiter as planned by the government. According to the last Census, the Brazilian population is composed of 44.2% whites, 8.2% Blacks, and 46.7% Browns. In conclusion, 54.9% of the population in Brazil has declared to be either Brown or Black.

White privilege in Brazil and in the United States

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. (Ellison, 1947)

When you spend your whole life not taking into account the privilege you have always had because you are white, you take things for granted. I've always considered myself a person who cared about others. I really did care. However, I was immersed in a white Brazilian society. I was born in a white middle-class family who never talked about race or any other controversial topics. I went to private middle-class schools where the majority of the students were white. Later on, I went to a private college where my colleagues were mostly white. At the time I

[23] São Paulo is one of the states in Brazil. Most European immigrants worked in coffee farms in the state of São Paulo.

started college, there was not affirmative action in the country[24]. Finally, I went to work in an elite private school where most of the students were white. The only time in my life that I started to question how race was constructed was when I got to the United States in 2018 and started discussing white privilege.

Peggy McIntosh, an American feminist and antiracism activist, who happens to be a white woman, was one of the first authors I read that made me reflect on my own privileges in Brazil. She mentions that although racism is something that puts others at a disadvantage, she had been taught not to see white privilege, which puts white people at an advantage (McIntosh 1989). I felt very connected to McIntosh's words, as a person who was born and raised white and was under the same kind of white thoughts. I was taught not to recognize white privilege. And when I started unpacking racism in the United States, I started to think about my own privileges in Brazil, some of which I had never thought I had. Being white, I had access to good education, I was always welcomed in public spaces, I never felt threatened or faced injustice because of the color of my skin, and I was always given a chance to try and to succeed in my education and career.

First I started to think what having racial privileges meant. I concluded that it is the notion that whiteness subjects people to have advantages just by the fact that they were born white (Leonardo 2004, 137). McIntosh also created a checklist with conditions of benefits that white people have and people of color don't. This helped me question and identify the daily effects of all those privileges I've had all my life in Brazil. Privileges that my colleagues who are Black or Brown don't have. I also started thinking how my whiteness in Brazil protected me from

[24] Affirmative action programs started to be implemented in Brazil around 2001 to increase the number of Black, Brown, and Indigenous students in higher education institutions. There are also need-based quotas and quotas for students who have studied in public high schools.

suffering hostility and violence (McIntosh 1989, 11). However, I am not white in the United States, so here I don't have this protection. I didn't feel afraid, but I felt hopeless because I was able to witness many kinds of injustice, such as being with a Black friend in a restaurant and being mistreated because of the color of our skin. I got in touch with the difficulties a Black friend faced in order to succeed academically in her Master's program. However, I'm optimistic by nature and McIntosh has given me the hope I need to be resistant. She has helped me understand that the necessary changes take many years to happen. However, reflecting and acting upon these questions of lighter skin benefits and privileges involves a daily increase in my consciousness (McIntosh 1989, 12) that starts by reflecting on the concepts of white supremacy. White supremacy is the brutalization, dehumanization, and domination of exploited racial minorities that emerges from settler colonial societies, whereas white privilege describes the benefits that are afforded to the whites (Bonds 2016, 716). It has its roots in settler colonial projects and the practices of power and domination embedded within, and it sustains racism both in the United States and in Brazil. Saying that in Brazil race is fluid[25] and in the United States race is static (Greene 2009, 159) may sound a bit too simple and naive. This explanation of Blackness and whiteness need to be examined more closely, since there are gradations of color that may define a person's race in Brazil. These physical characteristics are linked to Black and/or white ancestry (Greene 2009, 186).

Because I was raised believing that whiteness was invisible, in my childhood, teenage, and adult years I have never considered the privileges I held, nor the roles brought by their benefits. My whiteness in Brazil didn't let me see that people's non-whiteness can prevent them from living in an equitable society. In Brazil, if you are a person of color and live in the suburbs

[25] The concept of race being fluid is not necessarily dictated by ancestry or fractions of blood.

of big cities you are in constant danger of being pulled out by the police. However, when you are born in a white family in Brazil, you rarely have to worry about being stopped by policemen. These are some of the issues of race inequalities and different treatment that are present in both countries.

Since it's a racial crime to empower yourself if you are not white (Kendi 2019, 38), here in the United States I got in touch with a more transparent race discussion. I noticed the structure of this society is very different from what I have studied, read, and imagined, even being an English teacher for more than thirty years and having learned about American culture throughout my professional life. The so-called hyphenated identity[26] showed me that by naming both races, both identities are present and show the need for belonging. Following this revelation, I started thinking about the benefits of being included in society: being welcomed in all places, having more possibilities of access to good education, having the possibility of building my career without having to think about race, and facing no discrimination in personal, academic, and social life. These are the privileges you never think about when you live in a predominantly white society, as I always had. And when I got here, I had to start thinking about these issues because they were in front of me, we were discussing them in classes, I was hearing testimonials of my Brown and Black colleagues from the University. I learned a great deal from these experiences, which helped me grow as a human being. So, first, I had to admit to myself that Brazil is not a racial democracy and racism exists in Brazil too, although it manifests differently. Racism in Brazil is more related to the interplay between the color of one's skin with their social class, while in the U.S., racism is more transparent and is related to color and origin. This in mind, I had to rethink my roles. When you go over your roles, you are more prepared to be active

[26] This refers to communities of color, such as, African-American, Native-American, Asian-American, Mexican-American.

in society. You are better able to avoid stereotypes, you think more critically, and you deal with cultural differences, accepting them without feeling like you have to deny your roots and erase your culture.

But how are Blackness and whiteness perceived in both countries? In the United States, there is the one drop rule; that is, if a person has one African ancestor (one drop of African blood), that person is considered Black. In Brazil, both Blackness and whiteness are perceived by physical appearance; that is, hair texture, skin color, nose size, eye shape (Greene 2009 146-147). As a result of these different definitions of race, my struggle during the sixteen months that I have lived in Norman, Oklahoma, United States made me switch from one identity to another. My identity as a woman of Color in the United States made me see race construction from a perspective of resistance. As a white woman in Brazil and a woman of Color in the United States, my role is to fight against white privilege. My voices need to be heard when I go back to Brazil, so they can be heard as I educate children and teachers. As Collins (2013, 129) states, by developing critical consciousness in students and creating curriculum and classroom practices where dialogue, engagement, and empathy are dominant. Teaching educators and students how to recognize the privileges that we have had should be my struggle, and to develop a critical posture on what we have been taught about ourselves and others. We have to teach a multicultural curriculum that emphasizes students' different ethnic and racial groups, languages, and social classes in a way that promotes social inclusion (Banks 2006, 612).

Multiple voices

> It was like a voice came out of me that I did not know was there. And I was hearing this voice for the first time. I was speaking with my own voice (hooks 1989:31).

I've always had a voice and shared it as much as I could within my family and my community. There were periods in my life that my voice was louder, others in which it was quieter. However, it has only been spoken from a white female perspective. Having lived in the United States for more than a year, having studied racial topics in a predominantly white university in the state of Oklahoma, a white Christian southern state, I discovered I have some other voices that urge to be heard.

Now I know more of my multiple voices. Voices of a white educator, a Brown educator, a multicultural educator, a teacher developer who works in a predominantly white private institution in Brazil, and a Brazilian woman. There are some other voices that will pop up throughout the continuous process of decolonization that I've been going through. However, some of these voices come from the process of having benefited from white privilege throughout fifty-two years of my life. White privilege has forbidden me to grow and speak (Freire 1959:73) and I learned that I didn't want to be color-blind and color-mute (Sue 2015, 30). I wanted to be able to notice racial differences and also talk about them, because I see this as a form of resistance. I strongly believe that when you don't speak about those differences, you are accepting society the way it is with all the inequities. I began to share my voices because I wanted them to be heard.

The first step was to think about the language we use in our daily lives that emphasizes racism, of which we are not consciously aware. I removed some words from my personal lexicon, words that expressed hidden racism: black sheep, acting black, acting white, white lie, shady/sketchy neighborhood, black market, good hair, and blackmail. All these words express inferiority about people who are Black. In Portuguese, we also have many words that carry racist

meanings and are used in everyday conversation. Some examples of subtle racist speech in Portuguese are: *denegrir*[27], *lista negra*[28], *mercado negro*[29], *dia de branco*[30], *serviço de preto*[31], *a coisa tá preta* [32], *da cor do pecado*[33], *ter um pé na cozinha*[34], *inveja branca*[35] . These are the racial microaggressions that people of color experience day after day. Removing these words was the starting point of decolonizing myself. It's a way to reject the perpetuation of racism and exclusion, and to fight oppression.

My white voice in a predominantly white private Brazilian institution

> Renda-se, como eu me rendi. Mergulhe no que você não conhece como eu mergulhei. Não se preocupe em entender, viver ultrapassa qualquer entendimento. (Lispector 1998)[36]

After examining how race is constructed in Brazil and in the United States, how some white Brazilians still believe in the myth of racial democracy, and how white privilege is present in both countries, I am able to reflect on how I see myself as an educator who has been working in a predominantly white elite private school in Brazil for more than twenty years. Working in

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[27] Denigrate, in English. It comes from the phrase to become Black. Translated by the author.
[28] Blacklist, in English. Translated by the author.
[29] Black market, in English. Translated by the author.
[30] Working day, in English. It means that if a working day is white, white people are hard workers. Translated by the author.
[31] If a poorly/badly done job is done by a Black person, it means that Black people are lazy to work. Translated by the author.
[32] When things look bleak, it means that they are not going well, and in Portuguese, it's used the word Black (*preto*).Translated by the author.
[33] It's a compliment in Portuguese. It refers to a white skin being sun tanned. It transforms the body of the Black woman as an object that is a sin (*pecado*). Translated by the author.
[34] It refers to the female slave that served the white family in the kitchen (*cozinha*). Translated by the author.
[35] It means white envy, and it brings the idea of white as being something positive that can be envied. Translated by the author.
[36] Translated by the author: "Surrender, just like the way I did. Dive deep into the unknown, just like the way I did. Don't try to understand it. Living goes beyond any kind of understanding."

education, for me, has always been a gateway to discussing problems that we face in our life contexts and to be able to intervene in these contexts, transforming the world (Freire1974: 67). In this sense, it has the potential to develop critical consciousness and create reflective citizens who can act upon the world in order to make it a better place for all of us and for future generations. This has been my role as a teacher, pedagogical coordinator, and teacher educator who works with upper-class Brazilian monolingual students learning English as an international language in an immersion English program in São Paulo. My career goals have always been to promote meaningful learning from a critical thinking perspective and to encourage reflection and understanding of the world in which we live. This has always been my commitment as an educator who aims at helping teachers and students understand that in order for learning to take place, we must make meaning of what we're teaching and learning. Our chosen contexts, contents, materials, and approaches have to be relevant and culturally significant. As a teacher educator, I tend to encourage teachers I work with to deconstruct the narratives of a single story and present to their students multiple stories in order to focus on the larger picture of the community around us (Tschida 2014). For me, this is one way to have teachers and students understand the world in which they live and to act consciously and critically in order to transform it.

This being said, my pedagogical practice is rooted in culturally responsive pedagogy and problem-posed educational approaches. Through culturally responsive pedagogy that emphasizes students' cultural place in the world we live in, it's possible to engage learners in reflecting upon their own culture and the culture of others. This concept helps students develop academically with an emphasis on cultural competence and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings 1995, 483). By adopting this approach, students' reflection and critical thinking skills are stimulated

and developed. An equally important approach, problem-posed education proposes a reflective, active, and continuous dialogical approach that is focused on the students' view of the world. In action and in cooperation, teachers and students become responsible for their educational development process, and consequently become agents of change and growth (Freire 1970, 109). In the same way, I have always believed that educators have to create a **c**ooperative environment so that students work together. When examining cultures or debating problem-posing education, there's a possibility of learning from each other in a collaborative manner. Moreover, this is a way to reflect upon our roles as citizens who live together on this planet and have to learn how to live better on it. By getting in touch with aspects related to cultures around the world and their peculiarities, similarities, differences, and influences, students learn how to work in a respectful way and learn from differences. This is achieved by building the idea of a Community of Practice, encouraging learners to feel they belong to the group. A Community of Practice (CoP) is formed by people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly[37]. Communities of Practice learn together, share what they learn, and grow together.

As Paulo Freire stated in the book Pedagogy of Freedom, there is no teaching without learning. One requires the other. Whoever teaches also learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning (1998, 31). I truly believe in the balance of teaching and learning and in the power of teachers as learners and learners as teachers. This equilibrium can only be achieved when both teachers and learners are active and think critically upon their own processes and choices, as well as on the roles they have in the world in which we live. My choice of content and materials has always been reflexive, multicultural, and autonomous. Since I'm

[37] Etienne Wenger, "Introduction to communities of practice," Wenger Trainer, 2015, https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

responsible for an extra-curricular immersion English Program, I do not have to follow the national curriculum and I have never been immersed in a system of standardized tests. This has given me freedom to choose and create content and curricula based on my pedagogical views. I have always encouraged my students to reflect, and I have always reflected upon my choices and pedagogical assumptions. However, my white privilege has never been a topic of reflection and discussion. I have never included in my classes or teacher development programs a reflection on the benefits white people have in Brazil. I have always been a teacher who acted as a transformative intellectual who reflected (Giroux 1985: 376). In spite of that, my choice of themes and content suited social and cultural contexts (Freire 1970: 108). I have always been a reflective practitioner who had active responsibility for what I teach, how I teach, and what the larger goals were. Therefore, I have always given my students an active voice (Giroux 1985: 379). Nevertheless, I have never questioned white supremacy and white privilege and, consequently, I have spent my whole life as a colorblind educator.

As noted above, being a white educator in Brazil before coming to the United States didn't give me the tools to reflect on racial issues. I've lived my whole life under the veil of racial democracy, and the truth was only revealed to me a couple of months before starting to write this thesis. Likewise, I have been asking myself how I can help educators engage in critical thinking through culturally responsive pedagogy and problem-posed education through racial lens when I work in a white institution. My responsibility now is to develop teacher development programs that give me tools to become an agent of change and unveil racial democracy. Undoubtedly, my role as a white voice in a predominantly white private Brazilian institution is to insist on resistance and come up with plans for real reflection and changes. Without question, I do believe in social transformation, and Brazilian educators who work in white institutions need to get in

touch with the concept that in Brazil we still suffer the impact of colonialism and the consequences from being slaved. It is hard for us, white Brazilian educators, to acknowledge these racial inequalities. However, it's only by unpacking them that we can promote social transformation, even if slow and small. And this is achieved through curricula and teacher practice.

My Brown voice in a predominantly white public American institution

> I do not believe that our schools, as they are currently structured, conceptualized, and organized, will be able to help most students of color, especially those who are poor and from cultures that differ from the school culture in significant ways, to acquire knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in the knowledge society of the next century. (Banks 1977: 11)

In the early nineteenth century New York there were racist entertainment performance comedies called Minstrel shows. In these presentations, there were white characters who covered their faces with burnt cork, shoe polish, or grease paint. In 1830, one character called 'Jim Crow' was created and performed by a white actor called Thomas Rice. This Black character sang, danced, acted like a buffoon, and imitated enslaved Africans on southern plantations. The objective of this character was to diminish African Americans and to create a stereotype of humiliation[38]. Blackface is intended to instill inferiority, humiliation, and fear in the hearts of people of color. In the Spring of 2019, we had racist episodes of blackface on campus[39]. That's

[38] For more information on Minstrel shows and blackface, read the entry *Blackface: the Sad History of Minstrel Shows* at https://www.americanheritage.com/blackface-sad-history-minstrel-shows and *Blackface: The Birth of An American Stereotype* at https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/blackface-birth-american-stereotype.

[39] First article published on Norman Transcript on January 18, 2019 - Gallogly condemns blackface video, says students have offered to apologize - https://www.normantranscript.com/news/update-gallogly-condemns-blackface-video-says-students-have-offered-to/article_113d3270-1b59-11e9-a875-4bfa6f59ca14.html; second article published

when I noticed that as a woman of Color I wasn't totally safe on campus. I feel that my voices were not completely heard in the United States. My voices carry the power of my ethnicity, my color, and my accent. I didn't feel comfortable speaking my own home language, Portuguese, in public spaces. This is called institutionalized racism by the fact that it is not only characterized by race, but also by ethnicity and language (Bernal and Alemán Jr 2017: 25). People of color have always experienced an accumulation of racism at the University of Oklahoma, since it is a predominantly white institution. Being here for sixteen months showed me that the campus is not a safe place for students of color.

In September 2019, another blackface racist episode happened on campus, and the response from the white president of the university was even more neutral and non-assertive[40]. The university released empty apologies and didn't act to protect students of color. The excuse for not expelling the student who participated in the blackface episode was based on the First Amendment and freedom of speech[41]. The lack of institutional action had a negative impact on students of color. It had an intense effect on me, as a woman of Color. It gave me, an international student of color, a sense of impotence. Likewise, the question that emerged from the lack of firmness from the administration was: how can blackface be considered freedom of speech if it is an act of racism? This uncomfortable question remains unanswered. Witnessing the events that followed the episodes of blackface made me understand that students of color

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on kgou.com on January 24, 2019 - OU Students List Demands After Second Blackface Incident - https://www.kgou.org/post/ou-students-list-demands-after-second-blackface-incident

[40] Article published on Norman Transcript on September 26, 2019 - OU students express anger over blackface incident - https://www.normantranscript.com/news/local_news/ou-students-express-anger-over-blackface-incident/article_1567be3b-b453-5731-8183-c33bdda2caf4.html

[41] According to the 1st Amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances". https://constitution.findlaw.com/amendment1.html

were meant to be voiceless, to feel isolated and excluded. I felt insecure while navigating my own Brownness on campus.

In the United States, society has continuously shown racial biases against people of color. I felt marginalized, something I had never experienced in Brazil. That was when I noticed that my body, my color, and my accent were used to exclude me or put me in danger. I tried to make sense of all this neglect towards people of color and started to research the history of Oklahoma as a southern white state. I learned that the city of Norman has a long history of blackface and racial violence. Norman residents have wrestled with its past as a sundown town[42] to be a college town in the present. However, normalized racism continues to be a part of university life. It's not transparent, mainly because the university has a politically correct narrative that focuses on diversity and inclusion. However, students of color experience racism on a daily basis. A friend of mine, who has suffered racism all her life, has once told me that unfortunately racism has been as much a part of the American culture as apple pie; that is, it is embedded in society. That was a strong metaphor, because it is everywhere and everybody who is not white can feel it. The three blackface episodes I witnessed at the University of Oklahoma during the time I studied here have made me realize that white Americans ignore and try to silence incidents of racism as the university did after the blackface episodes of Spring and Fall 2019. This made me think that racism will only end when everyone stops accepting empty apologies, promises, and claims that change will come and there will be zero tolerance for racism and aggression. Talking to people on campus after the blackface episodes made me understand and learn that students of color experience racism every day on and off campus. Sadly, it became an everyday occurrence. This sends the message that blackface is acceptable. As a result, toleration of blackface and hate

[42] Sundown towns were white towns where Black Americans were not welcome after the sun went down. Norman has been a sundown town from the 1890s to 1960s.

speech towards Black and Brown bodies normalizes racism against people of color. All I see is a dominant culture in public spaces oppressing the oppressed. In light of this, it's difficult for minorities to be comfortable in such spaces.

During my sixteen months living in Norman and studying at the University of Oklahoma, I met many people of color and learned from their experiences. I learned what it is like living in a country that is meant to exclude everyone who is not white. This brings insecurity and helplessness. Throughout my time at the University of Oklahoma, I met two kinds of people. I met the ones who had no hope for change, people who have suffered from racism and who believe that there is no way to decolonize education, society, culture, and life in the United States. However, I also met some other people who refuse to allow racism to disrupt their lives and education. As a result, these people have learned from lived experiences and pressed forward with hopes and dreams of social transformation. I learned from them how education has impacted their lives. I heard stories of graduate students and how education deeply impacted their lives. I also learned and felt uncomfortable with the role colonialism plays on curriculum and pedagogy. People of color do not see themselves in the curriculum. Their culture is erased, they are meant to assimilate. I have also been reflecting on oppression and in order to find out how the university has internalized oppression and how it has been oppressing people of color, I refer to Freire (1970, 44) when he mentions dehumanization. To the author, dehumanization is a process related to both people who have their humanity stolen and those who have stolen humanity. He also says that the struggle to be humanized is only possible because dehumanization is not a given destiny. To this end, I go back to the role of people of color and how they are made to feel inferior or that they do not belong to the university setting. They have to fit but are never given a real chance to fit. As a result, the university culture oppresses and

isolates minorities. It's a very painful process, trying to exist and connect in a culture that does not value you. From my observations and conversations, I believe this is the path of marginalized populations at the University of Oklahoma.

A second aspect made me deeply reflect and learn about the difficulties of being a person of color in Oklahoma, my observation of ELL[43] classes in a public high school. I spent twelve hours watching classes of students who are immigrants to the United States. I observed ELL English classes and ELL Reading classes. All of them were mixed grades[44]. There were thirty-four ELLs in the school I went to. Nine of them do not attend ELL classes anymore because they have achieved social and academic proficiency in English. Seventy percent of the students in these classes were Latinos and Latinas and thirty percent were Asian. I noticed that students could be more challenged in order to achieve more academic goals, such as going to a demanding university. It was clear to see that the teacher is not certified as an ELL teacher. She had no knowledge of instructional scaffolding[45], sheltered instruction[46] or the SIOP model[47], approaches and techniques that provide language support to ELLs. I didn't see much oral participation from students or group work, since there was no interaction and language growth. The activities were individual, and the classroom was geographically divided into nationalities and language. Asians on one side, Spanish speakers on the other side. There was little interaction among culturally diverse groups, no sharing of cultures. This certainly gave them confidence to relate to their peers, but I strongly think that multicultural interaction should be encouraged, since it's a powerful growth and learning tool. The teacher should take advantage of such diverse

[43] ELL refers to English Language Learners, mostly immigrants.
[44] Students were in 10th, 11th, and 12th grades.
[45] An approach through which teachers add support for students in order to enhance learning.
[46] An approach to teaching English which integrates language and instruction.
[47] A method of instruction that ensures ELLs have content and language needs met in mainstream classrooms.

groups and instead of just dealing with factual answers to reading passages, she could foster interaction in a way that students could expand their critical thinking skills and learn from each other's cultures. The teacher mentioned that she was an advocate for the ELLs. Undoubtedly, she showed affection towards her students, but it was shown through a white perspective of benevolence only, by showing how much she cared about them. She hasn't shown she was an advocate for her students' academic growth.

An example of true teacher advocacy was shown in Project *Adelante*, a project designed for Latino and Latina elementary students to attain knowledge, skills, and motivation to enroll and succeed in college (Delgado Bernal and Alemán Jr 2017, ix). For a period of ten years, students from project *Adelante* visited the local University and participated in academic and social activities that showed them that they can picture themselves in a higher education institution when they finish high school. It was a project that focused on disrupting inequities that shape education for students of color. On the contrary to Project *Adelante*, what I saw in the classes I observed was that students of color were underestimated in their learning process. They had been tracked in a low level long before. They were not meant to academically succeed and develop their skills. The students from the classes I observed maintained the status quo of what has been predicted by the white society, to follow the colonial logic of deficit thinking, a path that disrupts equitable educational pathways from a given community (Bernal and Aleman Jr. 2017:23). Society does not expect them to go to college. When I asked the teacher if any of her seniors were coming to study at the University of Oklahoma, she appeared to be shocked by my question and quickly told me that OU[48] was too academic for them. At that moment, from the

[48] OU refers to The University of Oklahoma.

classes I had observed and from the lack of challenge these students have had throughout K-12[49], I was sure that OU was a huge step for them since they hadn't been prepared to such high levels as white students had. Without question, the ELLs from the classes I observed were meant to follow what was expected from them: not to be in an academic setting and pursue academic goals, contrary to the students from Project *Adelante* who saw themselves going to college classes, living in the dorms, eating at the cafeterias, and pursuing an academic path.

The question that followed my reflection when observing these classes was: how can we form people who think critically if we do not provide equal conditions for them to grow and learn? In my view, the way to develop transformation is to start change from the very beginning, in kindergarten. Educating society as a whole, educating children, educating educators, creating educational policies that help students and teachers develop learning communities that include, and not exclude. We're not going to change things over the weekend, but if we don't start doing something, how can we know that it's not possible? There is an urgency to begin praxis, referring to reflection and action that can enable us to find meaningful solutions (Freire 1970,126). Although the work may be painful, it is work to be done and as educators, we must commit to purposeful action.

I was once told that the educational system in the United States is not broken. The system is working very well. It's been working the way it was created to work. However, another system is needed. The educational system in the United States is meant to marginalize and exclude students of color. They grow up being constantly reminded by white teachers that they are not smart enough to succeed. The schools where they study are vehicles of American assimilation and they praise Anglo-Saxon values and norms only, encouraging students of color, mainly

[49] From Kindergarten to 12th grade.

Latino and Latina students, to erase their cultural identities. Languages and cultures are erased, students are meant to assimilate to American culture, leaving their home culture behind.

From my experience observing classes in a public high school in Oklahoma, I noticed that some students who come from marginalized populations are not challenged to achieve a more academic future, such as going to a demanding college or university. The lessons I observed were based on banking education. That is, content was deposited into students of color's minds without reflection on the role of such content in their lives. However, my experience as an observer in the United States tells me that if this communication is included, education can be improved. Although the purpose of education should be to educate and to form communities of people who learn together, it's not what is seen in schools in the United States. White supremacy is still viewed nowadays as a way to impose oppressor ideas and views. This way, Black people continue in the oppressed role. The role of education in the United States since the beginning of the schooling times has been to remind people what their place in society is and to perpetuate exclusion and subordination to white man. It has always been tied to and framed around whiteness.

The white woman who came to the United States and the woman of Color who returns to Brazil

> I think you travel to search and you come back home to find yourself there. In many ways travel becomes the process of finding. (Adichie 2005)[50]

Since I arrived in the United States, I've been facing this new challenge of getting in touch with the way I view my own country in terms of race. I have been learning much about the United States and also about Brazil. It is interesting to think that I had to come all the way from

[50] Quote mentioned in an interview at https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2005/mar/06/observerescapesection3.

São Paulo to Norman to get to know my own culture better. The educator who arrived at the University of Oklahoma in August 2018 is not the person who is going back to Brazil in December 2019. My core values have remained the same, but I strongly feel the need to go back home to come up with teacher development actions that question the privileges and white supremacy embedded in white education.

I am committed to diminishing oppression by sharing my voice as an educator who has been Brown for sixteen months and learned about racial inequalities. An educator who is sharing her voice of not perpetuating a dominant culture and ideology about race, class, and gender inequality. I'm an optimistic person. I do believe that itis my role as an educator. Getting in touch with all the information and knowledge in this master's program made me feel like trying to understand my own country and how we also perpetuate a dominant culture's ideology in Brazil. White supremacy is an international issue that happens differently from country to country due to colonialism's effects, but also due to culture values. I do believe in uncovering the inequalities of race, class and gender inequality through education. I believe that we have to talk about things that make us feel uncomfortable. In support of this, race, class, and gender inequality are subjects that make people feel uncomfortable. Coming to know that there is racism and that it's everywhere makes people feel uncomfortable. So, we have to talk about it from the very beginning - elementary schools. The more we talk about it, the more teachers can work on class projects that deal with those issues, the easier and more natural it can get. It's a long run process. I feel this is my commitment as a white and Brown educator.

Giroux (1985) helps me trace my future educational goals when he states that educational reform can be a threat because it may not develop critical thinkers, but rather turn people into mechanical professionals who do what they are told. This has been extremely present in my life

in the past year, mainly because of what Brazilians have been facing lately with the disempowerment of teachers and attempts from the government to proletarize teacher work, reducing teachers to the status of technicians who implement curricula without critical thinking (1985, 376). I do not believe in teachers as technicians, but in teachers as transformative intellectuals who reflect, act, and produce curricula that show students' cultural and social contexts. My commitment to education is focused on this premise.

Palmer mentions that good teaching comes from identity and not technique. He says that we have to teach who we are, our inner self. We have to find out who we are as teachers. He brings the idea of community of truth, in which the subject is in the center. We can't know the subject well if we stand only in our shoes (2007). We have to put ourselves in our students' shoes, in other culture's shoes. We have to look at new, less oppressive perspectives.

As an educator, my return to Brazil has the power to provoke a social change in the way I view teacher development. Educational reform, even if on a small level, includes questioning privileges and encouraging students to not grow up as white supremacists. Reform moves toward change, and resistance is a source of energy to fuel this change.

Chapter 4

Conclusion: My struggles

> The ways in which I practice resistance have changed over time and have matured from one setting to the next. I am fundamentally a teacher. This is how I conceptualize my scholarship, my pedagogy, and my advocacy. I recognize that ideas matter and that we must access every available resource to practice resistance (Collins 2009, 133).

This *testimonio* is the product of empowerment of my decolonizing journey through race, class, nationality, and gender. Before writing it, I was only a conscious female educator who had always considered the multiple backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, and experiences of my white students. However, I have never considered or included in my teaching practice or teacher development programs discussions of the innumerable privileges and benefits embedded in white culture. I've developed my life and career as an educator as someone who aims at assisting teachers who could appreciate, accept, and be interested in other languages and cultures. I have always known that teachers send messages to students who don't belong, but it was only after living and studying in the United States that I learned that these messages not only devalue students but are also able to erase views, language, and culture of students of color. I have unpacked my own identities and ethnicity through this thesis and consequently my white benefits and privileges have been questioned and brought to the table. This *testimonio* is an instrument of denouncing inequalities and oppression.

Both countries, Brazil and the United States, need educators and school policies that provide reflection, action, and mediation among white students and students of color in order to

disrupt inequalities in educational settings. If schools are supposed to be a space of care and a safe space for all students, schools and teachers should develop critical care praxis, based on getting to know students as individuals and understanding the role that race plays in defining the conditions of communities (Rolón-Dow 2005, 104).White teachers most of the time don't know and value their students, and the institutions send daily messages through their narratives that students of color's bodies don't matter (Irizarry 2011, 51). As an educator who is resistant, the questions I've been asking myself since I arrived in the United States are:

- If education is Eurocentric and doesn't reflect the culture of students of color, how can we have education less focused on whiteness?
- If white teachers have never learned how to value their students of color, how can we develop teacher development programs that teach white teachers how to see people of color as meaningful?
- If education should have the purpose of creating curious people who have the desire to learn things that are meaningful and purposeful for them, shouldn't institutions have teachers who engage and care about students, teachers who validate how their students are feeling in school spaces?
- Shouldn't schools be a place where kindness is the motto and power is shared within students of all colors, ethnicities, who speak different languages and share different cultures?
- How can we develop an environment of collaboration within schools in which Brown and Black bodies are valued and respected?

This *testimonio* provided me with tools to think deeply and critically about the questions above because it tends to challenge Eurocentric ideologies embedded in white supremacist

ideals. It’s a tool that validates my experiential knowledge and acknowledge power in order to break down racial injustice.

From my experience as an educator in Brazil and my observations and studies in the United States, what I identify is that students of color do not want to be devalued. They do not want their language and culture to be erased. They do not want to be silenced. They are urging to have their culture reflected in the curriculum as well. Their desire is to share their culture with their peers and be valued. They are willing to have teachers who see them as bodies who matter. Their voices need to reach policy makers, who can create another system because the present system does not reflect students' needs. What is needed is a system that encourages all students to think critically, a system that gives voices to the voiceless, that listens to students, engages with them, involves them in educational processes, and validates their experiences. For Freire, every person is able to think critically. All human beings, in dialogue with others, are able to become conscious of their own reality in order to change it. Only by being conscious can the oppressed be liberated from the oppressor (Freire 1970,32). Students of color need to be empowered to learn, become informed, acquire knowledge, and think critically. On the whole, students of color need to be able to denounce the oppression they have suffered. That's the only way to achieve social change.

My main role now is to help the team of white Brazilian educators I work with to unlearn and deconstruct the myth of racial democracy in order to help students reflect upon the white privilege (and benefits thereof) they have always held but never thought about. In support of this, my role is to assist educators in taking action and engaging in critical conversations inside and outside of classrooms. Exchanging stories of marginalization and dehumanization may enlighten others. Take a deeper understanding of the oppressed, and the oppressor can be one other path.

This is how to strengthen a community that wants to be based on freedom and social justice. In the same manner, it's through critical consciousness, a powerful tool to achieve reflection and action, that we can improve education from a racial perspective. As Palmer (2007) states, we ought to develop the stages of education, a movement that promotes social transformation. The stages start with an individual who begins to commit. Later on, the educator looks for others who have been involved in similar changes, forming communities of change. These communities of people who share the same educational needs and goals gather and involve more people. And, finally, they pressure policy makers for change. The movement, according to Palmer, is how I visualize the follow-up part of my decolonizing journey through race, nationality, and gender, while in Brazil. For transformation to happen, transformative ruptures will be needed, ways to put theory into practice in order to create anticolonial shifts in the context of inequitable practices that I'm immersed in as a white Brazilian educator (Bernal and Alemán Jr 2017, 5).

Not long ago, I was told that there is hope in resistance and this has become my greatest challenge for the years to come. My hope is that more Brazilian educators can join me in this decolonizing journey of reflecting upon benefits and privileges with the goal of creating social transformation . My journey that started as a strong denial in August 2018 will take me back home to Brazil in December 2019 with more powerful voices that urge to be heard, shared, and multiplied.

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