Critical Education

Literacies of the Heart and Antiracist Pedagogy

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Lilia D. Monzó
Elena Marquez
Chapman University

Abstract

Challenging structural violence is a major project of our time. The massive Black Lives Matter (BLM) uprisings of Summer 2020 brought greater awareness of the systemic racism of universities and a commitment to challenge it. A Marxist-humanist lens recognizes racism as foundational to the racial-colonial capitalist patriarchy and the university as deeply implicated in the development and maintenance of these structures. While all these interlocking oppressions must be eradicated, in the US, racism has historically galvanized more people to action. For this we need a populace with critical literacy to connect their daily oppressions to structural forces. Critical literacy also encourages us to listen to the Oppressed whose "Reason and force" may prove useful toward our liberation. A critical literacy of the heart, drawing on Paulo Freire's work, is one that challenges us to transform structures of oppression through humanizing antiracist pedagogy. The bulk of the paper is drawn from a duoethnography of two Latina instructors. The stories shared offer insights into the deep-seeded racist policies and practices in education and the complexity of challenging these. We argue that such complexity calls for an intentional antiracist pedagogy of "other doing" that goes against the "commonsense" of our society.

Introduction

Challenging structural violence is a major project of our time. The massive Black Lives Matter (BLM) uprisings of Summer 2020 brought greater awareness of white supremacy and its deadly results for Black lives (Buchanan, Bui & Patel, 2020; Taylor, 2016). However, the disproportionate police killings of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color) persons continues unabated (Bunn, 2022) and the Far Right has waged a reactionary war on BLM activists, Critical Race Theory, and those who dare to teach anti-racism (Rodriguez & Williamson, 2021).

The BLM uprisings spread impetus among members of the academy to act in solidarity with the Black community and to acknowledge and challenge the systemic racism found in higher education. In September 2020, many professors across the United States, and a day later also in Canada, united in a two-day Scholar Strike in which some faculty withheld their labor while others with more precarious employment conditions, such as adjuncts, engaged in teach-ins and discussions on racism (Butler & Gannon, 2020). Many universities made public commitments and developed initiatives to ramp up Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts through course offerings, curriculum, and hiring and promotion practices. However, some scholars questioned these university proclamations of support, calling it "tokenistic and superficial" (Batty, 2020). Indeed, only a few years after the BLM uprisings, the movement for racial justice within higher education institutions has begun to dissipate and a number of institutions, including Penn State and Princeton University, have been called out for backtracking on their promises to increase DEI efforts (Gassam Asare, 2023).

As Sawyer and Waite (2021) note, it is crucial to understand how discriminatory practices prevail within the context of professed indignation over racism. Without this understanding it is easy to believe that an attitude of anti-racism and a desire for equity will translate into equitable practices. While there are certainly important reforms that can support greater equity and inclusion, racism is too deep-seeded and structurally embedded to be easily or fully eradicated. Against "reformist reforms" (Bell, 2021), we call for engaging with the "root causes" of racism in the academy, which require us to examine the inextricable relationship that the academy has had in the development of racial capitalism.

An intersectional Marxism (Anderson, Durkin, & Brown, 2021), rooted in the dialectical tradition of Marxist-humanism (Dunayevskaya, 2000; Marx, 1961), but also drawing inspiration from the radical Black tradition (DuBois, 2018; Fanon, 1991; hooks, 2000; Robinson, 1983; Taylor, 2016), provides an excellent theoretical grounding for our work. Paulo Freire's critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987) gives us the philosophical tools by which to develop a humanizing praxis that will challenge relations of domination. These theories posit race, class and other oppressions as interlocking relations of domination that uphold each other. Through these frameworks, we come to understand antiracism as the potential first step to ultimately begin the work of challenging all forms of oppression and of learning to relate to each other as human beings. These frameworks also highlight the important insights and impetus for change that are developed among the Oppressed (Freire, 2000).

In this paper, we share our experiences of racism and sexism as Women of Color in the academy as we conceptualized them within duoethnography, wherein we came together as two Latina instructors to collectively navigate our experiences and challenges within predominantly white institutions and to create community and support systems for each other. Here, we argue that

although the deeply-seeded and structural nature of racism and sexism in the university often thwart the best intentions to create equity-based reforms, faculty can and must engage in the academy in ways that challenge relations of domination, human hierarchies, and white supremacy. Through carefully selective examples we share our experiences as Women of Color in the academy and discuss our insights on how we navigated them. Our goal is to demonstrate that the Oppressed, in our case Latinas, bring ways of knowing and engaging in the academy that potentially offer a way forward in developing a more humanizing pedagogy or what we are calling *literacies of the heart*.

The University and the White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy

The popular narrative of higher education as the great equalizer of American society belies the historical fact that the university has, from its inception, served as an important mechanism to establish, justify, and maintain what bell hooks (2000, 1994) referred to as the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. As Stein (2018) notes, "... the 'shiny' promises of many institutions are subsidized by the shadow of its constitutive underside" (p. 78). Wilder (2013) documents how the first universities of the British American colonies were complicit with Indigenous conquest and also actively participated and benefited from Black chattel slavery. For example, Wright (1988) discusses how the first universities, officially a racist project to "civilize" Indigenous peoples, was fraught with "deception and fraud." Built on lands seized from Native peoples and with funds collected presumably for their education, Harvard, William & Mary, and Dartmouth Universities opened their doors to serve almost exclusively European-settler students. Similarly, the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, granted lands previously seized from Indigenous communities to the states to establish and endow "land-grant colleges." Again, these institutions benefited mostly white students. Tribal colleges and universities were not developed as land-grant institutions until 1994 (Stein, 2018).

Wilder (2013) also documents how profits from the transatlantic slave trade and the plantation economy wound up in university accounts and that enslaved peoples built and served these institutions. Although a second Morrill Act in 1890 provided funding (not land grants) for the creation of historically Black institutions, this funding was only a fraction of the land grants that resulted in the establishment of today's predominantly white institutions (Sorber & Geiger, 2014).

Later policies to expand opportunities further reinforced white supremacy. The so-called "golden age" after WWII expanded social services and higher education but further racially stratified students. In California, for example, this expansion funneled poor and BIPOC students into the two-year community college system while maintaining the prestigious UC system with a predominantly white enrollment (Stein, 2018). Furthermore, neoliberal policies calling for privatization, competition, and efficiency have drastically reduced social services, including financial aid, and raised tuition to exorbitant prices, which has further limited access to Black and Brown students.

In addition to this direct exploitation of and lack of access for BIPOC communities, universities adopted the role of "knowledge producers" and deployed a science that they argued determined the objective truth of white intellectual and moral superiority (Mignolo, 2009). Within this context, notions of biological determinism and racial essentialism were borne and research was developed to determine and assign intelligence and other social characteristics to particular

races and genders, which led to solidifying violent claims against BIPOC communities (Byrd & Hughey, 2015) and invalidated other ways of knowing as shrouded with personal judgement and presumed substandard (Smith, 2012).

This history has normalized whiteness as an objective and superior philosophical perspective, informed by and informing material relations, from which to view and engage in the world. Whiteness refers to a set of deeply held values, beliefs and practices that are embedded in capitalist institutions, including the university, which serve to grant access and define excellence, thereby falsely proving itself superior to other ways of understanding the world and contributing to white supremacy (Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017). Importantly, whiteness is often invisible to those who hold these cultural views; instead they perceive this perspective to be the only one (Sonsoy & DeAngelo, 2017). Whiteness, thus, becomes one of the most important avenues by which anti-discriminatory laws and policies are systematically thwarted and systems that may aim to supposedly diversify or even challenge racism continue to perpetuate systems of domination.

A Marxist-Humanist Analysis

As discussed above racism and white supremacy have been and continue to be highly embedded in institutions of higher education. To understand why universities have developed and remained this way, we turn to Marx (1961, 1977) and the Marxist-humanist tradition, rooted in the work of Raya Dunayevskaya (2000, 1991), which centers Marx's humanism and his dialectical approach. A Marxist-humanist perspective engages Marx's analysis of capitalism and his philosophy of revolution, links racism and sexism to capitalist relations, and emphasizes our human agency and the potential for transformation in the concrete struggles of our time.

Marx articulated a system of political economy that demands the continuous accumulation of capital in service of the few who own the means of production (capitalists) through the exploitation of a mass of producers (workers). Marx's analysis centered workers, whose extraction of free labor, at the point of production, results in profits and capital for the capitalists. Marx argued, however, that the system has an internal point of crisis in that greater production leads to a decline in value and thereby a tendency toward a falling rate of profit. In order to compensate for this inverse relation, workers must be continuously pushed to produce more and/or their wages must be cut. Marx foreshadowed the enormous growth of technology that would be introduced to maximize production and that this would push workers out of the labor force. An important aspect of this process of production for Marx was the way it deforms us as human beings, alienating us from ourselves, each other, nature, and our humanity. Marx believed that such a system was not sustainable indefinitely because workers would come to recognize their oppression and their collective agency to stop production and thereby bring the system down. Although this has yet to happen, the key point of this argument for us is Marx's articulation of human agency and collective potential for transformation.

As a dialectician, Marx recognized the complex interaction between objective and subjective reality. He understood that a class system that exploits that masses must be upheld by other structures that limit the possibilities that the working classes would collectivize around a class consciousness. Examining how the English working class demeaned the Irish Fenians, Marx posited that racism serves as an effective tool to materially stratify and ideologically divide the working classes (Monzó, 2019). Through negative media representations and hyper-exploitation,

the English working classes came to perceive the Fenians as inferior and as responsible for bringing down the wage. The English working classes, thus, often sided with the English bourgeoisie (coded as white) and against their own class interests rather than side with the Fenians (coded as cultural/racial other). In today's world, this plays out similarly with the capitalist relations providing social, political, and economic privileges to white peoples while marking Black and Brown bodies for low educational outcomes and menial labor. Women of Color face additional oppressive conditions under this white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, which positions women as keepers of the family and Women of Color as producers of the next generation of highly exploited workers. As seen above, education plays a key role in this process by providing greater access to status professions to white men, funneling women to professions that perpetuate traditional gender ideologies and power relations, and relegating BIPOC communities to low-skill labor.

Unfortunately, many Marxists have historically downplayed Marx's dialectic and developed what is today considered a class-reductionist analysis, whereby racism and other forms of oppression are seen as byproducts of capitalism (Cox, 2020). Some race scholars have responded to these interpretations of Marx with an outright rejection of his ideas as Eurocentric and unable to speak to racism and other forms of oppression. However, in a detailed study of Marx's major writings and correspondences, Kevin Anderson (2016) has documented that, through his study of and involvement with the pollical upheavals of the time, Marx grew beyond his early Eurocentrism. For example, arguing for the abolition of slavery in the U.S., Marx stated, "Labor in the white skin can never free itself as long as labor in the [B]lack skin is branded." (1972, p. 275). In his later years, Marx began studying the family among Indigenous communities, seeking insights from these communities to a more humanizing society (Marx, 1974). Challenging, misrepresentations of Marx as merely concerned with class, Marx engaged deeply with various freedom movements of his time and believed these to be worthy of fighting for, even when they did not express class consciousness. Marx also challenged the treatment of women as property and argued that the level at which we have become human ought to be measured by the extent to which we treat women equal to the ways in which we treat men (Marx, 1961; Plaut, 1999).

Marx's work also helps us understand the ways in which racism intersects with capitalism at a global scale. In *Capital, vol I*, Marx argued that colonization not only jump-started capitalism through thievery – in the form of land, resources, and slave labor – but suggested that this would prove to be a necessary and recurring process (Anderson, 2016). Indeed, we see racism playing out within global capitalism in the significant precarity that exists among a racialized Global Majority, in the power relations, economic exploitation, and environmental disasters that the Global North perpetrates upon the Global South, and in the continuous imperialist wars that are often waged and fought upon non-western lands. Certainly, Marx did not have all the answers nor does his work explain the multitude of nuances of today's multiple oppressions, but that so many of his ideas explaining capitalist relation speak to current social conditions suggests that his work offers key insights that can aid our goals for a more equitable society. As Women of Color we have come into university spaces carrying historical legacies of exploitation and oppression and epistemologies that reflect these experiences. Yet, our diversity, with respect to experience and ways of knowing, have not been recognized within these universities wherein a culture of whiteness has generally prevailed.

There is a long historical legacy of race scholars, including W.E.B. Du Bois (1998) and Frantz Fanon (2021), drawing on Marx and recognizing capitalism as a central aspect of the hyper

exploitation of Black and other communities of color. In *Black Marxism* (2000), Cedrick Robinson brings race and class together as an interconnected system of *racial capitalism*, arguing that "the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions" (p. 2). Robinson challenged Marx's early proposition that capitalism's initial goal had been to deconstruct the rigid caste system of feudalism and posited instead that from inception capitalism extended discriminatory practices and became intertwined with racial systems of violence.

However, drawing on their personal experiences of racism, sexism, and class oppression, Women of Color have recognized that multiple structures of oppression have developed together throughout history to uphold each other and create a multivarious stratified global society. This unit of analysis has recently grown in popularity under Kimberly Crenshaw's (2022) concept of intersectionality, which depicts unique forms of suffering as well as insights as a result of living under multiple forms of oppression. However, these ideas have been percolating among Women of Color for some time. bell hooks, for one, has been referring to a system of "white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy" since the early 80s (hooks, 1984). hooks used this concept consistently to discuss how these structures are consistently present in our lives and must be challenged in educational spaces but also in our daily interactions. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2017) points to the Black feminists of the Combahee River Collective whose work developed the concept of "interlocking systems" of oppression. The Combahee River Collective was an organization of Black radical feminist formed in 1974 and named to highlight the important work of Harriet Tubman whose raid in 1853 at Combahee River in South Carolina freed 750 enslaved people. However, Taylor emphasizes that this idea of intersecting oppressions can be traced as far back as Anna Julia Cooper in 1892. Likely, whether named or not, the reality of living under multiple oppressions that interact in unique ways has been long recognized by the people who experience it. Importantly, Taylor points out that the Combahee River Collective recognized that their oppression as Black women and Black Lesbian women, was deeply rooted in capitalism. Furthermore, they held a commitment to ending injustice for all peoples but also poured themselves into movements that sought justice for Black and Brown women, under the understanding that freedom for the most oppressed, would mean freedom for all. In her own work, Taylor discusses that the Black political elite turned on the working-class Black community, supporting liberal colorblind ideologies that have been instrumental in dismantling social service programs that have had the greatest negative impact on Black women. She points out that the new fascist order, in the wake of the ubiquitous public executions of Black peoples, can no longer rely on the false ethos of morality that colorblind ideologies purported and instead justifies racism as acceptable because it does not apply to the majority of citizens.

Dunayevskaya also emphasizes the experiences of women, Black communities, and Black women, in particular. She wrote about the revolutionary "Reason and force" that these groups would develop, always capitalizing *Reason* to highlight the importance of listening to the theoretical insights that the oppressed developed out of their experiences. In particular, she argued, based on the long history of Black freedom struggles and their international reach, that it was the Black masses, and especially Black women, who would become the "vanguard of the revolution" (Dunayevskaya, 2003).

Drawing on these important insights of Women of Color, coupled with Raya Dunayevskaya's similar articulation, Marxist-humanists have begun to refer to an *intersectional Marxism* (Anderson, Durkin, & Brown, 2021) that treats all systems of oppression dialectically

and recognizes the importance of not reducing any one oppression to a function of the other. The understanding that structures of oppression uphold each other suggests that all must be challenged for any one form to be eradicated. However, Marxist-humanists also articulate that intellectuals are often too far removed from the experiences of the most oppressed and must therefore learn from the key theoretical insights of the people engaged in the concrete movements of today to develop next steps in revolutionary praxis (Monzó, 2021). The Black Lives Matter movement was particularly successful at garnering mass support within the US and internationally and provides credence to the arguments posed above. Not only was it organized by three Black Lesbian women who were able to garner support across multiple identities, but the movement also became more anti-capitalist as it progressed. Although initially focused primarily on challenging the police killings of Black and Brown people with impunity, the movement rather quickly developed a strong anti-capitalist identity and agenda, calling to defund the police, which is a central aspect of the racial capitalist patriarchal state. Learning from the concrete struggles of today, means trusting the insights of the oppressed. Given this, we believe that a focus on racism, and perhaps anti-Black and anti-Black women racism, while keeping sight of all other intersecting structures of oppression, can be an effective first step toward a world liberated from the many unfreedoms it produces. We believe that as Latina women we also bring insights regarding our experiences in the university that reflect our homegrown epistemologies and the values and meanings that we have developed through our own histories of oppression. Duoethnography gave us the context within which to share and dialogue about our specific experiences and encounters with faculty, administrators, and students, as a means of making sense of these experiences and developing counter narratives. But we also sought to move beyond analysis of why and how but to develop new, more humanizing, processes and ways of interacting in the university. For this, we turned to Paulo Freire's articulation of critical literacy as a means by which we challenge racism and create avenues for liberation through humanization.

Literacies of the Heart: A Space of Possibility

Above we have articulated, based on the work of Marx and Marxist-humanism, that the system of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy exists as overlapping structures of oppression that mediate our experiences and divide us into separate, opposing camps, limiting our potential to join forces to challenge the system. In particular, we have highlighted the dialectical relation between racism and capitalism as it has manifested in the university in ways that support a white supremacist capitalist class while funneling BIPOC communities into low-skilled labor through negative experiences in K-12 and limited access to higher education. We argue that the oppressed, especially Women of Color, may have the "Reason and force" that is needed to develop the antiracism that is necessary to challenging all systems of oppression. Freire's theory of critical literacy can be especially fruitful in our teaching and in our work with colleagues at the university to develop the critical consciousness necessary to engage such antiracist praxis.

Paulo Freire, rooted in Marx as well as in liberation theology and other influences, developed a philosophy of liberation that involves praxis, a process of "… reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (1970, p. 33). A key concept in this process is critical literacy, defined as "reading the word and reading the world," (Freire and Macedo, 1987). Freire points out that reading is a meaning making process that allows us to make sense of and name our world and that it develops in the context of culture and community. In order to read the word we must first have a cultural context for it. It is this cultural context that gives us the possibility to also

write the world. This space of possibility for understanding the complexity of a world that is as much a part of us as we are of it demands a humanizing context where the Oppressed can recognize themselves as truly human – with a language and discourses that speak to their own experiences and desires. Freire points out that critical literacy cannot be developed through the colonizers language; rather it must develop via "true dialogue," which refers not just to communication, but to a process of "epistemological encounters" wherein we can learn from the diverse knowledges and ways of being of the Oppressed (Freire, 2000).

Critical literacy involves a perspective on the world that recognizes the dialectical tension between the objective world and the subjective individual. From this perspective we come to understand the world as a series of social relations and phenomena as structurally embedded to maintain systems of oppression. Yet the dialectic reminds us that we are not merely plopped into an existing world, but that we are in and of this world, shaping it with every step we take – even when our choice is to do nothing. This perspective impels us to reflect on our own positionalities as Oppressed and/or oppressor. Critical literacy allows for and develops through *conscientizacao*, or critical consciousness, which embodies more than an understanding of oppression but a commitment to changing conditions.

An important articulation of critical literacy is its negation of charity, the view that the Oppressed need to be 'helped' (acted upon). Freire (2000) argued for clarity, understanding, and envisioning our potential as agents in and of the world, whereas charity renders us dependent and incapable – it is a 'false generosity'. Clarity is empowering and instills hope, rendering all human beings as inherently capable. Critical literacy is also sociocultural and historical, allowing us to recognize ourselves as social beings and agentic makers of history, sometimes constrained but also capable of reflection and change. Critical literacy empowers us to engage with the world differently, to dream of freedom and to change the world dialectically, without and within. It develops our empathy, our hope, our courage, and our faith in humanity and in ourselves. Critical literacy is a *literacy of the heart*.

The development of critical literacy, thus, demands spaces wherein we can come to recognize and value the cultural contexts in which we first encountered words and worlds that gave them meaning, belonging, and identities and from which they constructed their knowledges and epistemologies. Given a society that normalizes ideologies and practices that sustain a racial-colonial capitalist patriarchy, such spaces demand opportunities to learn to think dialectically, to see the world from the perspecitves of the Oppressed, to interrogate our commonsense, and to unlearn the values and practices that perpetuate violence and alienation. These must be spaces where we engage with the Oppressed to learn to value the insights, values and practices that come from their experiences of oppression but also from their families, their cultures, and their joys, and that may, with a renewed trust in themselves as creative human beings, result in the "revolutionary Reason and force" that may lead us to freedom. All of this requires opportunities for dialogue to truly see the Other and opportunities for praxis – the reflection and action that lead to the transformation of both ourselves and our social conditions.

That opportunities exist for developing critical literacy among the U.S. citizenry is evidenced in the mass protests that erupted in response to the brutal murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others at the hands of white police officers. The BLM uprisings of 2020 make clear that under particular social conditions, people can and do recognize injustice and mobilize collectively in solidarity with the Oppressed. That spring and

summer brought together a number of events that made it impossible to deny systemic racism and in particular anti-Black racism and which catapulted the people to action.

Taylor (2016) points out that the Black community had become especially disenchanted with Barrack Obama, who as the first Black U.S. president, had failed to deliver on Black people's hopes for greater justice and improved social conditions. Instead, the President's remarks often gave support to the dominant narrative that the U.S. offers up opportunities to those who strive, thereby pathologizing economically impoverished communities. Taylor points out that this disenchantment resulted in low political participation among Black women, resulting in the Trump presidency of 2016. However, this state of inertia was quickly transformed into an active Subject position wherein the Black community erupted to demand justice for their sons and daughters. In 2020, BLM had been reignited for the third time and had been developing as an organization for eight years. They had learned important lessons along the way and built networks of support with other grassroots organizations working toward similar goals, some of which had roots in the Civil Rights Movement. BLM erupted quickly and became a national and international household name, drawing on communities across racial boundaries and multiple intersecting identities.

Panayota Gounari (2014) offers an important discussion, following the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement, of how a citizenry moves from a state of what Carl Boggs (2000) terms "antipolitics," wherein people develop a deep sense of powerlessness and retreat from politics, to position themselves as Subjects, engaging their agency for the public good. Gounari argues that a key aspect of this shift has to do with people seeing the interconnection between themselves and broader social ills or as Gouanri put it, connecting "their private lives with public issues (part 2, para. 2)." Gounari points out that political engagement occurs when people see themselves as part of the political process and its construction as it develops. According to Gounari, "Politics constitutes a unique public sphere, a type of *agora* in which people come together, interact, make decisions, forge citizen bonds, carry out the imperatives of social change, and ultimately search for the good society … (part 1, para. 3)."

As we watched the murder of George Floyd and his family's anguish unfold over and over again across media platforms, through what can only be described as trauma porn, those of us who have some race and/or class privilege were asking why is this happening? Why is no one stopping this? And some began to ask what can *I* do to stop this from happening again? Critical literacy begins with questions that are spurred on by the indignation to social conditions that are recognized as dehumanizing but also that connect us personally to what is happening. The videos documented people standing by and failing to act in response to the injustice. Such images spur us to question how we might act under similar circumstances and how we may be complicit in these social conditions.

Around the same time, reports were coming out that BIPOC communities were significantly over-represented in COVID-19 related deaths, illness, and economic impact. In addition, work stoppages and required isolation meant that many people had time to reflect and mobilize. Such conditions, along with access to internet, video footage, and social media made Black Lives Matter an international household name.

Numerous zoom-based book clubs, discussion groups, interviews and conferences were organized to answer the questions posed above. Many people were publicly interrogating the systemic nature of racism - the history of the police department as slave patrols in early America, the immunity of the police force and its union, corporate interests and the profits they reap from

the racist prison industrial complex, the white supremacy that shapes deficit theories and false narratives of inequality, the racist foundations of capitalism. As Gounari (2014) notes,

> … the work of an engaged human being, an active citizen, [is] to whirl around issues exhaustively in discursive and material ways until the walls of our solid, monolithic, palpable worlds start to crack, to fracture. (part 2, para. 3)

Such discussions are key to the development of critical literacy, which asks us to question the structural dimensions of particular phenomena and to reflect on our own complicity in maintaining structures of oppression. As such, critical literacy allows us to re-read our passive observation of the world into a complacent actor that maintains the status quo and to rewrite ourselves as active change agents. The involvement of millions of people globally in protests against police brutality reveals the complex process of developing critical literacy and its potential to move us to transform ourselves and our world. There is no blueprint and this is part of the process of developing critical literacy. Yet in a world where we are taught to be afraid of ambiguity and that we need immediate answers, the development of critical literacy can make us especially vulnerable, which may be why it is seemingly stumped at every turn.

Therefore, critical literacy must be nurtured with hope and faith. As Giroux points out critical literacy is not in itself a transformative praxis. Critical literacy allows us to read the world in a way that develops our critical consciousness and moves us to act against injustice. It requires a "counter-education" that allows us to think in the sense that Gounaris writes above. It must encourage risk and allow for some successes to instill faith. Without these elements, our critical literacy develops into a sense of fatalism that is immobilizing. However, for hope and faith to be sustained we need to see movement in the direction of liberation.

Unfortunately, the ruling class has mechanisms by which it can obfuscate reality in order to maintain its power. The BLM uprisings produced a fascist political backlash launched against Critical Race Theory, claiming that race scholars and teachers were indoctrinating our youth to anti-white racism. In addition, the pandemic shutdown was lifted with encouragement to "return to normal," shifting people's attention back to a daily grind that leaves little room for reflection and action. Four years after this national and international outcry, fatalism has set in and the centuries-long practice of killing Black and Brown has once again been relegated to an everyday event. Yet that society felt empowered to stand with Black lives in mass in 2020 tells us that people can be propelled to act. The task at hand is to gain a greater understanding of how the system works to counteract our humanity and indignation at injustice and how we might create conditions that allow for our human capacity for compassion, love, and hope to flourish and where we can develop the critical consciousness necessary to transform ourselves and our existing social relations.

Friere decreed education a pivotal space for this transformation. Although, as discussed above, the university has historically served to develop and reproduce the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, it is important to note that this does not make it necessarily so. It is human beings who have developed these structures of oppression and, therefore, we have the capacity to collectively transform them. An intersectional Marxist-humanism helps us recognize that movements grow from the ground up and racism, at least in the U.S., seems to be the oppression that catapults people to action. As such it is potentially the most salient starting point for transformation. In addition, Marxist-humanism helps us recognize that these overlapping structures of oppression may produce "a revolutionary Reason and force," key insights and impetus, among the Oppressed. As we saw during the BLM uprisings when Black people began to

be heard by the broader society, the knowledges and epistemologies of Communities of Color may be harnessed to develop a more humanizing, more just, and more equitable society. Such is the potential of critical literacy, whether it be utilized in the classroom with students or among the faculty and staff, we can create spaces that encourage dialogue so that the voices of the Oppressed can be heard and we can develop policies and practices that take into account every person's humanity and right to dignity and celebrate and learn from their diverse ways of being.

It is with knowledge of this productive role of schooling and its potential for transformation that we engaged in duoethnography to not only examine our experiences as Latina women, but to think creatively from our own epistemological positionings of how we might move in strategic ways to challenge the intersectional white supremacy inherent in university systems. What we found, of course, were highly complex processes at play, which is why racism and other oppressions remain entrenched. However, our many conversations regarding our experiences did reveal our diverse ways of knowing as Latina women and certain opportunites for transformation within the university.

Duoethnography

We are two Women of Color scholars who have dealt with racism and its gender and class intersections throughout our lives, including as students and faculty in higher education. We met in the fall of 2019, when Elena began her doctoral studies and Lilia served as her advisor. We came together for advising and mentoring, classes, research, and in preparing for Elena's dissertation. Our identities as Women of Color soon had us sharing our many past and current experiences of racism and sexism in the academy.

Lilia: I am a mid-career, tenured associate professor of education. My scholarship, teaching, and community work focuses on challenging systems of oppression and I have generally engaged in research *with* Latinx communities and Women of Color. As an immigrant, I grew up within a world that I felt belonged to someone else. Fear and humiliations associated with poverty, racism and sexism defined much of my life. To be "successful," I have had to don a white mask to hide my "otherness." However, as a Marxist-humanist I have come to recognize that the normalized structures of universities supports the dehumanizing relations of domination that are necessary to maintain this racist-colonial capitalist patriarchal system. Although I believe that people's "horror stories" need not be revealed in order to be treated as human, I do recognize that these stories may inform other Women of Color who are trying to understand their place in white institutions and/or that these stories may become the sources of discussion from which ideas to move toward a better future may emerge.

Elena: I am a Latinx and White emerging scholar and doctoral student and have recently begun teaching as an adjunct in various colleges. I am also someone who spent years as a high school English teacher in public schools. Growing up working class with a Latino father and white mother, I was socialized through my mother's successes in educational institutions, which were founded to uphold white supremacy (to be as white as possible was to be a good student). Questions around race were not permitted in the classroom and my white privilege of being able to act white allowed me to rise to the top of the class. As a teacher, I was faced with students who had been taught that their only worth was tied up in their ability to perform in similarly racialized normed practices – sit still, complete classwork, perform well on standardized tests. From my experiences in the classroom, I came to see that the problems within public education required answers outside

of the narrow and quantifiable data being gathered, outside of the binary questions of effective versus ineffective. As I began to research questions of equity and justice in public education, as a doctoral student, I began to understand the need to create intentional research practices that seek to amplify voices, humanity, and solutions without falling prey to the cycle of production that can easily commodify research subjects and fail to create space for answers outside of the expected norms.

Methodological Articulations

We drew on duoethnography (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012), which brings two or more participants together, to share their experiences, ways of knowing, and perspectives regarding a shared phenomenon. Duoethnography is a critical inquiry methodology that recognizes the significance of lived realities in the process of knowing and the impact of sociohistorical, political, and economic conditions. It juxtaposes the histories, social positionings, and particular perspectives of participants to enhance understanding. Although we have many similarities of experiences as Women of Color both attending and working in predominantly white institutions, we also have important differences that allow us to examine the world differently and to develop different strategies for sense-making and for action. A critical aspect of this approach is that it demands that we interrogate our own assumptions and that we listen and consider thoughtfully the social positioning of other participants and the ways that these provide different vantage points, interpretations, and ways of engaging. From our perspective, a crucial and necessary aspect of any critical methodology, but especially for a duoethnography among Women of Color, is that it demands the development of relationships, solidarity, and decolonizing methodologies (Monzó & SooHoo, 2014; Smith, 2012). As such, relationships are built on a commitment to each other and on the realization that we are in this together.

Research as a Living Process

We were well aware that the formal assignments through which we came together are clearly embedded with particular power relations and that these influenced this duoethnography, how we engaged with each other, what aspects of our histories we shared, the openness with which we disagreed or provided different perspectives. We actively sought to listen with our hearts, to create space for other-doing and other-knowing, and to be mindful of our different positionalities.

Throughout the four years that we worked together we shared our stories of upbringing, family, education, marriage, childhood and childrearing, gender dynamics and racial aggressions. In many ways this duoethnography is part and parcel of living as two Women of Color in academia, whose histories of oppression cannot be divorced from any of our everyday experiences and interactions. However, the bulk of the stories and ideas that inform this paper come from dialogues held between Fall 2020 and Spring 2022. A large portion of this time was during the COVID-19 pandemic; thus, we met approximately every two weeks via ZOOM to share and discuss about ourselves, our histories, our values and beliefs. Our "research" was a process of *living in relationship*, wherein we came to know and respect each other, to trust our collective wisdom, to offer en(courage)ment, and to prioritize our and each other's well-being. Although the stories presented here initially surfaced between Fall 2020 and Spring 2022, there was no clear stopping place for this research; As relationship-based critical research, "it merely pauses and moves in an iterative fashion, recycling and moving forward to new spaces and new challenges." (Monzó &

SooHoo, 2014, 156). Thus, many of these stories have since been collectively rethought and rewritten to reflect new experiences and fresh insights. They will no doubt continue to evolve as we ourselves move through the world, growing and learning as we go.

Sharing Stories

The stories below evidence racisms (and its intersections) that are structurally embedded in schooling and the difficulties we have faced in challenging them. The stories are real but, certainly, told from our perspectives. Our goal is to shed light and support a deeper and more complex discussion around racism and antiracist pedagogy.

The Struggle for Agency

During the BLM uprisings, students of color seemed to develop greater agency to speak up against racism. A group of students expressed to Lilia that they felt "unsafe in one of their classes" and that the white female professor's "outbursts" seemed particularly pronounced when directed at BIPOC students. The incidents students described included the professor raising their voice, silencing, invalidating student comments, denying religious accommodations, repeatedly mispronouncing diverse names and evaluating some students more harshly. It was difficult to identify these as racially motivated incidents because they were not aimed *solely* at BIPOC students nor were *all* interactions between the faculty and BIPOC students negative.

Initially we ignored the racial dimension, choosing to perceive the problem as faculty stress. Lilia tried to empathize with the professor, pointing out the dehumanizing stressors that faculty endure. Time and again, Lilia suggested they speak to the professor and also offered to speak to the professor on their behalf. However, students were adamant that she not do so, indicating fear of retaliation via grades or other humiliations.

As the semester progressed and the problem persisted one student of color hesitantly expressed, "I don't want to say this but I do think race has something to do with it." We understand that in our society race-relations impacts all interactions. Yet we name racism only after numerous repeated offenses, recognizing this offense as the horror that it is, and also fearing the common accusation of "playing the race card" - itself a racist form of silencing (Hirsch, 2020). A white ally in the class was less hesitant to point it out stating, "Just because a person doesn't treat all People of Color poorly or treats some white students poorly as well, doesn't mean that they do not hold a prejudicial ideology that does not allow them to see the value in diverse ways of thinking." As we discussed the antagonistic way in which questions and comments posed by BIPOC students were often met, we discussed the feelings of affront that faculty may feel when questioned by students, and how this may be exacerbated by race dynamics. Indeed, in a study of Black undergraduate women's experiences, participants articulated that white professors often dismissed their ideas or contributions to class discussions even on matters related to Black culture and history (Branch, 2021).

The entrenchment of white supremacy and western knowledge systems deeply impacts what is learned and valued. Lack of awareness of diverse cultural and religious practices is not uncommon and reflects a, perhaps unconscious, value for western curricula. In an attempt to make instructional minutes "count" and to be legitimized as the "expert," the professor attempts to focus students' attention to what they perceive as important and minimizes or cuts off (silences) those ideas that are not part of their own repertoire. The uncommon experience of a white professor

having their ideas questioned by BIPOC students can be perceived as a challenge to their authority. To a degree, we understand that white supremacy culture sets up white female professors (also oppressed by gender) to desire authority and protect their image as "experts."

Discussing what to do next, we questioned the punitive nature of reporting processes, which individualizes societal problems and does not lead to growth. Yet to dismiss these incidents would continue to perpetuate racism in the academy. We also recognized that individuals have agency and all of us, but especially white people, have the responsibility to seek out greater knowledge about racism and engage in self-reflection and transformation.

Eventually, a few students sought administrative support. The response was "sympathetic," but the "we will talk to them" had little impact on changing behavior. Microaggressions are often invisible (Sue, et al., 2007). It takes much more than a "talking-to" to change behaviors that are deeply rooted in dominant ideologies. Yet there was seemingly no alternative but the punitive reporting. When confronted with a students' charge of institutional racism, one administrator responded, "there's nothing we can do about that." Although the problem of institutional racism is certainly greater than mere reform, this fatalistic response lacks responsibility and closes the conversation.

We all wanted a process wherein faculty members would be supported in recognizing their own racial biases and aggressions (Sue, et al., 2007) but also have immediate change in the classroom to support student safety. Lilia began suffering from stress-induced insomnia, reliving her own racialized experiences. The emotional labor and energy that is extolled from faculty of color and students of color in dealing with racism may negatively impact their success.

We see the invisible hand of racialized capitalist relations impacting institutional processes. As Marx (1867/1977) noted, capitalism deforms our humanity. The capitalist focus on the individual negates our interdependence as social beings, and instead defines freedom as the "individual right" (person or corporation) to pursue one's interests. The university's major concern seems to be the right to eliminate potential lawsuits and to remain competitive within the so-called "free market." Punitive processes that blame individuals redirect our focus from structural inequalities and are efficient and cost-effective. However, as Freire (2000) points out, blaming individuals is a "naive consciousness." Dismantling punitive processes requires an entirely new orientation to what it means to be human and to our understanding of "truth" wherein co-construction, social responsibility and sharing resources become the new norm.

Hiring, Tenure, and Promotion

Although reforms may not directly challenge the racist, capitalist foundations of universities, increasing BIPOC representation among faculty can be an important step to developing non-western systems and valuing diversity. However, the hegemony of the ruling class functions through an ideological apparatus that encompasses a totality of our lives, making it difficult for us to perceive how particular processes are socially constructed, rather than inherently "normal" or superior (Gramsci, 1970). The normalization of western notions of excellence as objective truth makes it very difficult to recognize diversity and aim for equity.

There are numerous obstacles to developing antiracist processes in hiring and promotion. Traditional standards of quality do not reflect the excellence that defines BIPOC faculty, such as a commitment to research and teaching that enhances the life and educational opportunities of

oppressed communities, decolonizing approaches that require relationships, emotional labor and studying *with* communities. This often involves time-intensive qualitative research that may produce less, but often richer, outputs.

Many times initial criteria for faculty searches fail to capture the diverse academic trajectories and goals of BIPOC faculty. In one example, search criteria for a science teacher education position in an education department required a bachelor or masters in a physical science, thereby excluding candidates who had a PhD in science education but had become interested in the field through work or other life experience. Given the lack of representation of BIPOC teachers in STEM fields, BIPOC communities may not follow a traditional pipeline.

Another focus in this faculty search was the number of publications without consideration to type of research or its contributions to the participants and community. Given that this search was for the rank of assistant professor, an important factor differentiating BIPOC candidates may have been the resources available to them. Most BIPOC doctoral students are first-generation students who work full time and have other family obligations. Part of their epistemological diversity is the priority they may give to family and community. They also tend to offer up much time and energy to teaching, mentoring and emotional labor. Although these foci may have greater humanizing and revolutionary potential, they were generally perceived as deficits.

According to Marx (1867/1977), capitalism is a system of value production that functions through capital accumulation. Use value that does not necessarily produce capital is often dismissed in our society and the indirect ways in which use value contribute to capital are often unrecognized. While most faculty attempt to be "fair," the processes we develop, even with good intentions, continue to reproduce inequalities. Although there is lip service to evaluating scholarship based on quality rather than quantity, this is easier said than done. Search committees only examine a few papers (there is not enough time for more) and evaluation committees for promotion may not be sufficiently knowledgeable in the particular areas to determine quality. The default is to look at the number of publications and to expect quality to be determined by "quality indicators." However, this is a far from perfect system. Blind reviews are not actually objective since editors have perspectives that may influence who they select as reviewers who, in turn, also have their own perspectives. Furthermore, journals have ways of elevating their impact factors, which in turn brings in more submissions and raises rejection rates. This circular system of reproduction may be especially difficult to penetrate for BIPOC faculty who may engage in decolonizing research built on relationships that are time and energy demanding.

Another factor in faculty and promotion is teaching excellence. Here again, quality is highly determined through quantified measures that negatively impact BIPOC faculty. It has been shown that women and People of Color often receive lower student evaluations (Ford, 2011). The implicit bias that white men hold greater expertise is reflected in student discomfort with and challenges to faculty who are not white men. There is increasing documentation of the racial hostility being experienced among Women of Color faculty, especially when they teach courses that address racism or other controversial topics. Yet, student evaluation scores remain the major source of teaching evaluations. Reviewers who are made aware of this problem look for observable evidence of racism in student comments; yet this is often a tacit phenomenon.

For example, when Lilia has suggested to students to seek support from Professor White (pseudonym), they respond with sympathy, stating "he so busy with all his writing." This assumption was at odds with the reality that Lilia, as most BIPOC women, serves on many more

service committees, teaches a larger course load, supervises more students, and maintains an active scholarship agenda. The assumption that white men are "so busy with their writing" is consistent with the white supremacist notion that white men do more 'intellectual labor" and/or are more sought out for their intellectual prowess and that our primary job as Women of Color is advising and/or that we have less demands on our time.

Lack of experience with racial trauma can negatively impact reviews. For example, during a promotion committee meeting, a white male noted that the faculty member under review had not addressed pedagogical issues that came up regularly in student evaluations. They remarked that they, themselves, always carefully reviewed their student evaluations, implying that the BIPOC faculty under reviewer was not taking student evaluations seriously. Other white committee members nodded in agreement. What these committee members did not understand is that many BIPOC faculty have a history of racial trauma that is relived each time we have to read student evaluations, making it a dreaded experience.

Opportunity as Capital

In the same vein as capital, the more opportunities someone has, the more opportunities are presented to them. We have noted that dominant group students, faculty and staff jump at every perceived opportunity without thought to others in the room who may also need opportunities, whether for advancement, leadership, experience, or learning. It is perceived a virtue to take advantage of every opportunity that comes our way. Yet, like everything else in an inequitable society, not everyone has the same access to opportunities.

Undoubtedly, U.S. BIPOC communities have also been socialized to take advantage of opportunities, but we notice that People of Color tend to have a greater wait time in volunteering or accepting opportunities, looking around when these are presented to assess who else is interested and considering the time commitments involved. There is also a strong value for supporting each other among BIPOC communities. We perceive this to be a learned survival strategy of working-class communities of color who often need to rely on each other for both economic and other social supports. There is also the added factor of self-monitoring. Studies indicate that BIPOC women who do step up quickly may be perceived to be arrogant, pushy, or controlling (Branch, 2021).

Knowing the importance of opportunities, identifying them and competing for them are aspects of individualism – a form of cultural capital embedded in whiteness and capitalist social relations, what some are calling white-supremacy culture (Okun, 2022). Cultural capital refers to explicit and implicit knowledge and skills that lead to success and social mobility in a given society (Bourdieu, 1977). There is no denying that schools reproduce and reward white-supremacy culture.

The inherent inequities of a racialized and gendered capitalism becomes manifest through the limited availability of opportunities that alienates us from each other as human beings. Moving through the world as individuals, we forget that we are actually interdependent, with the social responsibility to support everyone's access to opportunities. With an individualistic perspective, we may not perceive that another person's development may benefit each of us.

We notice that many of the white women in our advanced degree programs do not have to seek out opportunities. They land on their laps because of the many opportunities they have already had – opportunities to go to good schools, to be seen and heard, to develop confidence, to become good writers, to see their lives reflected in spaces of power, to be invited to write with faculty, and

more. Others have limited opportunities that have nothing to do with their capacity. They are equally brilliant and perhaps bring insights that have not ever been heard or considered.

One second-generation Taiwanese woman, Joey, began her doctoral studies as a part time student while continuing to work as a full-time public-school teacher. During the program she bore two children and had caring responsibilities for them and for a parent. Joey also had community responsibilities that extended to the other side of the globe. Her dissertation work was fueled by personal trauma and the need to negotiate multiple identities.

Joey entered the academy hesitantly, articulating a thoughtful resistance to becoming the "colonized colonizer" (Villenas, 1996). Instead, she made her doctoral pursuit a community investment as she shared her struggles and triumphs with her high school students and challenged dominant structures through poetry and spoken word. Later, Joey prioritized her young children and her dissertation work, taking a year off from teaching to engage thoughtfully with alternative schools that had been developed around Indigenous epistemologies and community growth and she took the time to build respectful relationships that would honor their place and voice in the world. With this ethical commitment, Joey tread softly, feeling her way and extending her hand to be guided by the wisdom of her elders.

From a dominant perspective, Joey could be viewed as less "scholarly." Yet, her work provided insights, such as the decolonizing need for "invitation," that would not have been learned without her diverse engagement and the priority she gave to relationships (Liu, 2022). The dominant narrative that "time is money" and "wait time is wasted time" are deeply ingrained in western society.

A second example reveals that we often fail to tailor our programs to meet the needs of BIPOC students. A Black working-class woman, Maria, was asked how her dissertation had affected her personally. This brilliant student choked back tears as she revealed that every other day she wanted to quit. Lilia recalled that during the admission process for the program, one white faculty reviewer expressed concern that Maria had not responded readily when asked which books she had read lately. This was a shaming question since reading is not necessarily a leisure activity among working class communities. It positions white-middle-class practices as the standard and fails to draw upon the wealth of experiences that students of color bring.

Maria further described a sense of alienation in her program. This is true for many students of color but was magnified for Maria in an institution that had very few Black faculty and no other Black students in her cohort. Maria had difficulty finding a chair for her dissertation because her interactions differed from the more common willingness to jump at every opportunity, which was incorrectly interpreted as disengagement.

Clearly, we need to do better at understanding BIPOC student identities, needs and interests and to create the conditions that validate their diversity and help them thrive. To practice a colorblind pedagogy is racist. As Women of Color faculty, we continue to ask how we can do better by the students of color and women of color, in particular. Answers are not easily forthcoming, but we know that we need to hear their voices in these matters.

Toward an Antiracist Pedagogy

Antiracist pedagogy recognizes that we must pro-actively counter the normalized racism embedded in our institutions. It is not sufficient to be inclusive moving forward, we need to be

explicitly and intentionally antiracist (Kendi, 2019). The stories above reveal that racism remains deeply entrenched in the university. Our university "commonsense" (Gramsci, 1971) includes standards of knowledge, excellence and opportunities structures that sustain a false narrative of meritocracy that justifies the white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. Therefore, we need to begin changing structures altogether. What would it look like to begin to privilege non-western epistemologies in our classrooms, in our hiring and promotion practices and in opportunities we provide? How can "excellence" be redefined from non-western perspectives?

We have begun to develop this antiracist pedagogy, finding ways to challenge notions of "truth" and standards of excellence in teaching and in our work with colleagues. To our students we offer opportunities for revisions, have them grade themselves, and involve them in course design and curriculum. Yet the playing field is vastly unequal. Students who struggle most are often those whose earlier education failed to prepare them well. Opportunities to revise are more difficult for those who have to work or have caring labor or other responsibilities. When students support course design and curriculum, their suggestions are often very traditional. Thinking outside the western commonsense requires BIPOC students to reflect deeply and draw upon their home-grown epistemologies to access their "good sense" (Gramsci, 1971). This is a difficult endeavor made that much more difficult by the lack of time, models, and support systems that BIPOC students have in colleges and universities. Among faculty we push against traditional policies, offering a perspective from the vantage points of Women of Color. Yet, here too we struggle to be heard, as we find ourselves inevitably in the minority. Even when we are heard, traditional notions of excellence and meritocracy are so entrenched that we are not understood.

John Holloway (2010) calls for "other doing" or creating cracks in the system through practices that oppose our learned commonsense. This is a strategic project of transgressive behaviors that are antiracist, antisexist, antiheteronormative, antiablist, anticapitalist, antigendernormative – in short, anti-establishment. While all systems of oppression must be challenged, an intentional antiracist pedagogy is also anti-oppressive more generally. Since capitalism is fundamentally racist and sexist and founded on a system of human hierarchies, we have to concede that antiracist pedagogy is also, ultimately, anti-capitalist. Transforming social relations will require much more, but we can begin by challenging oppressive conditions in our classes. As Holloway points out (2010) small cracks to the system, will eventually lead to larger cracks, which will eventually allow us to topple the system of racial-colonial capitalism.

Antiracist pedagogy is Other-doing that requires the insights and epistemologies of critically conscious BIPOC communities, since they are the one most impacted by the horrors of racism and thereby have the impetus necessary to do things differently. Critical literacy is necessary for BIPOC communities to understand the structural nature of their oppression and it is necessary for the development of allies, who will support antiracist pedagogy. Gaining clarity regarding racism and how it functions to supports the existing system is necessary for people to begin to hear BIPOC voices and to recognize and challenge their own invisible privilege.

A critical literacy of the heart is where we can start – gaining clarity about our positionality, valuing the oppressed, and opening space to hear and follow their good sense, their antiracist sense; in short, treating each other as human beings. The university is a key context where we can begin to ask the most important questions of our society and of ourselves – questions of justice, of human rights, and of social responsibility – and to develop a praxis of love. This is a long-term project – a project for the ages – as the most important aspect of this project is improving the social conditions of the oppressed and to honor their voices and the keen insights and vision that they

may bring about humanity, justice, and love. It is a long-term project, but one that has already begun. Let us in the academy advance the fight.

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Authors

Lilia D. Monzó (she/her) is Professor of Education in the Donna Ford Attallah College of Educational Studies at Chapman University and Co-director of the Paulo Freire Democratic Project. Monzó is the author of *A Revolutionary Subject: Pedagogy of Women of Color and Indigeneity.* Her work engages a Marxist-humanist, revolutionary critical pedagogy to develop a praxis against all forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, class relations and their many intersections with the goal of developing a more human society. Monzó has published significantly in academic journals and public pedagogy. She teaches courses on critical pedagogy, curriculum theory, and social movements.

Elena Marquez (she/her) is currently a doctoral candidate in the Donna Ford Attallah College of Educational Studies at Chapman University, researching cultural and curricular studies with an emphasis on critical literacy and its implications on activism. She has spent nearly a decade as an educator, working in public and charter school settings as a secondary English teacher, program director, instructional coach, and curriculum designer. As a current teacher educator and researcher, her commitment is to cultivate liberatory spaces of reflection and expression through embodied humanization and a critical pedagogy of love.

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