Chapter 10
Talking to the Wall: Whiteness and White Resistance in the Classroom

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I believe in revolution
because everywhere the crosses are burning.
sharp-shooting goose-steppers round every corner,
there are snipers in the schools…
(I know you don't believe this.
You think this is nothing
but faddish exaggeration. But they
are not shooting at you.)

I am marked by the color of my skin.
The bullets are discreet and designed to kill slowly.
They are aiming at my children.
They are facts.
Let me show you my wounds: my stumbling mind, my
'excuse me' tongue, and this
nagging preoccupation.
with the feeling of not being good enough (Lorna De Cervantes)

I am the mother of a young Latinx Muslim boy with multiple exceptionalities. At age 4 he was already an avid reader, and by age 5 he knew the entire periodic table and could explain kinetic energy to an adult, articulating precisely the difference between exoplanets and dwarf planets. In the classroom, his peers have consistently alienated him because of his "ethnic differences." Yet he is a happy child who strives to maintain and nourish his friendships even with those who remind him he does not belong. He is a brilliant 7-year-old, yet most his teachers fixate on his inability to work independently, write neatly, and follow instructions. One teacher said she has seen "a lot of kids like him." Not one teacher has ever mentioned his giftedness. My attempts to address his special needs have only been met with skepticism and reluctance. Dei (2014a, b) reminds us that the school system either does something *for* you or does something *to* you (p. 240). I have seen my son struggle to be seen, acknowledged, and valued. He is too young to grasp the significance of the acts of

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resistance that often allow him to claim a space in the room. I celebrate these acts and continue to nourish them, for they give me hope that I have some control over his fate in the school system and to pursue change. I refuse to let the school do something *to* him; instead, I want to believe that one day the school will be a space where all knowledges can coexist.

In this article, I reflect on the ways race continues to be a highly contentious issue in school settings, despite blatant acts of racism that constantly manifest in Canadian classrooms. Mohanty (1990) explains that classrooms should be understood as political and cultural sites, as power hierarchies are often reproduced in Eurocentric educational institutions. I discuss how whiteness is constructed in the classroom and the role that white educators, and particularly female teachers, play in policing its boundaries. Lastly, I examine how multicultural narratives operate in the school system to mask white hegemony. I employ a critical race theory framework in my reflections, drawing from my personal experiences as a queer Latinx immigrant, and recent racist incidents perpetuated against children of color in Ontario. My intention is to contribute to the existing conversation about the unspeakability of race in the Euro-Canadian/American school system and the complicity of white educators in the perpetuation of racism in schools. I wish to imagine the possibility of a classroom where nonwhite children are no longer victims, but benefactors of an equitable system.

10.1   My Positionality

I came to Canada from Mexico to study as an international student at the University of Calgary in 2003. I felt the years spent on campus as isolating and with little personal, spiritual, or even professional reward. My inability to make white friends secluded me, and I felt unsafe most of the time. The majority of my professors were white males. I never engaged in class discussions, even when I felt my contribution was valuable, because I thought it was not worth the risk. I was troubled by the idea of being taught classes such as Anthropology of Gender or the Anthropology of Latin America by white male professors. I suspected it was problematic, but did not have the language to articulate my concerns. I experienced internalized oppression because of my isolation and lack of representation. I self-doubted while reading, writing, and learning; as a woman of color in academia, I felt oppressed and unseen by the rhetoric of white dominant ideology and Western scholarship. Today I know this rhetoric is imbued with ideologies of racism. This is the rhetoric that wants to "hush our voices and [prevent] us from articulating our victimization" (Anzaldúa 1987, xxiiii). My experience as an undergraduate student was dreadful, and I promised myself I would never set foot in academia again.

Two years after graduation, and exhausted from feeling invisible and in the margins, I decided to move to Toronto. I had just given birth to my son and felt it was time to acknowledge that social and cultural alienation were fragmenting my iden-

tity. In an impulse of self-preservation, I convinced my partner to sell everything we had, quit our jobs, and move to Toronto. The so-called multicultural paradise promised a diverse landscape where we could raise our multiracial baby; the city also offered an opportunity to find community and heal. I felt empowered by our agency and choice in transforming our experience as an act of active resistance. I will not be a passive witness to my son's constant invalidation, bullying, and tokenization in the classroom. I decided to give academia a second chance so I could become a better advocate for him.

10.2   My Theoretical Framework

I am influenced by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, particularly her stance on theory and academia and the pervasive ways in which these spaces have been heavily restricted for communities of color. For Anzaldúa (1987), "If we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by theories" (p. xxvi). What happens when we, the objects, become the subjects? Anzaldua invites women of color to look through the master's gaze and use *his* methodology—the "master's tools"—to dismantle Western hegemony. Likewise, Yosso (2005) argues:

> [I]f some knowledges have been used to silence, marginalize and render People of Colour invisible, then 'Outsider knowledges (Collins 1986), mestizo knowledges (Anzaldúa 1987), and transgressive knowledges (Hooks 1994) can value the presence and voices of People of Colour, and can re-envision the margins as places empowered by transformative resistance. (p. 70)

My framework in this essay is critical race theory, as it foregrounds race and challenges claims of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity, "asserting that these claims camouflage the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups" (Yosso 2005, p.73). Using the principles of interest convergence, the myth of color blindness, and experiential knowledge, I problematize white supremacy in the educational system. Through counter-stories, critical race theory works by amplifying the experiential knowledges of racialized communities (Delgado and Stefanic 2001). Counter-storytelling entails "telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told," that is, disenfranchised communities, people of color, Black, and Indigenous peoples (Solorzano and Yosso 2002, p. 26). Using personal examples, this article will explore how the white imagination responds to realities of race and racism in the classroom, demonstrating that race and racism are institutionalized and upheld by white educators. Dei (2014a, b) argues that race and racism are "a major responsibility for the contemporary educator and learner" (p. 239); thus, I focus on the centrality and saliency of race and how this determines children's and educators' social location.

10.3 The Unspeakability of Race

Although it is important to analyze race across historical time, for the purposes of
this article, I intend to focus on the concrete effects of race, as a socially constructed
category with no scientific validity (Omi and Winant 1993; Miles and Torres 1999;
Lopez 1998; Dei 1996a, b). W.E.B. Du Bois stated that slavery, colonialism, segre-
gation, privilege, and exploitation not only perpetuate racial hierarchy but also cre-
ate the "worlds of race" themselves (as cited in Olso 2005, p. 119). Race is not just
a sociocultural construct, but one that has "sinister causes and consequences"
(Lipsitz as cited in McLaren and Torres, 1999). Despite its lack of scientific validity,
the salience of this social construct developed over half a millennium of enforce-
ment as a tenet of social organization (Omi and Winant 1993, p. 5); race "continues
to gain social currency because of its utility in distributing unequal power, privilege,
and social prestige" (Dei 1996a, b, p. 2). Racism, as the undisputable consequence
of race, is deeply engrained in our society. Racism makes race real; as educators and
community workers, we ought to identify the salience of race and recognize its
effects even while facing resistance. We ought to treat both concepts as tangible,
living, and operative aspects of our society (Dei 2014a, b, p. 240). Racialization
defines children's experiences in school, and we must be cognizant of these pro-
cesses if we wish to engage in antiracist discussions and pedagogy. This realization
is more evident for parents of color than it is for white educators and for white
parents; we need to articulate ways to problematize their institutionally embodied
inaction, denial, and passivity.

Race, as a fundamental principle of social organization (Omi and Winant 1993,
p. 3), dictates our social location, possibilities, and limitations. Yet the relevance of
race continues to be contended in education conversations, making its consequences
undistinguishable and debatable. This reluctance to engage the issue of race may be
the result of an "uncritical acceptance of the status quo" and a feeling of guilt vis-à-
vis racism and discrimination (Egbo 2011, p. 26) on the part of white educators and
those in positions of power in our educational institutions. It is not surprising that
for parents and guardians attempting to engage educators in conversations about
race in the classroom can be an exhausting ordeal. As a mother of color struggling
to navigate the school system, my efforts to engage in racial conversations have
been infertile most of the time. Nonetheless, these discussions have allowed me to
reflect on the unwillingness to acknowledge race as real and the need to center race
and racism in discussions even when that makes educators uncomfortable.

Not giving race the discursive space it warrants allows educators to deny the pos-
session of white privilege. On the other hand, educators who acknowledge race as
real have taken their first step toward both a critique and transformation of the racist
practices that operate in the school system. Heywood (2016, class discussion), in
response to a student's resistance to the term "white supremacy," highlights the
importance of having the courage to "name" the oppression if we hope to dismantle
it. Similarly, Dei (2014a, b) argues that the denial of white dominance distorts real-
ity and does not allow us to work together to find solutions (p. 15). The last time I

discussed the importance of the problem of representation with my son's teacher, she claimed to "completely understand" and equated my problem to her struggle in finding French-language books for her son: "Most children's books in French, have animal characters; I know what you mean, it is a struggle!" In other occurrences my attempts to bring race into the conversation are met with significant resistance; cheerful faces slowly morph into discontent as I utter the words "white" or "racism." It seems the same policy makers, administrators, and educators who embrace diversity and "multiculturalism" resist acknowledging the presence of white supremacy in the school system (Deckers 2014, p. 62). I argue that to uproot Western hegemony in the school curriculum and the dominance of whiteness in the classroom, race, racism, and white supremacy must be identified, confronted, and destabilized with collective rage.

In the fall of 2016, seven families filed a joint human rights complaint against the York Region District School Board for racial and religious discrimination faced by their children while they were at school. The complaint cites the case of a Markham principal who was found to have posted Islamophobic comments on Facebook. The director of education for the York Region school board, J. Philip Parappally, claimed that "[w]e all share a goal to create learning environments that are safe and welcoming for all students and staff. As one of the most diverse and highest performing jurisdictions in the province, our achievement comes in concert with equity and well-being" (Javed 2016). J. Philip Parappally's statement is a clear reminder that diversity and multicultural frameworks—and those who align with them—do little to challenge the status quo or resist structures of power and domination.

Less than a couple of months earlier, the mother of a 16-year-old boy who was banned from attending any school in the Durham region had also filed a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights tribunal alleging racial discrimination. Even though the problem of racism in the Durham District School board had been discussed in the past, the school board refuses to compile race-based statistics, arguing that "there is no scientific data to support the claims that black children are being expelled and suspended at higher rates and being punished more severely than white students" (Haines 2016). Effectively, there is no data to support these claims, because the school board refuses to collect data that may support allegations of racism and discrimination in the disciplinary records of students.

In another instance, Mississauga police used handcuffs to restrain a Black 6-year-old girl following an incident at her school. A Peel Police spokesperson said they were called by the elementary school's administration, because the child was acting violently, by kicking, punching, biting, and spitting (Hudes 2017). These incidents illustrate that the lives of racialized students are threatened by the racist attitudes of educators, denial of administrators, and excessive violence with which children are disciplined. School administrators have consistently failed to place the saliency of race at the forefront by attempting to divert the conversation. As Dei (2014a, b) contends, the unspeakability of race shows its significance (p. 239).

Recent statistics employ veiled language to address the experiences of racialized students in the school system. Although data can help us establish the nature and context of a problem, as in the case of the Durham District School board, studies

often focus on language, country of origin, length of time in Canada, or citizenship status as it relates to student disengagement (p. 14). Evidently, there is significant resistance to speak about race and its implications in educational outcomes for racialized groups of students; this resistance is pervasive in the language employed by schoolteachers, administrators, and policy makers alike. Research conducted by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) on dropping out shows that Portuguese-, Spanish-, and Somali-speaking students leave school at the highest rates: 38%, 37.5%, and 35.1%, respectively. By region of birth, English-speaking Caribbean and Central/South American and Mexican students leave school at the highest rates, 38% and 37%, respectively. Combined with earlier statistics, these numbers are indicative not only of issues of language and place of origin but point toward a hostile learning environment for racialized students. Educators, policy makers, and administrators have attempted to disappear race either by denying that race matters or by using code words and phrases such as "newcomer children" or "cultural differences" (Schick and St. Denis 2005, p. 366).

Undoubtedly, the school system is structured to disproportionately benefit white children over any other cultural group; white children gain from the normalization of white supremacy, while the same practice disenfranchises Black, Indigenous, and children of color. White children learn to claim truth as their private domain, while nonwhite children learn to hide their culture because white hegemony teaches them they do not hold "truths" but "perspectives" (Howard 2006, p. 54). Research suggests that nonwhite parents talk about racial identity much more frequently with their kids than white parents do (Vittrup 2010). In the exercise of their privilege, white parents enjoy the luxury of not having to teach their children to identify and stand up to racist bullying, to protect themselves from police, or simply to be proud of who they are, no matter how much they learn otherwise. Ignorance and lack of engagement are luxuries not available to members of racialized communities (Howard 2006 p. 61); for us engaging in conversations about race is no longer an option. We must protect our children by telling truths and explaining injustices; we must guide and help them heal from the insidious effects of racism and teach them to fight for justice.

10.4   The Construction Whiteness

I am interested in exploring the making of white subjects in the school system. Reflecting on the processes that take place in the classroom, I draw from my experiences as an immigrant mother of a racialized child attending a public school in the Toronto District School Board. Whiteness takes different forms in the imaginary of racialized communities. White identity is a racial fabrication, and white subjects are highly implicated in preserving the racially constructed status quo (Lopez 1998, p. 193). I argue that white women educators are most complicit in policing the boundaries of whiteness in the classroom, as they do little to problematize its unjust effects and continue to rely on color-blindness discourses that promote liberal

multiculturalism as a solution. The making of white subjects in the school system presents a microcosm of the ways in which whiteness is centered and placed at the top of our Canadian racial hierarchy.

I was born and raised in Mexico City. My first encounter with a white subject was while on a family trip to San Antonio, Texas, when I was 7 years old. I had seen white people on TV, mostly on American movies, but never in the flesh. I remember being in an elevator on the way to our hotel room. A white couple entered, and my dad pulled me toward the wall of the elevator to make more room for them, even though there was enough room for another family or two. My parents always ensured that we did not occupy much space, especially in spaces shared with white subjects. The message was unspoken, but clear: Do not make too much sound, do not talk too much, do not take up too much space, do not trouble white people, and do not be yourself in front of white people. I learned these rules early on. I have observed other parents of color passing on a similar admiration for white bodies to their children, by acting to diminish their children's presence in spaces shared by white bodies.

My father admired the white people he did business with: "These people are talented at everything they do"—he often said. I grew up believing white people were good at mostly everything they did: *they* made movies we grew up watching, *they* dominated sports, *they* made the music my father played and loved, and *they* were beautiful—to my then 7-year-old colonized aesthetics. When my parents took me to Sea World in San Antonio, I remember admiring white girls my age, as they walked in their swimming suits. My body was brown and thick; my hair was long and frizzy. I knew that—unlike me—the girls by the swimming pool looked like my dolls at home, and they reminded me of the girls in the movies we watched. Inadvertently, during that trip I was learning to fear, respect, and admire white subjects. This is how whiteness was constructed in my context. Euro-whiteness was an aspiration, something seductive that I fantasized with, but an archetype that made growing up painful. Whiteness was a destination, both a place of arrival and a mirage.

Theorizing the social construction of whiteness is essential in our efforts to deconstructing it. However, revising its historical fabrication entails an extensive literature review that is beyond the scope of this article. The intellectual justification of racial stratification was (and is) used to justify the process of colonization and Eurocentrism. Social Darwinism explained how the theory of survival of the fittest applied in the context of social groups, as "different races adapted socially through the process of competitive survival." The perceived failure of some "races" was utilized to justify their inhumane treatment (Dei 1996a, b, p. 61). "White" as the victorious racial category was proclaimed powerful, dominant, and desirable. Whiteness needs to be understood as the historically specific convergence of economic, geopolitical, and ethnocultural processes: a sociohistorical form of consciousness given birth at "the nexus of colonial rule, capitalism and the emergent relationship between dominant and subordinate groups" (McLaren and Torres 1999, p. 56). Racial and socioeconomic disparities were structurally designed through colonial rule, and this process of colonization has had devastating effects to Indigenous, Black, and other nonwhite peoples throughout the past 500 years.

In the 1960s, Fanon asserted that whiteness had become a symbol of purity, justice, truth, and virginity. Historically, Euro-whiteness was made seductive as it gave access to power and resources; the relationship between the white Europeans and those who were subverted continues to be one of colonial domination (Quijano 2007), as European colonialists constructed institutions, such as schools, with the purpose of perpetuating and preserving their positions of power. While direct and explicit colonial rule may have disappeared, colonialism persists today in its many disguises as cultural, economic, political, and knowledge-based oppression. Despite the evident processes through which whiteness is institutionalized, universalized, and structured to benefit white supremacy, the perniciousness of whiteness relies on its ability to be invisible.

White as a social category continues to go unmarked and thought of as synonymous with humanness, enabling whites to proclaim universality (Anzaldúa 1987; Ferguson 1990; Hytten and Atkins 2001). Unlike nonwhites, who are portrayed within paradigms of homogeneity, whites are perceived as individual "historical agents whose differences are unclassifiable among themselves" (Hytten and Atkins 2001, p. 58). To "race" white people is to destabilize their claim to speak for humanity (Hawley 2005, p. 54) but also to make their differences imperceptible as in the homogeneity that characterizes other racialized communities. The need for white people to locate themselves within the structures that have historically privileged them is resonant now more than ever. Yet, bringing whiteness to the table in institutional settings, such as the school, continues to be met with resistance, leaving people of color powerless in conversations where oppressions cannot be named.

In the classroom, colonial relationships and dynamics can be reproduced, whereby white teachers (perhaps unknowingly) uphold power configurations of white supremacy at the expense of marginalized students. In the Euro-Canadian/American educational system, white educators are implicated in the lack of critical attention to white supremacy and white racism, despite the growing number of studies that have identified a need for progressive changes in teacher education programs (Sleeter 2017; Matias et al. 2014; Egbo 2011; Allen and Rosatto 2009; Solomon et al. 2005). A study by Solomon et al. (2005), which investigated teacher candidates' perceptions of whiteness and white privilege in Canadian society, found a tendency toward the denial of such privileges. Teacher candidates were asked to respond to Peggy McIntosh's (1990) *White Privilege* piece. Some of the white study participants responded:

> McIntosh's tone is castrating, counter-productive and intrinsically feeble-minded in character with its ethos of negative energy. Why should whites (and males) forever be made to feel guilty by would-be do-gooders like McIntosh.

> Whites may well be over-privileged in some settings, but the author fails to point out any negative aspects of being white. To highlight some negative aspects, minorities have affirmative action for attaining certain jobs, and can use discrimination as an advantage against whites.

> This article is one-sided with the emphasis pointing to minorities being oppressed. How can she [McIntosh] say there is 'white privilege' if when I applied to become a teacher, there

was a clearly stated option for anyone of a minority to state that? (Solomon et al. 2005, p. 158)

Allen and Rosatto (2009) discuss how white educators' investment in specific, concrete, and privileged identities, such as whiteness, remains unchallenged even when exposed to critical pedagogy literature (p. 8), such as the examples above. According to Dei (1996a, b), "a critical anti-racism educational strategy questions the centrality and normativity of Whiteness, and the fact that 'White' is a key concept that leads to the constructions of non-whites as the *other*" (p. 65).

One privilege of whiteness, according to Schick and St. Denis (2005), is to pass invisibly as the norm, which depends on the marginalized identities against which the norm can be compared (p. 299). Fine (1997) asserts that whiteness is produced in a symbiotic relationship with other colors, where:

…whiteness grows as a seemingly "natural" proxy for quality, merit and advantage, "color" disintegrates to embody deficit or "lack"…"[W]hiteness" and "color are therefore not merely created in parallel, but are fundamentally relational and need to be studied as a system. (as cited in Schick and St. Denis 2005, p. 300)

In practice, this system of privilege starts at birth, and it is pervasive as soon as children enter the school system. Schools, like other Eurocentric institutions, have a history of "othering" racialized bodies; whites are socialized to conceptualize their world in ways that favor their positions within it (Solomon et al. 2005; McLaren and Torres 1999). Yet we know white men and women do not fare equally within the system of white supremacy.

Njami and Srikanth (2002), argue that historically, white women have used the domestic space and their power within it not to subvert but to preserve the status quo and to further racism (p. 16). While parents of color engage in racial conversation with young kids in preparation for membership in racialized and marginalized groups, white parents have the luxury of not having to think about race, and their children will also privilege from the comfort in knowing they are the norm. White children see themselves represented in books and stories; they learn their names are pronounceable, and their traditions are reflected in the school calendar. White children enjoy their lunch with confidence—knowing that Mohammed and Francisco will never make fun of their macaroni and cheese or Wonderbread sandwich. Unlike us, whiteness in the lunchroom is odorless and invisible. As parents and educators, we ought to confront the resilience of racism, the delegitimization of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1997) of students of color, and the ways in which white teachers are implicated in rewarding some capital over other.

Schools normalize white dominance through traditional pedagogy, the devaluation and "othering" of nonwhite cultures, curriculum, liberal multiculturalism, and racist administration. If racism is the symptom, the performance of whiteness that upholds white supremacy is the disease, and to cure it we must thoroughly understand the disease itself (Matias and Mackey 2016, p. 35). How can we begin to unpack the meanings of whiteness while the word itself pervades the limits of the politically correct? How can we put on the table issues of white supremacy and

engage white teachers in the conversation, without being confronted with their naïveté and lack of awareness? In Yamato's (1987) words:

> With the best of intentions, the best of educations, and the greatest generosity of heart, whites, operating on the misinformation fed to them from day one, will behave in ways that are racist, will perpetuate racism by being 'nice' the way we're taught to be out there: marginalization and contemporary cultures nice. You can just 'nice' somebody to dead with naïveté and lack of awareness of privilege. Then there's guilt and the desire to end racism and how the two get all tangled up to the point that people morbidly fascinated with their guilt are immobilized. (p. 21)

We know that individual intentions are not enough, and change must happen at an institutional level.

10.5   The White Woman Educator

> As the often-silent benefactors of both white supremacy and the legal protections that were made possible by civil rights movements led by people of colour, white women in particular have a moral and ethical responsibility to place the abolition of white supremacy at the forefront of their personal agendas
> –Dreama Moon

White women teachers comprise a significant majority of the public school teaching force in Canada and the United States (Ryan et al. 2009; Goldring et al. 2013). A study on the racial diversity of the teacher population in Canada found that the proportion of the general population of color is much greater than the proportion of racialized elementary and secondary educators and educational counselors (Ryan et al. 2009). My contention is that white teachers, in particular white women teachers, are complicit in the maintenance of white hegemony in the classroom, and they work actively to police the boundaries of whiteness.

The winter of 2016, I had a discussion with my son's teacher, after my son had complained that his white peers had mocked him after learning that he speaks Spanish. The teacher responded by stating "that's just boys trying to be silly," erasing the racist content of the bullying, and justifying their white supremacy in training. When I spoke about an incident I had witnessed while volunteering in a school trip, where a white boy had asked a nonwhite first-grader boy "how do you say your name in English?," the teacher, a white French Canadian woman, came to the children's defense by arguing that "even she had been asked similar questions." Njami and Srikanth (2002) suggest that white women occupy an in-between status as both marginalized and racially privileged in countries in which the residual effects of colonialism still operate (p. 14). Theoretically, this should equip this group with the resources and sensibilities to work with children who belong to communities that have been historically marginalized. However, as the cases above illustrate, and my personal stories interacting with white women teachers confirm, they are not only unable to locate axes of power and complicity with racism but also unwilling to

inquire into the forces that benefit them and white children in school power structures.

It has been acknowledged that by displacing attention from race to gender, white women have relinquished their moral responsibility in the fight against racism (see Njami and Srikanth 2002; Sleeter 2017; Fellows and Razack 1998). Fellows and Razack (1998) describe "race to innocence" as the process initiated by competing marginalities whereby white women, challenged about their domination, respond by calling attention to their own subordination (p. 339). Lugones' (1990) allusion to white women's source of incompetence in their understanding of racism and ethnocentrism, which she coins "infantilization of judgement," is described as a "dulling in the ability to read critically and with maturity of judgement, situations in which race is salient":

> White women turn into children avoiding all commitment except against racism in the abstract, paralyzed as responsible beings, afraid of hostility and hostile in their fear, wedded to their ignorance and arrogant in their guilty purity of heart. (p. 53)

White women teachers may use their own place on the margin to evade an examination of their complicity in the fabrication of white hegemony in the classroom, for instance, by using personal stories of overcoming sexism as a form of subordination and exemplifying the "hard work pays off" discourse. Mawhimey (1998) refers to storytelling or personal testimony as a move toward innocence which functions to normalize and recirculate white power and privilege. Despite their laudable intentions, white women teachers continue to do little to problematize the unjust systems of domination that affect children of color, and by exercising white hegemonic power, they deny and silence the "experiential realities of bodies of color" (Dei et al. 2004, p. 8).

10.6   Multiculturalism to Mask a Problem

Multiculturalism was brought under federal law in Canada in 1988, with the intention to preserve the cultural freedom of all individuals and to provide recognition to the cultural contributions of diverse ethnic groups to Canadian society (Moodley 1999, 148). However, the act has been criticized as an attempt to redefine and legislate race relations, in the name of protecting cultural diversity. Multiculturalism as a discourse was created by white legislators with political projects, as in the case of Pierre Trudeau's liberal agenda in the 1970s, which was meant to cope with the residual hostility of the Euro-Canadian population toward immigrants (p. 148). The celebration of "cultural difference" and the raceless nation narrative implicated in the Multicultural Act of 1988 has repercussions for the reproduction of racial privilege. Although Canadian multiculturalism has undergone several changes in the past decades, it has done little to revoke existing power arrangements. I argue that is not meant to subvert the current power dynamic.

In North American educational settings, although well intentioned, multicultural programs do little to generate social change; as whiteness continues to be an invisible yet universal norm, white domination becomes implicit in multicultural discourses. Multiculturalism as a discourse that celebrates diversity and mutual tolerance is patronizing at best, yet the tolerant majority "wallows in a self-congratulatory confirmation of its open-mindless" (Moodley 1999, p. 149). Multicultural education may not be as effective as antiracist education in specifically disrupting the privilege and currency of whiteness. As educators and academics, we ought to reflect on the difference between multicultural education and antiracist education; we must be vigilant of the ways in which multicultural narratives are used to mask racist practices and policies that directly affect racialized children. Multicultural education is not meant to disrupt white privilege, as the saliency of race and presence of racism are virtually ignored.

In multicultural education, different multicultural activities and celebrations are consistently implemented throughout the school year. Through celebration and song, and with no need to mention racial differences, these practices make their way into acceptable curricular practice (Schick and St. Denis 2005, p. 206). Yet dismantling oppression requires disrupting knowledge, not simply adding more knowledge (Kumashiro 2001, p. 34). The cause of racism is not the lack of awareness about other cultures, but the supremacy of a group over the rest. Individuals do not discriminate against others because they are different, rather it is the act of discrimination that creates hierarchical categories and then naturalizes these differences (p. 55). Evidently some educators falsely believe that by "adding on" differences in their lesson plans, the problem is solved and inclusivity achieved.

The problematic focus on difference that some multicultural discourses carry fails to change that which is non-different, or the norm (Kumashiro 2001, p. 6). For instance, educators may acknowledge celebrations such as Eid or Diwali during the school year, yet fail to dismantle the supremacy of the Christian calendar and the subtle imposition of Christmas celebrations on Muslim and Hindu children. Many white educators are quick to celebrate attempts to embrace diversity in their lessons, without an honest examination of power and privilege, and the way in which they are themselves implicated in such imbalances. While teaching about the othering of marginalized groups, they ought to carry their analysis onto the present and examine how some groups are favored, normalized, and privileged and how this process is legitimized and maintained by social structures (Kumashiro 2000 p. 36) and institutions alike, including the school system.

Questions of power and the construction of difference play an important role in the official and hidden curriculums alike (Dei 1996a, b, p. 117). Inclusivity means "ensuring representation and pedagogies that respond to the social construction of difference in the school system" (p. 176), yet many educators would support inclusion only when diverse ways of knowing are taught as subordinate and inferior to the superior ways of knowing, those sustained by the imperialist white supremacist patriarchy (Hooks 2003, p. 47). Bell's 1980 assertion that in most institutional contexts, white people will support racial justice only when they understand and see that there is something in it for them rings true today. In the classroom, the process

of knowledge hierarchy and power construction often goes unnoticed, especially as most white teachers are uncritical about common multicultural practices. While the inclusion of certain racialized voices is a step forward, we should be cautious of falling into delusional equity. If we continue to deny the saliency of race in the school system, with its tangible and detrimental consequences for racialized children, and if we reinforce the construction and perpetuation of power hierarchies through multicultural practices, moving toward equity will continue to be an unattainable dream.

A while ago, in my son's predominantly white school, his class read a book about a family fleeing their war-torn country. The family were refugees, which was not directly disclosed in the story, and the main characters were two boys named Marwan and Tarek, which are both Muslim names. At home, my son expressed empathy: "It's terrible what happens to the Syrian refugees." He also had unresolved questions: "Why are Syrians being bombed? Why is there a war? And why are people not doing anything?" In the class app, his teacher posted a photo of the children retelling the story through tableau and commented on how powerful the story was and the discussion that followed. The teacher said that "the students also shared connections of how they and their families have helped people in need and all of the children spoke about wanting to care for others through their words and actions." White parents were quick to celebrate the lesson: "Thank you for fostering this conversation in the classroom," a parent commented.

Although well intentioned, this activity is an example of an Orientalist approach to the Middle East, and an exercise of "othering" where children are given the opportunity to learn to emulate colonial relationships, while creating a static and stereotypical view of Middle Eastern communities. Racialized assumptions of communities of color reproduce educational inequities and reinforce deficit approaches to schooling. A sociological-cultural framework creates and justifies deficit thinking by using pseudoscientific standardized tests to build stereotypical views of racialized students (Portelli and Sharma 2014, p. 256) and create distorted notions of communities of color. As a result, educators try to fulfill students' deficiencies with forms of cultural knowledge deemed valuable (Yosso 2005, p. 75).

The luxury of ignorance has given white people the power and privilege to write their history and reinforce their limited versions of truth; thus, white ignorance and selective forgetting have been institutionalized in the name of education (Howard 2006, p. 63). Dei examines the value of multicentric knowledge and the need to create a space for other centers of knowledge. I believe educators when they claim their goal is for all students to feel included and welcomed in the schools. But what do educators really mean when they make such claims? How can we make sure the jargon of inclusivity and multicultural discourses remains relevant? For as long as they continue to universalize the experiences of the European subject, "multiculturalism" remains a strategy to mask white supremacy and uncomfortable racist practices. If we fail to provide a more critical look at liberal multiculturalism, struggles between power evasion and race cognizance will continue to be fought on its terrain (Frankenberg 1993). Furthermore, if we fail to reclaim other ways of knowledge and engage in multicentric ways of knowing and affirming racialized students'

myriad identities, histories, and social contexts of learning, our efforts to create inclusive classrooms will continue to be futile and counterproductive.

10.7 Concluding Thoughts

In this article, I have reflected on the unspeakability of race, especially in educational spaces and despite the racist practices that are prevalent in schools. I briefly explored how "whiteness" is fabricated and perpetuated by white teachers in schools, while attempting to identify the unique ways in which women teachers are implicated. Lastly, I discussed the ways in which multiculturalism is used to mask white hegemony and the constant "othering" of racialized students. Schools are institutions where proximity to whiteness is rewarded, and I am hopeful that this understanding will help us trouble race and work together to dismantle the systems that continue to oppress our children.

Discussions about race and whiteness with educators will continue to be met with defiance and skepticism. The classroom as a political space gives me hope for change; classrooms have the potential to be sites for antiracist interventions and social transformation. I am eager to continue learning about this possibility.

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