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Disclosure, Dialogue and Coming of Age in the Academy
Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Pier Junor Clarke, Wanjira Kinuthia,
Ewa McGrail and Geeta Verma

We all came to this space from different places. The five of us experienced our formative years in countries as diverse as the Bahamas, Guyana, India, Kenya, and Poland. Four of those countries were former colonies of Great Britain and one a former communist regime. We arrived at this site, Georgia State University, at the same time and together as novices inhabited a place in a department where we work with teachers in Science, Mathematics, ESOL, Language and Literacy and Instructional Technology. Of the five of us females, four are considered to be teachers of color with three of us representing the African Diaspora. Three of us come from contexts where English is not the mother tongue and two of us where dialects of English reside. We come from different class backgrounds and places where class struggles may be more profound or less pronounced. Our countries have been given different appellations, such as “third world,” “developed,” “developing,” and “emerging.” We are married and unmarried, attached and unattached, and from both large, extended and small, nuclear families, as well as from different academic disciplines. At the time of our coming together, we ranged from having no experience to having some previous experience working in the academy. Our simultaneous arrival as junior faculty in a new place facilitated our forming a community as we attended various meetings and new faculty gatherings. We subconsciously felt the need to come together outside of the “forced” mentoring settings. As strangers and newcomers to this place for all of us, and as first-time resident in the United States for one of us, we sought amongst ourselves to

create collegiality, belongingness, and kindred spirits to enhance and sustain our professional and personal selves.

Now, five years since our novitiate began, we come together to pool our collective consciousness to write this chapter as testimony of our growth in a place once foreign and uncomfortable. This paper describes how we formed a community and claimed our space in the academy. We assume five different yet collective voices in this chapter. Sometimes we speak of a singular experience as in “I,” and sometimes of a collective experience as in “we.”¹

The Underpinnings of Our Beginnings

In arriving at a new site from our many different places, we are called to introspect and reflect on our essence and our purpose, our *raison d'être*. In the following excerpts Voice 2 clarifies her purpose for being here while Voice 1 interrogates her arrival at this point and reflects on her experience growing up; then, Voice 5 reminisces about her prior life.

Voice 2: The beginning of another phase of my life began in the year 2003 when I entered the doors of an urban institution in the southern part of the United States of America. It was alarming to hear many comments, which summarized that I belonged to a group of new faculty who were changing the cultural mix at this institution. I began to wonder how I could make a significant difference to our faculty and student population. While doing so, I kept focused on my objective, which was to prepare, and explore the development of secondary school teachers' subject and pedagogical content knowledge for the benefits of them and their students in urban and suburban contexts.

Voice 1: How did I get here? Who, and what, was instrumental along the way? How have these experiences shaped me [and my role] as a person with more than one place I call home? Mine was a memorable happy childhood marked by climbing trees, eating the fruits while sitting on the branches chasing fireflies at dusk, playing made-up games with home-made toys. I identify with Laye, who in *The African Child* nostalgically narrates a happy idyllic childhood, the relationship with his relatives, informal education, initiations of culture and rituals, and later the experiences of studying abroad.

Voice 5: In my experience of finding a new self in a new culture, the questions of self-agency as influenced by past decisions, actions, and events in a personal life, and of authority in knowing the learning-teaching process, in academia, turned out to be doubly difficult translations.² I found myself in a position where I was starting all over again. Before coming to the U.S., I was an instructor at a reputable university (in the league of Harvard, Princeton, and Yale in the United States), regarded as a successful teacher and a promising scholar.

We write in this text about coming from different places and about how those different experiences shaped who we are and how we interpret our new world. Disclosure and dialogue is at once *a coming of age* and at the same time a dialogic, reflexive inquiry about who we are and how we came to claim and impact a shared space. Our work will draw on the need for disclosure and dialogue in the academy about matters which touch on the personal and professional because they challenge our usual ways of behaving and thinking and push us to reflect on how we can change and become agents of change in our teaching, research, service, professional

development and everyday interactions. Our work is informed by feminists and womanists and research and insights related to understanding lived experience through teachers' stories, counter stories and narratives. We are driven by a strong recognition for the development of multicultural, post-colonial and global educators and as such we come together as female academics to disclose our stories through interrogating ourselves, theorizing our lived experiences, describing ways of problematizing and contesting the status quo in the academy and rationalizing our contributions to our disciplines and to the education of teachers in the United States.³

We could reflect on our experiences using the multicultural framework that was proposed as an alternative to anti-racial education in the mid-1970s (Banks and Banks, *Handbook*). That multicultural framework encompasses conversations about assimilation into mainstream norms (humanistic school) as well as pinpointing the power structures that pervade the systems and customs of mainstream culture (anti-oppression school).⁴ Much of the work emerging from the multicultural framework literature focuses on cultural pluralism, inclusivity, and equity. The multicultural framework appears to be just and equitable, but it positions the mainstream versus the marginalized as dichotomous and thus not only privileges the inherent Euro-centricism but also underlines the hegemonic philosophical and epistemological assumptions of universalism. In addition, it does not take into account the newly emergent mixed, hybrid, and diverse identities becoming more visible as a result of intensified globalization and creation of Diaspora communities.⁵ Thus, "multiculturalism becomes an empty form of pluralism" (Carter, "Thinking Differently," 823) and does not allow for complex conceptualizations of culture, change, and identity or provide a robust theorization of diversity. Therefore, it is imperative that we identify and explore alternative ways of theorizing our complex identities and experiences to provide new

models that continue to question the reproduction of dominant ideologies, worldviews, positions, and values in education.⁶

Postcolonial theory like that outlined by Bhabba in *Location of Culture* and Gandhi in *Postcolonial theory* allows us to situate these conversations to encompass the “complex transformations and newly intercivilizational encounters of our rapidly globalizing world” (Carter, “Thinking Differently,” 820) and to address the issues of diversity, plurality, and hybridity. Postcolonialism’s ability to delve into contemporary matters such as identify, representation, marginalization, and conflicts can create spaces for meaningful discussions and provides theoretical insights relevant to the new complexities of the contemporary global world without marginalizing the existing conversations about diversity, equity, and social justice.

By framing our experiences using postcolonial theory, we feel that the intersections of race, color, accent (languages), nationality, gender, sharing or contesting powers on one hand can be constructed as “self-oppressing,” yet it does privilege us in certain other ways in the sense that we as a group are among the ones who can speak confidently of “matters of cultural hybridity firsthand.”⁷ We find that these complex spaces can never be captured by the conversations in multicultural framework as the complexity not only speaks to the idea of cultural hybridity (as in Bhabba, *Location*) but also in terms of being privileged and oppressed at the same time. One reason why we problematize the use of the multicultural framework to theorize our collective experiences is the fact that our experiences are much more complex than being a member of an ethnic group and thus being categorized as a majority/minority member. Our unique existence is at the crossroads of national, political, colonial, post-colonial, gender, and many more contested spaces and thus is more complex than belonging to a member of one ethnic group. For women and racial minorities to gain entrance into the academy is merely the first step in decolonizing the

institution.⁸ But by being internationals we bring additional insight and perspective toward radically changing the ethnocentric mindset of the university as well.

The ethnocentric mindset that permeates most university settings is greatly challenged when students and faculty from different corners of the world converge. They bring with them their cultural toolkits, which can serve to challenge or affirm the status quo, depending on the extent to which one is prepared to acknowledge the resources that one's culture has provided. Culture thus defines how people derive or construct meaning from their experiences across contexts. The fundamental expressions of community and communality define moral values. Further, global social changes are stimulating the rethinking of cultural issues both within and across boundaries, and culture is viewed as both stable and dynamic, shared by groups and disputed within and across borders, and operating at multiple levels of analysis.⁹

According to Crossley and Jarvis in their essay "Introduction: Continuity, challenge and change in comparative and international education," contemporary challenges are reflected in the new priorities and discourses in educational research that are inspired by the impact of globalization, and by the influence of postmodern and postcolonial perspectives that recognize the significance of culture, context and difference in all aspects of educational research and development. Educational disparity extends beyond the historical issues of Black and White to examine cultural pluralism and inclusion. In "Theories linking culture and psychology," Cooper and Denner explore several theories of culture and psychological processes within nations, one of which is culture as navigating and negotiating borders. These theories are approached from a multiple-worlds perspective. Individuals migrate, navigate, and cross cultural borders between their different worlds. Some cross the borders more smoothly than others, ultimately determining how one adapts to and moves between their social, educational, and professional experiences.

As a group of international faculty, we are products of our experiences, and those experiences shape who we are and what we will become.

Our stories are our experiences. In critical race theory, stories, particularly counterstories, allow others to see us as we see ourselves and enable us to counter how others construct us.¹⁰ In commenting on the marginalized literature of African American women, black feminist critic Barbara Christian notes that “in every society where there is the denigrated *Other* whether that is designated by sex, race, class or ethnic background, the *Other* struggles to declare the truth and therefore create the truth in forms that exist for him or her. The creation of that truth also changes the perception of all those who believe they are the norm (*Black Feminist Criticism*, 160). We choose to tell the truth through our lived experiences.

Van Manen describes lived experience as “the breathing of meaning” which has a “certain essence, a “quality” that we recognize in retrospect (*Researching*, 36). We are assigning meaning to our experiences in this chapter through our stories. We began by starting with self as seen in our opening excerpts and in the commentary of Voice 2 that follows:

Voice 2: Referring to the journey of my experiences as a “labyrinth of life pathways” is a metaphor for the complexities of my life journey. It is a maze which I navigate throughout my life. Through my reflections, I also realized that I needed to provide small episodes of my experiences so the audience can extract the highlights of my cultural experiences. I am aware that the walls of the labyrinth are the other contexts, which impact the experiences as an individual travels through the maze. I will refer to Jackson’s “four-step metacognitive process and pedagogical framework that prompts [me] to

evaluate and reconsider the ways in which [I] view members of [my] own cultural group as well as others who are unlike [mine].”¹¹

Resisting the Singular and Forming a Collective: Talking About “Us” and “Them”

Our coming together became crystallized very early in our first year at Georgia State when a group of us foreign women were gathered in the corridor talking freely and laughing loudly. One of us quickly quieted the group saying, “Shush, they will think we are talking about them!” In this utterance, the distance and strangeness between *us* and *them* was voiced and made tangible. We laughed in unison and hastily went our separate ways. In retrospect, we pondered our fear and collective response of *us* and *the status quo*. There was something disconcerting and still yet unvoiced, even unnamed in the statement, *shush they will think we are talking about them*. Another critical moment of consciousness was when three of us were assigned to the *Diversity Committee* during our second year. We saw ourselves portrayed as *minority* and *diverse* as well as *junior* and *new* and we had to grapple with and contemplate the meanings of these *names*. Though we came from multiple backgrounds, we were now an unofficial *we*. We were forming a community of sisters not by race but based on our status as members of the “outgroup,” the foreigners and “new.”¹² If we did not know it before, our journey was cast upon us. We could choose to take up the mantle or cast it aside in order to survive in the academy. We could choose to go our separate ways as individuals or form a collective. Thompson and Louque cite Hale when they note the dire need for faculty of color.¹³ During 2001-2002, according to National Center for Education Statistics, *faculty of color* accounted for 15% of the faculty in postsecondary institutions in the United States with only 5% being Black. The factors for such low numbers include problems with recruitment and retention, hiring practices, campus

climate and barriers to tenure and promotion, Thompson and Louque note. As Macedo so eloquently puts it:

For most subordinate cultural groups, coming to voice represents a process through which they come to know what it means to be at the periphery of the intimate and yet fragile relationship between the colonizer and colonized. It also means that the colonized becomes fully aware that cultural voice is not something to be given by the colonizer.¹⁴

In her introduction of “The Education Feminism Reader”, Lynda Stone calls upon remarks made by Adrienne Rich in 1977 to a group of women graduates of Douglas College, Rutgers University. Rich had challenged the graduates not to think that “they had come to get an education but to claim one” (Stone, “Introducing,” 1). The concept of “claiming an education” is an appropriate analogy for the process that we had begun; we could either “claim the space” we had inhabited or relegate the adjustment that anyone goes through in a new place, to the victory of the status quo. Claiming ownership and finding one’s cultural voice has much to do with one’s own sense of agency and feelings of self worth, which can be positively reinforced when there is a critical mass of like-minded individuals. As a group of women academics, we engaged in what Phillips calls “womanist methods of social transformation,” dialogue, arbitration and mediation, spiritual activities, hospitality, mutual aid and self-help, and “mothering” (“Introduction,” xxvi). For Phillips, dialogue is seen as:

A means by which people express and establish both connection and individuality. Dialogue permits negotiation, reveals standpoint, realizes

existential equality, and shapes social reality. Dialogue is the locale where both tension and connection can be present simultaneously; it is the site for both struggle and love (xxvii).

Certainly we have engaged in numerous dialogues at the “kitchen table,” in each other’s homes where “all are welcome and can participate” (xxvii). We have also participated informally in various arbitration and mediation settings as we sought spaces to lead and soothe uncomfortable discussions about difficult topics like race and homosexuality in institutional settings. These spaces included the academy, conferences presentations and each other’s homes.¹⁵ As Phillips notes “[W]hat undergirds the mediation process and gives it moral legitimacy is the appeal to common humanity, expressed as family relation, answerable to transcendental, spiritual, or ethical imperatives” (xviii). As a group, we have supported each other, as Voice 2 and Voice 3 report, working not just for ourselves but for the common good:

Voice 2: The ongoing conversations with my colleagues who initiated the “critical mass” project had led to my openness in discussing the issues that I was grappling with silently. From our discussions, we realized that we were diverse in race, religion, class and culture. While race and religion were easier to distinguish and talk about, many of us found it difficult to discuss the issues of class and culture. I tried to be forthcoming with my views or beliefs about these issues but soon realized that I needed to get deeper into my consciousness. I believe from our conversations back and forth, I was able to talk about my experiences more openly.

Voice 3: As a spiritual person of deep Christian faith, I know that the way forward is to work to create spaces for us to talk about uncomfortable issues which need to be discussed for the common good. How can we be an institution dedicated to urban education if we do not bring issues of sexual orientation, race and class to the table for all members in our department to discuss? Our Diversity Committee was the first setting where we were able to bring some of these discussions to an open place. Diverse members of our department worked together to create a Diversity Document that expressed our concerns in expressive and explicit language. From there we went to our respective Divisions to create spaces for difficult discussions. We were slowly cracking the ice and we did not need to “wear the mask.”¹⁶

For Phillips womanist methods of social transformation also include spirituality which “involve communication between the material and spiritual realms, based on the assumptions that these realms are actual, interconnected, and interpenetrating” (xxiii). We are from a diversity of traditions (Hindu, Jewish, Roman Catholic), and we have gathered together to celebrate Divali and mass at our respective homes or churches. We have discussed amongst ourselves our spiritual life forces as we coped with personal difficulties and losses as well as academic challenges. We have engaged in extensive discussions about our outside-of-academe work for social justice and our efforts with family and non-family members to eradicate the scars of poverty and loneliness whether they were in our home countries, in the United States, or elsewhere. *Voice 3* speaks:

Voice 3: How do we draw on our faith to support our everyday lives as academics? It is not an irrelevant anachronism. The challenges and turmoils

that we face are real but we must not abdicate our faith to the sidelines but use our belief systems to spur us to act in ways that are congruent with equity and social justice. Nothing else will do.

Hospitality is also an essential part of a womanist social transformative perspective as well. It “emerges out of womanist caretaking sensibilities as they manifest everyday life activities and reflects traditions of caring for the friend or stranger that have long histories in many of the world’s cultures and religions”; aligned with hospitality are mutual aid and self-help or “methods that involve coming together as a group at the grassroots level to solve a common problem” (xxvii). There is strength in numbers because we serve to provide moral support to each other when one is in need of encouragement.

Motherhood is the final method of social transformation that Phillips delineates. This is beyond the biological and beyond the Euro associations and representative of African cultural legacies.¹⁷ As such “motherhood” resembles “a set of behaviors based on caretaking, management, nurturance, education, spiritual mediation and dispute resolution” that furthers individual healing and reconciliation with the larger group (Phillips, xxix). Voice 2 captures the essence of these womanist attributes when she says:

I believe that I have learned from this experience of openness and sharing with my “critical mass” colleagues. I have incorporated the technique of empowering others and am using that technique to further influence my own thinking and continue to re-examine my long-held opinions of race, class, and culture. For my students who are usually in cohorts of various cultures, I have incorporated the technique of empowering them to open and share their

cultural experiences in my courses. Over the semesters, I have seen the benefits of this process. Exploring and stimulating my students' thinking of cultural awareness through readings of prior literature, participating in the process by sharing my own prior experiences and developing new thinking and analysis in reflective thinking and practice with them, and listening to their experiences and self-reflections among themselves were an interesting and powerful process. I have found strength to continue my openness to my colleagues and future students. It is my ultimate goal that the future teachers we prepare at our urban research institution commit to "doing their part" as educators to reduce bias, prejudice, and intolerance in P-12 learners. (See Jackson, "Starting with Self.")

Dialogue and disclosure go hand in hand in building and forming new partnerships and relationships. Disclosure of one's personal and professional history is a necessary antecedent to sharing and reflecting on who one is, where one has come from and what one stands for in the academy setting and, most importantly, what one can accomplish in the university, particularly when one does not perceive herself to be (treated as) a member of the status quo. However, this process is fraught with inner and outer tensions. Bell hooks states it this way:

To commit ourselves to the work of transforming the academy so that it will be a place where cultural diversity informs every aspect of our learning, we must embrace struggle and sacrifice.¹⁸

From Outsiders to Insiders

We very early identified ourselves as "outsiders" in our teaching, in our research, in our service and interactions, and in how we were treated and perceived by our colleagues. In our

teaching we often found that we shared similar views on how we felt our American students perceived us. We found that it seemed that our expectations of what constituted a top grade were not congruent with what our American counterparts were awarding. Were we being extraordinarily demanding? We felt that we were not, as we had not collaborated on “being difficult,” but it seemed that we were in agreement whenever we got together. This was a common theme of our discussions:

Voice 3: My students think I am difficult. I get comments like this, “this is the first time I did not get an “A.” I really do not know what it is. I have agonized over this and I have finally come to the conclusion that, no, I am not being overly difficult. The pieces of work that are being contested are indeed well below an acceptable standard and will not be changed. Some of my teaching scores are low because I have been picky about the quality of work the students have submitted and I required a rewrite. My students despised this and rewarded me with low teaching scores even though their end of course grades were high.

For those of us who are not “native” speakers of English or American speakers of English, we were doubly penalized not just for being demanding but for having “an accent.” While there is no such thing as “not having an accent,” having a different way of speaking can sometimes work against you, as Lippi-Green notes in *English with an Accent*. In this context, Voice 1 shares some of the cultural adjustments that were necessary while Voice 5’s fears are manifested in over preparation because of some negative experiences and unsatisfactory comments made about her teaching. Voice 3 speaks about the insensitivity of some of her colleagues.

Voice 1: After growing up in a large, multi-ethnic cosmopolitan city, I went on to pursue further university education mainly in small college towns in the United States. I embraced the typical American college life to the extent that I could – watching movies at the local theatre, eating late-night pizza, playing sports, working as a student assistant, and still making time to study. I recall hysterical stories of cultural misunderstandings. Letting go of “British English” and acquiring “American English” meant that I could no longer put a “full stop” at the end of a sentence. I had to put a “period.” I also could not join an *organisation* but an *organization*.

Voice 5: I was worried and fearful. I feared I was imposing myself by attempting to teach native speakers of English while myself being a foreigner, with “an accent.” In order to establish and maintain my authority in an American university classroom, which I now came to realize, was intended more for myself than for my students, I would spend months on preparing for each new course and hours on preparing for each class. To my big surprise, and undoubtedly with a great deal of pain, I realized that American students were either confused about or even at times very critical of my approach to instruction in my college classroom in my induction years as an educator in America. Why? The answer was the difference of authority distribution between the teacher and learner in my old and the new culture, the culture I was getting assimilated into.

Voice 3: I was attending a meeting with some of our doctoral students and colleagues. After I had done my part of the program, I sat down with some

other colleagues. One colleague commented, “You’re in America now and you should speak American. It’s “schedule” /skedzul/ not “schedule”/fsed’jul/. I was totally taken aback and for a few seconds I was speechless by this unexpected comment. Then I remarked that everyone had an accent and that diversity was about accepting all accents. I let it go at that but I was very disturbed and angry by the sting of this comment. How could an education academic be so ignorant?

Our conversations during one of our meetings led to an interesting emergent understanding. We came to one realization as we were brainstorming the details of our chapter for this collection and sharing our background stories. We noticed that all of us had grown up as members of dominant group(s) in our respective countries of birth. However, all of us had and still have a strong and astute sense about other cultures in our home countries and around the world. Nonetheless, prior to coming to the United States, most of us had not explicitly positioned ourselves in discourses focused around the topic of race. We recognized that the prevalent personal, social, and academic discourse in the United States revolves around race. As the noted President of Spelman College, Beverly Daniel Tatum, reminds us, the United States is “a society in which racist ideology is still deeply embedded.”¹⁹ However, we observed that it did not play a significant role in shaping our identities during our growing up years and early education. Now that we are all faculty members at a research-intensive academic institution, all of us except one of our colleagues are considered members of minority group(s) in this country. Suddenly we are expected to understand the struggles of minority groups, engage in personal, social, and academic discourses related to minority issues and be the spokesperson for the groups that we are assigned to, belong to and/or represent. It was an “ah-hah” moment for us when we realized

that being in the United States and being a member of the US academia, we are now “forced” to participate in the *race discourse* that may continue to shape our identities and scholarly work whether we embrace it or not.

Voice 1: What then are the coping mechanisms that one can incorporate? I approached this question with my experiences of culture shock, nuances, and miscommunications. Having spent my early years in a context where I ‘blended in’, and then shifting to a context where I was classified as a ‘minority’ or ‘Black’, or ‘other’ elements that I did not consciously focus on before, I began to consciously explore how this continually influenced my perceptions.

Interestingly, it had taken the five of us to sift through this complex phenomenon and months of formal and informal conversation to come to this realization. We all had experienced and lived these realities but the impossibilities of creating an academic conversation out of these experiences demonstrate the challenges associated with negotiating imperialistic dominant power structures. Our efforts in deliberating on these power structures may allow us to understand the impact of colonization but do not necessarily empower us as scholars, especially if academic institutions are the perpetuators of imperialistic values.²⁰

Our unique positioning puts us in a paradoxical situation in our personal and academic lives. First, assuming that minority, women, and foreign-born faculty are more interested in topics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality, then by engaging in such work, they are automatically marginalizing themselves in the academic sphere as these lines of scholarly inquiry are not well-represented in American academia and do not hold the same status as other research

fields. Second, if we do persistently choose to engage in research topics that are considered “brown on brown” research (which implies that minority faculty members do mainly minority-related research), then the “research is dismissed as minor or self-serving,” and the assumption arises “that minority researchers cannot be objective in their analyses of those problems which are close to their life experiences.”²¹ These conclusions are drawn “either because the research area is not traditional or because the faculty themselves are seen as inferior due to race or ethnicity.”²² We have to remember, though, that to begin with, none of us perceive ourselves as members of minority cultures. Thus, these perceptions and understandings do not align very well with our expectations for success in our academic scholarship. Yet, this pattern does point to “significant connections between academic capitalism and academic colonialism” (Skachkova, “Academic Careers,” 714) and also the fact that our unique positioning forces us, reluctantly, to align ourselves with the research traditions expected of us but does not give much choice in methodological considerations. As Habashi posits:

The preeminent configuration in higher education institutions does not allow research conditions to flourish that are incongruent with the prevailing Western academic tradition. Therefore, no matter how much methodological reconstruction is done in decolonizing research, one cannot have a meaningful account of indigenous contexts without acknowledging the historical and current hegemony of European influence on modern academe.²³

This is extremely important in the context of our research and scholarship as we have become aware of the fact that many of us may have either unconsciously positioned, re-positioned, and/or re-aligned our research and intellectual interests to successfully *participate* in western academia. Re-orienting ourselves may have resolved the “*publish or perish*” needs that all of us face at

research-intensive institutions, but what this process has not addressed is the complexities of our being as international faculty and the struggles of being true to our identities. It also demonstrates the hegemonic and colonial nature of academic institutions as we continue to situate our existing research agendas and how that plays out in scholarly works. This is not to say that we have completely stopped pursuing research interests that may not align, situate within, or are welcomed within the traditions of the western academia. It does, however, reiterate the fact that “American academia confirms hierarchy of research topics that reflect the hierarchy of ethnicities, nations, and genders on a global level and confirms the status quo of white-Western-European-male perspective” (Skachkova, “Academic Careers,” 714).

Voice 4: I presented a colloquium for the Ph.D. students and faculty to share my research interests and ongoing research projects during the first semester of my arrival. The presentation included a synopsis of one of the book chapters that I had published and it shared my dilemma about my experiences in a postcolonial context and my current experiences in US academia. Not surprisingly, I found out that the students and the faculty were not familiar with the conversations and ideas that I presented from the first part of the book chapter. The first part of the book chapter focused on post-colonial theory and I attempted to tie these ideas with the US standards movement. After my presentation, I got many questions about my research interests. In responding to the attendees’ questions, I realized that I might have to let go of the post-colonial ideas presented in the book chapter and re-present them using a framework that the attendees were familiar with and could understand. This brought us to further conversations with the audience suggesting that my work

could situate well in multicultural education or diversity education. At that time, I recognized that I may either have to *re-package* my scholarly cultural hybridity to align myself with the existing lines of inquiry in the literature. The alternative not only posed itself as a challenge in terms of continued engagement with the postcolonial conversations but also presented a dim possibility of current and/or future doctoral students getting interested in my research and thus willing to be my advisees.²⁴

As we reflect on our experiences using different lenses, (i.e., a multicultural framework and postcolonial theory), we find ourselves more and more “in-between,” within third space” situations, as described in Rutherford’s interview with Bhabba. What we mean by an “in-between,” or “third space” situation is similar to the idea of cultural hybridity, where one can exist in two or more spaces not only in terms of identity but also in terms of being privileged and oppressed as a result of these identities. (See Bhabba, *The Location of Culture*). We wonder whether our collective experiences of being international faculty can be theorized by using the existing conversations such as multicultural education, diversity issues, and/or critical race theory that portray the institutional structures as places where oppression happens, or group of people being oppressed or oppressing other groups of people.²⁵ Our collective experience allows us to exist in a place that place that is majority/minority in many ways as we come from places that are at the intersection of national, political, colonial, post-colonial, national, gender, and many more contested spaces more complex than being a member of one ethnic group. We all find ourselves connecting and relating to each other due to our international background and experiences that are not solely captured by the *race discourse* prevalent in the western academia.²⁶

However, whether we might like it or not, and however the colleagues of the African diaspora amongst us may feel, though we may come from different parts of the world, we do have to carry the mantle of “the inferior race” wherever we go, be it North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa or the Caribbean.²⁷ Still, we cannot ignore the darkness of our skins and all that it may imply in the racialized context of the United States as well as in academe where the “Bell Curve” resides.²⁸ We are all keenly aware of the ramifications and aftermath of slavery even into the twenty-first century. We are critically conscious that every time we stand up to speak, colleagues are wondering what we will say and how it will be said and will it make sense. We have all been tested and tried and we tire of having to prove ourselves over and over again every time we are in a new place. We have seen and felt the sting of having to prove and re-prove ourselves to both students and colleagues, which is not an automatic “given” for new beginning white professors but an automatic given for beginning Black professors and also professors for whom English is not a first language. Is this unfair? Yes, it is, and it hurts every time someone asks a stupid question which attests to their ignorance and assumption of the inferiority of our being here. Just the other day, during a discussion, one of us was asked by a junior professor what our credentials were. Yet, the one from our group who was asked is the only one who has credentials in the area being discussed! We continue to be assigned “Diversity” type tasks (be it being on Diversity type Committees or expected to be the one to lead on matters that pertain to diversity when they come up) and it is assumed that we will accept them.

Who will change the tone and tenor of these categorizations? Only we can if we bring these into the open so that colleagues and students will become aware of how these mantles are or may be unwittingly and/or willingly constructed and assigned to us by discourses of

stereotypic expectation, denial and/or rejection, facial expression, tone of voice and apparently innocuous questions. We are inclined to reject the assignments which may be “repeatedly” ascribed to us and which limit our perspective, and we work hard to reject anything that borders on internalizing the currents of mediocrity and self-doubt. Only a strong critical mass of like-minded individuals can help anyone to continue such struggles in the onslaught of the stereotypic assignments by so many white and nonwhite, local and international students and colleagues in our everyday academic lives. Bell hooks reminds us of this daily challenge:

What does it mean for us to educate young, privileged, predominantly white students to divest of white supremacy if that work is not coupled with the work that seeks to intervene in and change internalized racism that assaults people of color; to share feminist thinking and practice if that work is not coupled with fierce action; ...to create a culture where those who could occupy the colonizing location have the freedom to self-interrogate, challenge and change while the vast majority of the colonized lack such freedom is merely to keep in place existing structures of domination (hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, 4).

To turn our backs on “what it means to be black” would be akin to denying our heritage. So, we carry the mantle of the oppressed dark-skinned people of the world wherever we go,²⁹ and we have no choice but to fight the battle of negative stereotyping and unfair treatment.

Since this is a collective yet not universalized narrative, so let us not forget about the one exception in our group. This colleague is Caucasian and thus is considered a part of the majority culture. Her positioning and categorization as an individual also happen because of the prevalent *race discourse* in the United States. Her struggles of being placed with the majority culture are

very similar to ours being placed with the minority culture with no other parameter except race being in this process. She considers herself as an international faculty member but is considered a part of majority culture by her academic institution. Some of her struggles come from not being able to tap into institutional *programs and benefits* typically offered to faculty members belonging to minority groups. Her background and experiences are very similar to ours, yet she is unable to participate in these programs, as she is being relegated to a part of the majority culture.

Facing Ourselves and Others through Questioning, Resisting and Participating

We have not disaligned or disassociated ourselves from our colleagues. To do so is not our agenda. In fact we have sought to acculturate ourselves and accommodate ourselves to the demands of academe by questioning, resisting and participating as best we could. We have confronted unfairness with faculty evaluations and lack of clarity on how things are done by questioning the status quo. What had hitherto not been articulated because it had been “understood” by all became written down so that it was less open to interpretation. We resisted “minority” appellations and assignments by sound discussion and theorizing with all our colleagues and administrators. We organized discussions of difficult topics and sought to bring marginalized and essentialized viewpoints to the department and college at large. We participated in discussions on diversity and issues of race at both the department and college level. We sought to reconfigure how diversity was constructed in our department’s diversity document. We have addressed multiculturalism in our curriculum, and we have spoken to the faculty at large for those who otherwise would not have spoken and represented for those who are absent. We continue to do these things, not because we are diverse faculty or even because we are international faculty but because we are faculty who care about the lives of those around

us and those we prepare teachers to teach. We intend to make a difference where we are. We can do our work and answer our life's calling better because we have formed a community, a group that can support us as we traverse this rocky terrain of the academy.

In Closing

Here in the American academy, we have to draw on our resources to enrich our work and personal contexts. In line with Rutherford's work, in some cases we are constantly negotiating and renegotiating our identities as we strive to adapt and acculturate but not lose sight of who we are. In our teaching, our identities are visible (Voice 5), as we are in our research (Voice 1).

Voice 5: In a larger context, this image of authority that I projected to my students in my own teaching is, however, directly connected to the teacher and teacher educator identity embodiments³⁰ that I had had been exposed to in my educational experiences in my home culture. Thus, in my own learning experiences, a teacher or a teacher educator was supposed to provide the learner with the tools and specific directions for problem-solving an issue at hand, leaving the student to his/her own means in figuring out the ways to accomplish this task. The aspects of the constructivist learning theory reflected in this instructional approach were choice, inquiry and problem-based learning, but little guidance from the more capable other, that is their teacher.³¹ This setup was believed to force the learner to be independent, resourceful, strategic, and self-disciplined. Dealing with ambiguity and resolving questions independently of the teacher's support were not only natural but also indispensable skills for students of my generation in my home country, to be

able to compete in entrance exams to colleges and universities, on both local and national levels.

Voice 1: My tasks as an educator and researcher are anchored by the question, “Where does educational research in international education and development stand in relation to contemporary processes of globalization?.”³² In response to this question, I bring in my cumulative experiences into my teaching and research. I am always seeking ways to incorporate and disseminate internationalized instructional content and I continually seeking ways to provide guidance to learners with renewed research and knowledge.

As international teacher educator professors we are conscious of “The Bizarre, Complex, and Misunderstood World of Teacher Education” in the United States as well as in other contexts where we have lived, studied or worked.³³ We believe that global perspectives are important at every grade level, in every curricular subject area, and for all children and adults.³⁴ and that inclusive education includes the voices of everyone in society and those in the global community. Internationals bring a knowledge of their respective home communities as well as perspectives as outsiders/insiders in the American academy. Such voices are needed if we intend to change the narrowly defined knowledge and skills for prospective teachers (Gal, “Global perspectives”) and to address the globalization needs of future educators. We believe our very presence helps to give voice for others, if we choose to use that voice. As Sheared notes:

Giving voice has become an aim of those who seek to provide students and educators with an opportunity to become engaged in a critically reflective

dialogue regardless of the subject matter. This aim is based on the proposition that all knowledge is grounded in a social, political, economic and historical context. To give voice requires us to acknowledge different realities and understand that there are different ways of interpreting reality.³⁵

We do choose to use our voices, and this book chapter is a testimony to that will. We have disclosed ourselves as it were. We have “come of age.” We have “come out of the closet of hiding” as so many of our fellow academics hesitate to do by not disclosing who they are and what they stand for in the new realities of preparing teachers for a diverse and increasingly interconnected world of the twenty-first century. In so doing we can really say that we are prepared to “walk the walk and talk the talk” as we teach the future teachers of the United States and this world.³⁶ We have faced ourselves and each other as well as the community at large. We must therefore be accountable to all especially our private selves and our public selves and those who are watching and learning from us. Even though Christian wrote these words in 1985, we find them still applicable today, as we write in 2011:

the struggle is not won. Our vision is still seen, even by many progressives, as secondary, our words trivialized as minority issues or women’s complaints, our stance sometimes characterized by others as divisive. But there is a deep philosophical reordering that is occurring in this literature that is already having its effect on so many of us whose lives and expressions are an increasing revelation of the *intimate* face of universal struggle (*Black Feminist Criticism*, 163).

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¹ The selected personal excerpts for this collaborative essay are based on the individual chapters prepared for our forthcoming book “Critical Mass in the Academy,” edited by Gertrude Tinker Sachs and Geeta Verma (in preparation)

² See Merriam, *Non-Western Perspectives on Learning and Knowing*, and Ferraro, *Making Up One’s Self*.

³ On feminist and womanist influences, see Stone, “Introducing education feminism”; Greene, “The Lived World”; Hooks, *Teaching to transgress*; and Phillips, “Introduction.” From cultural studies and critical race theorists, see Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* and “Remembering Fanon”; Said, *Orientalism*; Hall, “Who Needs Identity”; Morley and Chen, *Stuart Hall*; and Banks and Banks, *Handbook*. See too, on understanding lived experience, Curtis and Romney, *Color, Race and English Language Teaching*; Connelly and Clandinin, “Stories of experience”; and Van Manen, *Researching lived experiences*. On teachers’ stories, counter stories and narratives, see Clandinin et. al., *Navigating Sites*; and Delgado, “Storytelling for oppositionists and others.” See also Alfred and Swaminathan, eds., *Immigrant women in the academy*; and Merryfield, “Why aren’t teachers being prepared.”

⁴ See Verma, “The Influence of University Coursework.”

⁵ On privileging Euro-centrism, see Carter, “Thinking Differently about Cultural Diversity.” On the increasing visibility of hybrid, diverse identities, see Valdivia, “Geographies of Latinidad.”

⁶ See Dimitriades and McCarthy, *Reading and teaching the postcolonial*.

⁷ Verma, “Colonial and postcolonial science in India,”

⁸ See Hsu, “Where’s Oz, Toto?,” 55.

⁹ See González, Moll and Armanti, *Funds of knowledge*; Christian, *Black feminist criticism*; Cooper and Denner, “Theories”; Sussman, “The Dynamic Nature of Cultural Identity”; Winkelman, “Cultural Shock and Adaptation”; and Semali, “Community as Classroom.”

¹⁰ Delgado, “Storytelling”; Delgado and Stefanic, *Critical race theory*; Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*; Said, *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*.

¹¹ Jackson, “Starting with Self,” 2. See also Gomez, “Prospective Teachers’ Perspectives.”

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- ¹² See Thorton Dill, “Race, Class and Gender,” and Allport, *The nature of prejudice*.
- ¹³ See Thompson, and Louque, *Exposing the “culture of arrogance.”*
- ¹⁴ Macedo, “Poisoning Racial and Cultural Identities,” 2.
- ¹⁵ One example of an occasion when we presented together at a conference was our paper on “Internationalism and diversity in local and international teacher education contexts” at the Georgia Association of Teacher Educators, Jekyll Island, GA, in 2005.
- ¹⁶ See Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.
- ¹⁷ Hilliard, “Race, Identity, Hegemony, and Education.”
- ¹⁸ Hooks, *Outlaw Culture, Resisting and Representing*, 33. We are indebted to our colleague Barbara Gormley for this most appropriate citation.
- ¹⁹ See Tatum, *Can We Talk About Race?*, 70.
- ²⁰ See Hiner, “History of Education.”
- ²¹ Skachkova, “Academic Careers of Immigrant Women,” 713.
- ²² Turner and Myers, *Faculty of Color in Academe*, 26.
- ²³ Habashi, “Creating Indigenous Discourse,” 774.
- ²⁴ On postcolonial theory, see Bhabba, “Remembering Fanon” and Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*. On cultural hybridity, in particular, see Bhabba, *The Location of Culture*.
- ²⁵ See Delgado; Delgado and Stefanic; and Macedo—all cited above. See also Sleeter, “How White Teachers Construct Race.”
- ²⁶ See Li and Beckett, “*Strangers” of the Academy*. See also Lin et. al., “Women Faculty of Color in TESOL.”
- ²⁷ See Castenell and Pinar, eds., *Understanding Curriculum as Racial Text*; Omi and Winant, *Racial formation in the United States*; McCarthy et. al., eds., *Race, identity and representation*; Moore et., al., eds., *African presence in the Americas*; Essed, *Everyday racism*; Tinker Sachs, ““The World Away from

Home”; Torda Lowe, “The outsider’s voice”; Premdas, *Identity, ethnicity and culture*; and Moore, *Pichón. A memoir*.

²⁸ Jensen, “How can we boost IQ”; Hernstein and Murray, *The bell curve*; Russell and Glauberman, *Bell curve debate*.

²⁹ See Tinker-Sachs, “The World Away from Home.”

³⁰ See Alsup, *Teacher Identity Discourses*,

³¹ Kirschner et. al., “Why Minimal Guidance during Instruction Does Not Work.”

³² Little, “Globalisation and Educational Research,” 428.

³³ Here, we invoke the title of a productive essay by Kincheloe, which appeared in a collection edited by Kincheloe, Bursztyn and Steinberg and entitled *Teaching Teachers. Building a Quality School of Urban Education*.

³⁴ See Gal, “Global perspectives for teacher education.”

³⁵ Sheared, “Giving voice: An inclusive model of instruction,” 273

³⁶ See Cochran-Smith, *Walking the road*.