Journal of Education, Language, and Ideology
volume 2 | issue 1 | 2024
pp. 158–182

Research Article

Should I Continue to Teach English? Conflicting Subjectivities of a Racialized Teacher

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Received: March 12, 2024
Accepted: August 5, 2024
Published: October 14, 2024
doi: 10.5281/zenodo.13931978

This autoethnography explores the politics of place, the impact of colonization on my linguistic identity as a racialized English language teacher, and the intersection of race and racism in the professional sphere for non-native English teachers (NNES). I analyze my lived experiences through theoretical lenses that inform research on race, teacher identity, teacher education, and English language teaching. I conclude by sharing my reflections/views on how marginalized teachers can resist hegemony in the professional sphere and reappropriate their racial and professional identities.

Keywords: colonized; identity; race; resistance; whiteness

1. INTRODUCTION

Am I invisible?
Or am I overshadowed by whiteness?
Whiteness that is perceived very hard to see,
Yet permeates my way of being.
Do I have to be white to make people listen to me?
Do I have to be white for people to respect me?
Do I have to be white for people to value me?
Do I have to be white for people to appreciate me?

The purpose of this autoethnography is to analyse the intersection of my racial, professional, and linguistic identities in terms of my lived experiences as they relate to colonial structures of power. I will share some ways to resist hegemony in teaching practice and bring an awareness of how race and racism infiltrate the teaching practice of racialized English language teachers (Motha, 2014).

Ann Marie Foerster Lou (2013), winner of the National Geographic Teacher of the Year award opened her acceptance speech by saying, “Who you are is just as important as who you teach” (as cited in Motha, 2014, p. 98). We carry our multiple identities and subjectivities into the classroom. We constantly negotiate our identity in relation to the politics of the place. Writing this piece was emotionally draining as I battled with numerous facets of my identity. I realized that, as an English teacher, I perpetuate a dominant ideology that subjugates students from the Global South. On the other hand, this process was also agentive and transformative. This autoethnography emerged from

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a course on the sociocultural perspective on education and identity, a part of my master's program. The enriching academic discourse and subsequent assignments unearthed deep colonial sentiments, demonstrating how the course material itself was an agent of empowerment (Ilieva, 2010).

The impact of race and racism often remains unquestioned in Asian English Language teaching (ELT) contexts (Kubota, 2022). I write this piece to share my voice and raise awareness among English teachers in India and other post-colonial contexts, urging them to examine the implications of coloniality on their identity and practice. I also address the question: How has coloniality shaped my personal and professional identities in both national and transnational contexts?

2. METHODOLOGY AND THEORISING EXPERIENCES

Autoethnography as a methodology is gaining prominence in the field of TESOL (Canagarajah, 2012; Jain, 2023; Mirhosseini, 2018). I resonated with the lived experiences of transnational scholars and realised that teachers in post-colonial contexts often go through similar experiences (Canagarajah, 2012; Jain, 2023; Yazan et al., 2020). In doing autoethnography, we, as researchers, critically examine our lived experiences and subjectivities. However, these experiences are not created in a vacuum but are shaped by our sociocultural, historical, and political contexts (Sikes, 2021).

I use memory, emotions, thoughts, and feelings as tools in this autoethnography. I also adapt Anderson's (2006) methodology of analytical autoethnography. I turn my gaze inward and use self-reflexivity to analyse and theorize my professional identity and practice as a member of the TESOL community. I have chosen specific instances related to my multilingual and transnational identity as a colonial subject.

The analysis is structured chronologically, beginning with the impact of colonial structures on my childhood, followed by my undergraduate and graduate studies, my experience in the hotel industry, and finally, my identity as a teacher in both India and Canada. Currently, I am an international student in Canada, having taught English for nine years in my native country, India. While narrating my journey, I have not mentioned the names of all the organizations I have worked for, as it is not my intention to target any specific institution.

Before embarking on sharing bits of my personal experiences with English, I would like to briefly mention the theoretical lenses that I found useful in reflecting on them. I found Motha's (2014) book *Race, Empire, and English Language Teaching* to be particularly insightful. She examines the intersection of empire, colonialism, post-colonialism, and its intersection with race, English language teaching (ELT) and linguistic ideologies that create language hierarchies. Motha (2014) further distinguishes between empire with a small 'e' and capital 'E'. The former is akin to monarchy, a colonizing government, whereas Empire is the invisible neoliberal force

manifested from certain powerful white nations that infiltrate ELT practices. In my analysis, I refer to the impact of both empire and Empire as India was colonized by the British, and I consider how the forces of globalization have impacted the ELT profession. In her book, Motha further talks about the interconnected strands of whiteness and coloniality, as well as their impact on English language teachers and students.

I analyse my teacher identity and experiences in Canada through the interconnected lens of racial microaggression and racist nativism, stemming from the efforts of critical race theory (CRT) to analyze the role of race and racism in education. Racial microaggressions are subtle forms of racism that can be experienced in everyday life through verbal and non-verbal attacks on racialized individuals. This assault can be both conscious and unconscious, and the attacker can be white or racialized subject themselves (Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Ramjattan, 2019). The theory of racist nativism--also a branch of CRT--helps analyze the nativist discourses that are harmful for people of Colour[1] (Ramjattan, 2019).

For this article, I link racist nativism to the discourse that white teachers are the rightful owners and teachers of the English language, creating a deficit perspective of the teachers from the Global South. In his paper, Ramjattan (2019) documents the experiences of Canadian teachers with racialized identities who teach in private language schools in Canada. While these teachers are victims of racist and nativist microaggressions, they also exhibit acts of professional resistance. Ramjattan categorizes these acts as conformist and transformational resistance. I find Ramjattan's (2019) theorizing of professional resistance helpful in speaking of my experiences of defiance as a marginalized English language teacher.

Identity theorists have drawn extensively from Bourdieu's theory of capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015). The theory indicates that individuals' positions in the social structure determine their value in society and influences their behaviour (Peirce, 1995). However, I do not subscribe to Peirce's (1995) interpretation that the values of neoliberal social structure solely drive individuals. While I acknowledge Bourdieu's theorization of capital, I find it helpful to bring the concept of *power* to this paper as well as analyse how it influences various facets of marginalized identities.

Social sciences and education scholars have focused on how power dynamics operate within social relations (Flores & Lewis, 2020; Foucault, 1982; Boler, 1999). In "Power and Truth," Foucault (1982) emphasizes the centrality of power relations. Power, he argues, is neither objective nor context-free. It is dynamic, unequal, and not held or possessed by any individual, group, or institution. Power operates in every aspect of life through social relations and the hierarchies within those relations. Furthermore, it is

[1] I have chosen to use both British and American spellings which reflects the impact of coloniality and transnationalism on my identity. It is also to challenge the notion of adhering strictly to either American or British English norms.

multidirectional, signifying that power can flow not only from the top to the bottom but also from the bottom to the top (Foucault, 1982). Flores and Lewis (2020) further add that power is neither universal nor fixed—it shifts based on power relationships. For instance, power can be exercised by marginalized communities in the form of resistance (Boler, 1999). Boler (1999) defines it as *Feeling* Power (original italicized for emphasis): the strength that can be found in expressing emotions as a form of personal empowerment. In contrast, she also distinguishes Feeling *Power* (original italicized for emphasis), i.e. the symbolic power exercised by individuals living within white supremacist structures, felt through our emotions. Hence, I have chosen the term "power" due to its duality.

While power is inherent within larger social hierarchical structures, it can also empower marginalized communities as they negotiate those power structures in their daily lives. This empowerment manifests in actions such as reappropriating and reclaiming their identity, resisting white hegemony, and pursuing self-determination. For instance, marginalized communities may use borrowed colonial discourses to challenge the status quo (Boler, 1999; Flores & Lewis, 2020). In this paper, I have also chosen to capitalize *Colour* and use a small case for *white* to assign value to people of Colour. The use of binary terms like native and non-native; and centre and periphery is to underscore the discriminatory practices prevalent in the world of ELT.

3. MY COLONIAL IDENTITY

Growing up in India, I have lived under the shadow of whiteness even before I started my teaching career 10 years back. India, having been colonized by the British, and subsequently by the English tongue; my parents consciously decided to put me in an English-medium school, knowing that my prospects might be limited if a vernacular school were chosen. This school was under a Christian protestant church. Not only did I grow up reading stories in English and devouring articles from *Readers Digest* magazine, but I also memorized Christmas carols and participated actively in the Christmas celebrations. English was my favourite subject, and it was also my strongest suit academically.

I unknowingly became a slave to the English language and its foreign cultural practices. My schooling has been "historically shaped by the legacy of colonialism" (Motha, 2014, p. 27). As a teenager, I moved fluidly between three languages, Bengali-Hindi-English: a reminder of my multilingual identity. In 2005, I completed my bachelor's degree in English literature, which placed major emphasis on British authors. We studied 20th century Indian authors only in one semester. Completely enamoured by the course content from Shakespeare to Tennyson, I voraciously consumed novels written by English authors. It permeated my life as water finds its way into the crevices between rocks.

My interaction with the white race began in 2007 when I joined an international hotel chain in India. My role involved pleasing white management and guests. I experienced the symbolic *power* as the top hotel management executives including the General Managers consisted of white individuals (Boler, 1999). Over the years, I was often praised by my American and European guests with comments like, "You speak quite good English" and "You are not like other Indians." Similar incidents have been documented by scholars in their research (Kubota et al., 2021). The underlying question of why I was perceived as different from other Indians was never addressed, but subtly hinted at racial stereotyping.

Internationally, Indian guests are often considered rude, loud, and uncouth, which frequently results in discriminatory service standards in the hotel industry. I would bask in the glory of the guests' compliments, disassociating myself from my Indian identity and feeling culturally superior. My identity reflected an alien culture—I was a person who has read English literature, and was familiar with British cultural norms, despite never having travelled to Britain. I carried with me a sense of shame about my Indian identity. Explaining this as postcolonial shame, Mbembe (2006) draws attention to Gandhi's ideas that "imperialism cannot be explained by coercion alone," (as cited in Motha, 2014, p. 63). Colonized people agree to the narrative for a number of reasons. Similar to how Sartre (1948) describes the inauthentic Jew who accepts the anti-Semite's accusations and tries to dissociate himself from his Jewishness, I am the inauthentic Indian, an unfavoured minority whose identity has been distorted by hegemonic conditioning (as cited in Broyard, 1950). Canagarajah (1999) speaks of the conflict of being "torn between the claims of Western values and the indigenous cultures" as "an everyday experience for millions of people in post-colonial communities" (p. 1).

Interestingly, individuals from numerous European and Western nations also exhibit behaviours associated with being loud, and uncouth, yet these go unnoticed: they are tolerated and interpreted differently due to the power dynamics. The cloak of invisibility, namely whiteness, shields them. On the other hand, Indians face resentment for the same traits, as their visible racialized identities make them targets. Quoting Richard Dyer, Motha (2014) tells us that "to apply color white to white people is to ascribe a visible property to a group that thrives on invisibility" (p. 85).

I was socialized to believe that white people were culturally and socially superior, while my race was inferior. Motha (2014) highlights Frantz Fanon's insight into the psychological impact of colonialism. Colonized individuals often develop feelings of inferiority and seek to emulate the colonizers, desiring proximity to whiteness for greater symbolic power in society.

After nine years in hospitality, I switched careers and began teaching English; something I felt I was good at and derived happiness and satisfaction from. My journey began with Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA)

training from the British Council[2]. The politics of place and race created both my privileged and marginalized identities within the world of ELT (Park, 2015). My English language education, the CELTA certification, and my subsequent work experience at international schools gave me a higher status among teachers in the Indian context (Bhattacharya, 2017; Mohanty, 2006). However, in Canada, my Indian national identity reduced my status, despite my having the CELTA accreditation which supposedly provides mobility to English language teachers across the world. This mobility is, however, also impacted by racial status: teachers in general from "native English-speaking" Britain, Australasia, and North America (BANA) countries continue to hold symbolic, social, and linguistic power over teachers from developing nations due to white supremacist structures and the hegemony of the English language (Gerald, 2020).

Research by Ruecker and Ives (2015) and Selvi (2010) on online TESOL recruitment websites highlights the predominance of native-speakerism values. According to Ruecker and Ives (2015), "The ideal teacher is a young, White, enthusiastic native speaker of English from a predominantly White country where English is the official language" (p. 234). It is pertinent to acknowledge that racialised teachers who are passport holders from BANA countries, although privileged, are also discriminated against due to their phenotypical features (Kubota, 2022; Kang & Donald, 2009).

Over the years, several ELT organizations in Southeast Asia, Europe and South America have rejected my application despite my qualification and experience. For instance, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme primarily recruits citizens from major English-speaking countries as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs). The eligibility criteria include having a bachelor's degree in any field, but teaching qualification and experience are not prerequisites. However, "excellent English language skills, contemporary standard pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation in English, along with excellent writing skills and grammar usage," are required. Although the programme claims to accept applications from non-native English-speaking countries, the latest JET Programme Participant Numbers table clearly shows that the United States and other BANA countries dominate participation (JET Programme, n.d.).

As an English teacher, English has now become my dominant language, which, regrettably, made me feel superior due to comments on my proficiency and distinctiveness from other Indians (Kubota et al., 2021). Currently being at the crossroads as an international student in Canada, navigating my identity in international waters, I recognize that those masked compliments may have taken for granted the secondary status of my race (Kubota et al., 2021; Jain, 2023). Did English truly provide me with symbolic power or was I just whitening my identity? I had become a "white listening subject" (Rosa & Flores, 2017), carrying forward the historical burden

[2] British Council, under the umbrella of British High Commission, is an international cultural and educational organization with a presence in more than 100 commonwealth countries. Primarily, most of these countries were once under the British rule. In India, it is considered highly prestigious to obtain a qualification from the British Council.

of coloniality. As explained by Rosa and Flores (2017), a white listening subject can be a white or non-white individual, but they carry white subjectivities.

4. INDOCTRINATION OF NON-NATIVE TEACHERS

Teaching for international schools and subsequently for the British Council meant teaching globally published materials to my students in India. I never questioned the value of these materials and their cultural appropriateness — I was teaching English, and I should teach the English culture unquestioned as taught to me during my teacher training course. I bought into the narrative of English as apolitical, ahistorical, and a "neutral enterprise" with a focus on phonetics, "native" grammatical structures, and language skills, essential to promote "equity and access" to students from developing nations (Motha, 2014, p. xxi, 2; Phillipson, 1992). Feagin and Vera (1995) use the term ""sincere fiction" to refer to the persistent belief of ELT as racially neutral (as cited in Motha, 2014, p. 37).

In the past 10 years of teaching English, I have never used a text authored by an Indian writer on ELT. Global teaching materials are considered superior to locally produced ones, not only by myself but also by my colleagues and the institutions where I have worked. UK-produced textbooks, such as *Cutting Edge*, *Workout English*, *Headway, Longman's Academic Series* for ELT and a few more are commonly favoured by teachers and private English language institutions for teaching adults and teenagers. Kullman (2013) examines the widespread use of these UK-published ELT textbooks by the British Council, which promotes the dominant narratives of the Global North. Bose and Gao's (2022) research on ELT textbooks used for secondary education in Indian schools also shows a dominance of Western themes and white characters. It is interesting to note that this was the first of its kind of research in the Indian context, underscoring the nature of coloniality in India.

Teaching materials are not simplistic or neutral constructions; they are shaped by and carry the values of the author's personal, professional, and national identity (Canagarajah, 1999; Dengler, 2023). These materials reflect underlying perspectives that may unconsciously promote certain worldviews, ideologies, or cultural biases. I was unintentionally attributing symbolic *power* to Western ideals, creating a hierarchy where white native speakers held "legitimate linguistic and cultural knowledge" (Matsuda, 2002, as cited in Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 7) and establishing the British language and culture as the norm for teaching English (Boler, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Fujikawa (2008) refers to this notion of influence as invisible whiteness—a set of universal norms formed by hegemonic conditioning.

My teacher training course did not prepare me for different varieties of English; it emphasized British and American English as standard, dismissing other forms

(Alshammari, 2022). Teachers were also given a long list of "incorrect" Indian English[3] phrases while preparing students for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exams. Some examples of phrases that were given in the list--doing the needful, prepone, I am doing my graduation, wearing half sleeves shirt, bus stand--are some common terms used in India which are mostly comprehensible to the local Indian population. However, these terms are specifically deemed as "incorrect English" and students are taught to use "native" varieties and phrases which might not have any significance in the daily lives of the students. While nativized varieties of English, such as Indian English, have been gaining legitimacy in mainstream dictionaries like Cambridge and Oxford, English language classrooms continue to be colonial sites, as the assessment standards are created according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale (Ravindran Babu & Mani, 2018). To score higher on the lexicon descriptor, students are encouraged to memorize terms that are acceptable in English-speaking countries specifically in the United States and the United Kingdom (Beck, 2023).

I corrected my students' Indian English to teach the so-called standard variety, creating feelings of inferiority**.** Many of my learners also felt inferior due to their Indian accents. This mindset, common in postcolonial settings, stems from emulating colonizers and seeing "linguistic deficiencies" in other racialized bodies (Ramjattan, 2018, p. 729; Rosa & Flores, 2017). However, the message was clear that all forms of English are not equal, and that so-called standard accents and varieties are superior to the racialized varieties of English (Kubota, 2022). Online dictionaries like Cambridge, Oxford, and Merriam-Webster continue to provide American and British pronunciations as benchmark for the correct pronunciation of individual words and sounds. The IELTS listening exam consists of the voices of "native" speakers of English representing British, American, Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand English. This narrow range of accents forces teachers and students from the Global South to believe in the social construction of the myth of standard varieties of English associated with white native-speaking countries.

In learning English, marginalized communities continue to Feel *Power* created by the machinations of the white institutional structures (Boler, 1999). Shuck (2006) reminds us that English is evocative of a racial identity associated with a Caucasian face. This myth is reinforced by language schools in non-dominant English-speaking countries in both Global North and South through their preference for white native English-speaking teachers (Motha, 2014; Ruecker & Ives, 2015; Selvi, 2010).

[3] Distinctive language features of English created in the context of India's linguistic and cultural setting. Kachru (1965) refers to this as an idiom of English that reflects Indianness within the defining context of the Indian setting.

5. RACE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Despite the increasing diversity in educational settings, discussions on race remain insufficient in teacher training programs, reflecting a broader systemic issue. As Milner et al. (2013) aptly state "Race is grossly under-theorized in teacher education" (p. 538). In my 20 years of professional life, I have been predominantly trained by white trainers and educators — initially in the hospitality industry, then for CELTA teacher certification, and in several other teacher training programs thereafter. My CELTA interviewers and two out of three of my CELTA trainers were British. The international school where I worked hosted visits from white teacher educators, to instruct us on teaching methods and engaging strategies we could use in our classrooms. A few trainers were of Indian origin, but they often cascaded the training programs developed by white teacher educators. So essentially, my entire career I have lived with the assumption that whites know best. The intersection of my status in Canada as an international student with my status as a teacher from a linguistic and ethnic minority has opened my eyes to the privilege carried by white teachers.

Over the years, I have interacted with many white educators from BANA countries with teaching experiences in Southeast Asia. Little did I know that programs like JET were instrumental in providing them with international teaching experiences. In 2018, I attended the English Language Learning Specialists in Asia (ELLSA) conference in Singapore. While I met a few educators from Asia, the dominance of white educators from the Global North who had migrated to the Global South was evident. After the conference, feeling empowered, I approached my manager to express my interest in teacher training. However, that spark quickly died as I realized I did not know where to start. Where does one obtain the knowledge and authority to present oneself as an expert (Canagarajah, 2012)?

A few months later, another training session was organized, and once again, a white teacher educator from Britain was invited to teach classroom strategies. She presented herself with an assurance and confidence that I lacked. Much like, Canagarajah (2012), I experienced uncertainty about the depth of my knowledge and the adequacy of my skills. While the importation of white native-speaking teachers to peripheral countries is normalized and even advocated by the governments of various Asian and Western countries alike, the same is rare for teachers from the Outer and Expanding Circles of English[4] (Lan, 2021; Motha, 2014). For a long time, I viewed my abilities with a deficit perspective, carrying a sense of fear about how veteran white native teachers of English might perceive me, an outsider teaching them about teaching English. Such authority

[4] Kachru's (1992) concentric circles of English categorizes English into Inner, Outer, and Expanding circles. The Outer circle refers to countries that were under the British rule, and now use English as a second language. The Expanding circle refers to countries where English is used as a foreign language due to the impact of globalization.

and self-assurance of native speakers can be attributed to the history of colonization and the subsequent spread of English for cultural imperialism.

Peggy McIntosh's (2003) seminal essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" underscores the "unearned power" and privilege that white individuals carry (p.193). In conversations with me, white colleagues who have taught English in Asian contexts shared their feelings of superiority regarding their moral, cultural, and educational values, despite having no prior teaching experience. The analogy of missionaries was evoked in one of our conversations.

Building on Cook's (2012) theme of Helping Language, Stinson and Migliarini (2023) attribute this to the White Savior Industrial Complex, which reflects the assumption among these teachers that they are rescuing marginalized students in the developing world by imparting a supposedly superior language, believed to offer access to Western global capital. Cook (2012) further examines the political nature of educational development work carried out by U.S. citizens abroad, highlighting how it perpetuates Western hegemonic practices while marginalizing and Othering disadvantaged groups.

Widdowson (1994) challenges the assumption of white authority in education, questioning the cultural appropriateness of both content and teaching methods in local contexts. Canagarajah (1996) further expands that ELT often prioritizes the "pedagogical practices and theoretical constructs" of the centre while neglecting "the linguistic, educational, and cultural traditions of peripheral communities" (p. 444). This approach prioritizes the needs of the centre over inclusivity and responsiveness to the diverse cultural backgrounds of students from various periphery countries. The achievement gap between NNES and NES among teacher educators "must be seen in relation to the geopolitical, economic, cultural, and linguistic factors underlying center-periphery relations" (Canagarajah, 1996, p. 455). Additionally, Bourdieu's theoretical insight on hierarchical social structure can be used to interpret the significantly lower academic outcomes for teachers of Colour vs their white colleagues who hold social and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). The association of good pedagogy with native speakers "disempowers the non-white teacher" (Amin, 1997, p. 582).

Teaching at the British Council, I have always shied away from presenting my ideas to a wider audience of teachers, seeking constant validation from my manager, a British citizen. I recently attended a webinar organized by Trinity College London on "Building Sustainability into ELT - Are We Doing Enough?" The presenter, an expert in the ELT field and a male white teacher educator, shared insights on what are we doing and what can we do to make ELT sustainable by including climate change education. The presenter did not share any novel ideas, nor did he present a deeper analysis of how English contributes to climate change, which is the subject of my research. I, on the other hand, would have never thought of presenting to an international audience, despite my research. My lack of confidence in my abilities is a reminder of how whiteness impacts people of Color through processes such as "internalized racism, self-hatred, and inferiority complexes" (Matias et al., 2017 p. 3).

In the early 2000s, I witnessed the true impact of the liberalization of the Indian economy. The rise of call centres and the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector led to an increased demand for English as the language of business. Unlike many people I knew back then, I did not need to turn to the British Council to improve my English, as I had studied in an English-medium school. I worked in the hospitality sector for many years, where I secured a job without much experience, related qualification, or training, thanks to my ability to speak English (Meganathan, 2019).

After completing my CELTA certification in 2013 and entering the education industry, I noticed the rise in English teacher education programs offered by platforms like Coursera and Future Learn. These platforms provided training on IELTS, effective teaching methods, and a plethora of other topics. Professional development sessions felt like a rat race, where the number of certifications gained defined a good teacher. Perhaps that is why teacher education can be called an “enterprise” encompassing a plethora of worldwide organizations as part of the neoliberal education system (Matias et al., 2017, p. 2). Cochran-Smith and Villegas (2015) analyse the “shift to a knowledge society based on neoliberal economics," which dominates education policies in developed nations and other parts of the world (p. 8). Hundreds of working professionals choose to take TESOL, CELTA, and DELTA courses in India or elsewhere every year. The British Council in India alone trains approximately 200-250 teachers each year. I often interviewed 6-7 candidates each week.

As I began my teaching journey, I joined the bandwagon of the teacher training industry. I undertook online training on ‘Becoming a Better Teacher’ and IELTS skills training on Future Learn, took the Teaching Knowledge Test by Cambridge, and attended seminars and workshops to upgrade my knowledge and skills. I also began studying for DELTA, which is considered a prestigious diploma in the ELT industry for those aspiring to become teacher educators.

One consistent feature in these workshops is the predominance of whiteness, with white institutions and teacher educators leading the way. The hierarchy especially in English language education is quite clear: it is the institutions from BANA countries that hold knowledge to the right way of teaching. Selling teacher training programs like CELTA and DELTA as apolitical and methodology-based, Britain continues to hold the Global South in neoliberal shackles and dominates a major chunk of teacher education in the field of ELT. (Alshammari, 2022; Canagarajah, 1999).

Matias et al., (2017) critique the infiltration of whiteness in teacher education in the United States, noting factors such as the dominance of white pre-service teacher candidates, white teacher educators, white classroom-based practicum supervisors, white classroom master teachers, white school administrators, and curricula and teaching philosophies created by white scholars in education. In India, the impact of whiteness can be felt through the spread of international curriculums like the International Baccalaureate, British National Curriculum, Advanced Placement, or Cambridge (Gardner-McTaggart, 2021). It is also evident in teacher immersion

programs where pre-service teachers from the Global North spend part of their teacher education journey in rural India (Enriquez-Gibson & Gibson, 2015). In my experience, at the two international schools where I taught, the strong impact of whiteness was apparent through school administrators, curricula, and pedagogical practices.

Moreover, the hegemony of the English language can be seen as parents, policymakers, and students alike turn towards English language education to compete in the global economy (Bisai & Singh, 2022; Bose & Gao, 2022; Meganathan, 2019; Mohanty, 2006;). Furthermore, ELT teacher training courses offered in India are often considered inferior, and not on par with international standards, which is why international certifications like CELTA and DELTA continue to hold dominance over the Global South.

Whiteness in teacher education causes serious harm to the psyche of students and teachers of colour. White teachers continue to feel superior and confident in their "white righteousness" in international settings, affirming Western values including bias, prejudice, color-blindness, white privilege, and racialization (Matias et al., 2017, p. 13). Racism is internalized and naturalized, making it less visible in the field of ELT and to the population at large.

Sleeter (2017) advocates adopting the lens of CRT to examine teacher education. CRT questions the continued production of teachers who are not cognizant of how to teach students from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds (Fylkesnes, 2018). It highlights systemic racism in teacher education, which often caters to white needs.

Limited research has been conducted on the role of race in teacher education in developing nations and its reliance on the West. Why do teachers and scholars seek Western institutions? Why do scholars from Outer and Expanding Circle countries gain recognition mainly in Western settings or through English-language journals? My decision to pursue a master's degree in teaching English as an additional language in Canada reflects the perceived value of Western education. Without a degree from a white nation, I feared discrimination in the field of ELT. Canagarajah (1996) attributes this phenomenon to power dynamics, hegemony, and technological disparities between centre and periphery countries. English teachers' and scholars' knowledge from the periphery is often seen as "off-networked" and as "folk wisdom" unless validated by Western institutions or publishing houses (Swales, 1990, as cited in Canagarajah, 1996, p. 459, 460). Similar to the power that Western publishing houses hold over "academic" conventions and "intellectual" knowledge, NES hold symbolic *power* over subject knowledge and teaching practices (Canagarajah, 1996).

Being from the periphery keeps you in the periphery unless you relocate to the centre or become a part of a centre organization. I hope to share my marginalized voice by adhering to the discursive and non-discursive requirements of the centre. For the purpose of my analysis, I use Canagarajah's (1999) definition of the term centre, referring to traditionally "native English" BANA countries. My own choices of joining

the British Council, The British School, and other institutions teaching the International Baccalaureate curriculum reflect power dynamics between native and centre institutions (Foucault, 1982). These ideas reflect how colonial structures have impacted my teacher identity. In the academic world, "publication implies validation" (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 440); similarly, to be an English teacher, TESOL or CELTA certification from one of the Eurocentric nations and institutions provides the validation of a legitimate English teacher. However, validation for English teachers from the Global South is challenging; they lack the right "aesthetic", i.e., white identity and authority over the language (Ramjattan, 2015, p. 692). The imperialistic agenda of the West continues in the Global South in the form of exporting textbooks, educational projects, teacher training, funding schools, and other projects (Canagarajah, 1999; Dengler, 2023; Phillipson, 2016; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012).

6. CONFLICTING TEACHER IDENTITY

Identity theorists Darvin and Norton (2015) and Daniels and Varghese (2019) draw on Weedon's (1987, 1999) poststructuralist notions of subjectivity. While Darvin and Norton (2015) theorize the experiences of language learners' identities, Daniels and Varghese (2019) explore the area of teacher identity. Combining these theories, I see my teacher identity as constantly "changing" and in a perpetual "site of struggle" in Canada (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 36). I find myself in "constant flux," influenced by the power of the Global North that dominates the world of ELT (Daniels & Varghese, 2019, p. 58).

I am deeply aware of my racialized self as I walk into the classroom of a private language school in Canada where students from various countries and often from privileged backgrounds come to study English in "natural" settings, i.e., in a native English-speaking country. My status in the institutional hierarchy is further marginalized as I hold the position of a casual teacher, subbing occasionally for the regular teachers.

On one occasion, while substituting for a white Canadian teacher's B2 level writing class, I noticed the students' surprise when I greeted them. Despite following the provided lesson plan on persuasive language in advertisements, the students seemed disengaged. One French student, in particular, was visibly upset. He felt the lesson was useless and a waste of time, wanting to focus on essay writing for the language test. I tried to explain the relevance of persuasive language to essay writing, but he remained unconvinced. I remember sitting in the classroom, flustered, my whole body feeling hot, my face and neck burning as I struggled to keep my emotions in check. Eventually, with the class's consent, I changed the lesson plan. This experience left a mark on my professional identity. Each day that week, I walked into the classroom with dread, feeling the cold, apathetic gaze from the students. I wondered if the reaction would have been different if the same lesson was taught by the white Canadian teacher. Did my Indian identity provoke such a strong reaction from the student? I could sense the students feel cheated: they travelled all the way to Canada to learn English from an Indian.

On another occasion, a Japanese student repeatedly refused to accept my explanation of a grammar point, stating that, “You can’t convince me.” The same student later wrote an email complaining that my answer did not match the published answer in the textbook. I was called in by the academic manager to discuss what had happened. While my explanation was accepted, my concern about being racially targeted was dismissed. She explained that they often encountered such behaviour, especially during the summer term. Despite being aware of these incidents, the organization did not bother to educate the young students on matters of racism, as study abroad schools operate on the principle of profit maximization, which leaves little room for meaningful dialogue on diversity, equity, and inclusion in their curricula.

My experience with microaggressions, particularly from Southeast Asian learners questioning my knowledge and authority on subjects like grammar, resonates deeply with the observations of Matias et al. (2017). As they explain, “These micro-assaults, insults, and invalidations make tiny cuts and sizable slices into the mental and emotional well-being of people of Color ” (p. 13), highlighting the cumulative toll these incidents can take. The majority of the students traveling to Canada still believe in the native speaker fallacy (Ramjattan, 2015). I repeatedly have to establish my credibility as a legitimate English language teacher, and I find that being judged by racialized bodies feels even worse than being judged by white students. They often say they don’t understand my explanations, feedback I've never received in the past. I begin to question, “Am I a good teacher? Who is a good teacher then? Is the title of a good English teacher a 'birthright' of white native speakers?" (Thomas, 1999, p. 6). Students subtly imply that NNES teachers are incapable of teaching them. Ramjattan’s (2019) study on English language teachers in Toronto highlights that study abroad schools operate on native speaker ideologies. These stereotypes negatively affect a teacher’s professional identity, and despite having the right qualifications and experience, teachers from marginalized communities become less effective in the classroom (Amin, 1997, p. 581).

Teaching used to be a liberating experience for me: I derived a sense of satisfaction and felt proud of my teaching practice. Now, as I enter the classroom, I feel a sense of dread, fear of being judged for my racialized identity. My language classroom in Canada has become a site of struggle. My professional identity is constantly being challenged by students acting as gatekeepers. My limited Canadian teaching experience has left me with a feeling of “racial battle fatigue…— the anxiety experienced by racially underrepresented groups” (Mitchell et al., 2015, p. xvii).

A teacher’s professional identity is at the core of the teaching profession. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) describe the identity of a teacher as “dynamic…it shifts over time under the influence of a range of factors such as emotions, jobs, and life experiences” (p. 177). Sachs (2005) notes that it provides a framework to the teachers on “how to be,” “how to act,” and “how to understand” their work and place in society. She expands on this, writing that teacher identity is neither “fixed” nor ““imposed” but is negotiated

through experiences (p. 15). While I partially agree with Sachs, as an NNES teacher my professional identity has been shaped by imposed Western values — the values of whiteness including Western epistemologies, the influence of white culture, emotions, and behaviours. In India, I lacked confidence in my ability to become a teacher educator. However, in Canada, my professional identity is also dictated by my racial identity. I have been forcibly categorized in the social identity of an NNES due to my ethnicity. Although I had read about racial discrimination, it was in Canada that I truly felt the physical and mental pain of being racially "aware." The assigned social identity has had a negative impact on my self-esteem. Notions of hierarchy, power, and status now define my teaching abilities (Varghese et al., 2005).

Gee (2000) identifies four ways of viewing identity, one of them being discourse identity. An ESL teacher's identity is shaped in relation to the discourses they share with their students. While I view myself as a subject expert, this is *self* identity; for my students in Canada my *seen* identity is my linguistic and racial identity of an Indian teacher, an inauthentic speaker of English (Riches & Parks, 2021). Donaghue (2020) further extends the idea of teacher identity "negotiated in situated, work-based talk" (p. 2). Feedback from my management team forces me to align my teacher identity with institutional practices. As Riches and Parks' (2021) research shows, I am ""an ambassador of the second language" in [my] school (p. 45). For instance, we were reminded via official email not to use learners L1 in the classroom for teaching purposes. The classroom and the language school are an English-speaking zone only. I do not subscribe to such teaching beliefs as I am a strong advocate of Translanguaging[5] as a teaching methodology: as NNES teachers, our personal and professional identities often clash, causing internal conflict.

My own teaching experience in Canada reminded me of the concept of racist nativist microaggression (Ramjattan, 2019). It is a conceptual framework that sheds light on subtle everyday forms of racism against racialized groups. These microaggressions reflect nativist discourses creating inaccurate perceptions of people of Colour (Ramjattan, 2019). Incorporating this concept into the examination of my identity, along with the vague and negative feedback I have received from both racialized and white students, I realized that I need to whiten my teaching practice in order to be accepted by white listening subjects. The customers of the ELT industry (i.e. the parents and the students) aspire to learn English from teachers who "look good and sound right"—two favourable qualities supposedly only held by white native English speakers, making them the ideal teachers of the language (Karlsson, 2012; Ramjattan, 2015).

[5] Ofelia Garcia(2017) uses the term "translanguaging" to refer to the way bilingual speakers fluidly move between two languages. As a teaching methodology, translanguaging involves using learners' entire linguistic repertoire to teach a foreign language. The focus is on making meaning rather than grammatical accuracy.

7. RESISTING HEGEMONY

How can NNES teachers resist the hegemonic narrative? Ramjattan (2019) identifies three types of professional resistance teachers use to challenge their marginalized status: conformist, compensatory, and transformational. Conformist resistance involves adopting the dominant ideology, such as adopting a white name to downplay one's racial identity. Compensatory resistance offsets learner biases, like dressing formally to project a specific image. Transformational resistance focuses on pedagogical practices to educate students about damaging racist notions, even using microaggressions as teaching moments. However, teaching actively about race in an English language classroom can be daunting for teachers.

A conversation with a native Canadian teacher in the private language school where I teach was a reminder of how some white teachers may not touch upon the uncomfortable topic of race and often use the coded term “cultural difference” (Yosso, 2005, p. 75) as a way to mask racism, while NNES teachers suffer from notions of fear because of their lived experiences. Apart from the fear of addressing race in the classroom, racialized teachers carry the invisible burden of the fear of “disturbing dominant groups” and are charged with the additional responsibility of raising “consciousness in the members of dominant communities” (Lin et al., 2004, p. 493). I almost got into a debate with an experienced white male educator on the topic of why Canada Day should not be celebrated owing to the historical and cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples on Canadian land. The day reflects a celebration of colonial values and a constant reminder to the First Peoples of the atrocities they had encountered and continue to encounter. However, I chose to put a pause to the strong arguments brewing in my head, in order not to offend the other person and from being perceived as “too emotional”. On numerous occasions, I have felt this perceived *power* affect my interaction with white (as opposed to educators of Colour).

A shift away from whiteness is required in educational and social discourses to address issues of racism. Additionally, white NES teachers, often seen as authorities in ELT and teacher education, should initiate dialogues on race to support their racialized colleagues. However, as Cherrie Moraga (1983, as cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 73) writes, “The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression” and approaching it solely theoretically—i.e., non-performativity (Ahmed, 2006) of discourse—which often happens in academia or critical work. Without genuinely confronting the source of our oppression, authentic and non-hierarchical connections among oppressed groups cannot be established.

Amid the onslaught of negative feedback and perceived biases on NNES, Varghese et al. (2005) note the importance of “agency in identity formation, a movement away from a structurally deterministic view of the fashioning of individuals” (p. 23). NNES teachers need to claim their identity as disciplinary experts in the field of English language teaching (Varghese et al., 2005). How does one claim their identity though? Drawing on my experiences, I would say that this involves actively resisting dominant ideologies and

reappropriating one's identity by *Feeling* power (Boler, 1999). I exercised my agency by sharing my emotional distress and Rubin's (1992) article and scholarly articles as evidence for student bias with my academic manager. I also refused to change my name to "fit in" within the imagined community of Canada. I called out racist discourse when another teacher called me brown. I renegotiated my identity through language and discourse (Gee, 2000). Lastly, and most importantly, I conducted extensive research and pushed myself to give a presentation at the 2024 annual conference of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) on the topic of Translanguaging and native-speakerism in ELT. By presenting myself as a subject expert and addressing the "native" English teachers, I was able to reclaim my identity and also introduce them to decolonial teaching practices.

Moreover, Yosso (2005) advocates CRT for examining and challenging racial issues in social narratives. In the language classroom, Yosso (2005) extends Bourdieu's concept of capital for people of Colour. It can be further extended to teacher identity: NNES teachers utilize aspirational capital and maintain hope to counter student biases; they hold linguistic capital as multilingual, display the strength of resistance against inequality, and steer through challenging Western institutions using navigational capital.

8. CONCLUSION

English is a language of contradiction: while it empowers people to participate in the global economy, it also destroys the languages and cultures of minority communities (Motha, 2014). I feel this contradiction in my teaching practice. Teaching is considered to be a noble profession. But is teaching English truly noble? Should I, as a representative of a marginalized community, continue to teach English and be a lowly paid foot soldier of the ELT industry? The irony lies in the amount of time and money I spent to be trained in this profession. The answer is not easy. English language schools have spread like wildfire in today's globalized world; hence, teaching English responsibly has become far more important.

Teachers need to develop agentive roles and recognize that teaching English is a political act. We can resist dominant narratives by consciously moving away from centre-based curricula and globalized texts (cf. Amelia & Hikmawati, 2019; Viswanath & Mohanty, 2019). Using local, familiar material as content for ELT enhances learners' motivation and deepens their understanding of their own culture and local landscape. It preserves indigenous stories and oral traditions, giving voice to local communities while resisting dominant Western globalized ideas. Ahmed (2017) recommends materials that are grounded in the local culture. By using culturally appropriate texts and materials written by periphery authors, teachers can assign value to local writers and challenge hegemonic conditioning.

Dengler (2023) presents the case of Savannakhet University in Laos, where lecturers resisted Western dominant narratives found in globalized ELT textbooks by localizing and nationalizing the content. By incorporating local geography, culture, literature, and the lived experiences of students, they made a strong case for localizing ELT materials. Additionally, English teacher training and classroom teaching must move beyond Western methodologies and focus on alternative pedagogies that can preserve the language and cultural practices of minority communities (Canagarajah, 1999). For instance, the translanguaging approach can be used to harness students' linguistic and cultural diversity, develop learner agency, and move away from an English-only classroom (Garcia et al., 2017). I personally use translanguaging extensively in my A1 and A2 classes. Students appreciate the use of their mother tongue and are able to communicate their ideas successfully by using both English and their L1.

By adopting critical pedagogical practices, teachers can introduce ideas of social justice and raise students' awareness. Students should be taught to view texts critically and to raise critical questions. While I am pressed to teach the standard variety of English as an IELTS instructor, I bring awareness of different varieties of English used around the world.

I conclude this autoethnography with a call for TESOL professionals from the Global South to question the impact of Western epistemologies and coloniality on their professional identity and practice. The responsibility of teaching English should include fostering respect for linguistic diversity and promoting inclusive practices that honour and preserve local cultures.

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