Wrestling the Elephant: Teaching as a Racialized Body in the Social Work Classroom

Carolyn Mak
Mandeep Kaur Mucina
Renée Nichole Ferguson

Abstract: *White supremacist ideology is the elephant in the social work classroom, negatively impacting educators' abilities to facilitate discussion and learning. One of the most effective ways to dismantle and organize against white supremacy is to politicize the seemingly benign moments that occur in the classroom that can create discomfort for students and instructors. Politicization includes identifying and addressing both the racial (micro-) aggressions that occur in the classroom and the processes and institutional policies that create complacency and lull us to sleep. In this conceptual piece, we use a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework to understand how white supremacy perpetuates itself in the classroom, with a particular focus on whiteness as property. As well, we explore what it means to decolonize the classroom. Using a vignette based on our teaching experiences, we use these two frameworks to analyze classroom dynamics and interactions, and discuss how implications for social work education include waking from the metaphorical sleep to recognize the pernicious effects of whiteness and white supremacy. Included are practical individual teaching, relational, and systemic suggestions to enact change.*

Keywords*: Dismantling white supremacy, social work classroom, critical race theory, decolonization, racialized identities*

As social work educators, we focus on theory and practice, while weaving in stories from the field whether they are personal or emerge from the plethora of examples found in the news, podcasts, public radio, or from social media. How students take up and digest these stories is completely out of the control of the educator; however, the hope is that students emerge with a deeper understanding of the world we live in and how it shapes, constructs and impacts the people with whom we work. What happens when white supremacy, the large, stubborn, and ubiquitous elephant, makes itself visible in the social work classroom? What does the battle to wrestle the elephant look like for a racialized social work instructor? We use the term "racialized" or "racialization" to refer to the active process of being seen as a body belonging to a particular race, as a result being subjected to unequal treatment because of the color of one's skin. As Dalal (2002) effectively articulates, "racialization is the process of manufacturing and utilizing the notion of race in any capacity" (p. 27). While all people are racialized, white people are often seen to be exempt from being racialized, maintaining whiteness as the norm that all other races are compared to, giving whiteness a tremendous amount of power, socially and politically. For the aforementioned reasons, we have followed Laws (2020) and Miller (2020), and elected not to capitalize "white."

Carolyn Mak, PhD, MSW, RSW, Adjunct Assistant Professor, School for Social Work, Smith College, Northampton, MA. Mandeep Kaur Mucina, MSW, PhD, Assistant Professor, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia. Renée Nichole Ferguson, MSW, PMP, PhD Candidate, Policy Studies, Ryerson University Toronto, Ontario.

White supremacy is not a new concept, but it has only now become more commonplace in mainstream conversations, compared to early contexts which bell hooks names "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 2006). What hooks offered was a shift in conversation, where white supremacy was not simply a far-right ideology that was reserved for Klan and Nazi activity, but part of unnamed culturally normative practices and relationships that racialize and negatively impact Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC); while for white people, white supremacy is upheld in individual attitudes and structural inequalities.

Postsecondary social work classrooms are not immune to white supremacist thinking or indoctrination; as in society, white supremacy needs to be dismantled in the academy (Henry et al., 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). Fraught moments of discomfort and their ensuing dynamics are reflective of and are a result of white supremacy. As we will demonstrate in this paper, critical moments in the classroom serve as examples of how social work postsecondary classrooms are not designed to reflect or support the diversity of the learners and instructors who inhabit them. As educators who work in postsecondary social work programs that focus on social and racial justice and action, we know that even with increasing diversity of social identities and locations in classrooms, white supremacy continues to present itself. In other words, "increasing diversity" does not preclude white supremacy; activity and action are needed to uproot it.

One of the most effective ways to dismantle and organize against white supremacy is to politicize the seemingly benign moments that occur in the classroom that can create discomfort for students and even instructors. Alternately, it is incumbent on social work educators to also politicize challenging dynamics by making white supremacist and racist undertones more visible in the classroom. By "politicize," we intend to identify and address both the racial (micro-) aggressions that occur in the classroom as well as the processes and policies that create complacency and lull us to sleep. We recognise this sleep as dangerous because it offers a false sense of security within the current racially unsafe landscape; it requires complicity in our own oppression as well as the oppression of others. Without the critical tools to politicize both micro-level and macro-level interactions (e.g., individual conversations and policies, respectively), we might easily believe in a "racialized innocence" or a false sense of safety and security. Through the politicization of the benign, we are shaken awake and believe that these awakenings offer opportunities for resistance and action against the status quo, and are necessary for progress to be made. This paper aims to identify and document our processes of awakening.

We first examine the concept of white supremacy and its impact on postsecondary classrooms, including how racial microaggressions present themselves to do the work of white supremacy. By "classrooms" we take into consideration the people (students and instructors), the physical environment (classroom set up, materials displayed) and its construction (the building in which the classroom is housed, the land on which the institution operates). We recognize that well before more recent contemporary discussions of white supremacy have occurred, Black feminists and critical race scholars have been using this terminology. We use a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework to understand how white supremacist ideology and racism affect both students and faculty alike, and further examine what it means to "decolonize our curriculum and education" to help us

understand the politics of identity, power and privilege that are at play in the classroom. By examining our awakenings, the ways that whiteness behaves perniciously in institutions and how we want and work to de-center this perspective, we hope to add to strategies that educators can use to make more critical and informed decisions about their teaching practices. In particular, we will call attention to the "invisible contracts" that are constantly being negotiated by racialized instructors; namely, how occupying this space can be lonely, can engender self-doubt, and necessitates emotional labor often not shared by white colleagues.

Overall, we aim to empower educators to recognize and voice how white supremacy takes shape in their own institutions, to be able to organize in both individual and systemic ways to dismantle it. With an established framework of CRT and decolonization, in the latter part of this paper we analyze a vignette that illustrates how white supremacy creeps into the classroom. To model and practice self-reflexivity, we first briefly discuss how each of us comes to this work.

Self-Reflexivity and Coming to the Work

We are three women-identified, racialized educators who personally encounter the continual effects of white supremacy in the postsecondary classroom. For us, the body one inhabits can constrain choices in education; for Indigenous and racialized faculty, implicit bias and racism (both from students and that which is internalized) negatively impact our ability to teach, grow and advance. It is vital to position ourselves to the readers in order to contextualize what informs our teaching and why we persist in the dismantling of white supremacy.

Renée. Black Canadian feminist theorist Njoki Wane (2011) raises important ideas about the use of the spiritual self, collectivism and relationship for Black feminist theory. Using her own personal narrative, Wane argues that we cannot tell the stories of our lives without finding a context for these narratives. For Black feminists in particular, our context is rooted in a collective consciousness of gendered racialization; it is grown out of histories of colonialism, slavery, imperialism and neocolonialism. Emerging from this, we form cultures of resistance against what bell hooks (2006) calls an ethic of domination, and a commitment to global practices of freedom in recognition that our own liberation is irrevocably linked to the global community.

As a descendent of peoples who survived the Transatlantic Slave Trade, with nearly ten years of teaching experience in the university classroom on the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, my work is grounded in this particular milieu of Black feminist thought. My visceral experience and witnessing of racism buried within interactional and contextual rules of the classroom leaves me thinking about relationships of power and domination that I participate in and witness in the classroom. I draw on the work of my Black feminist foremothers to illuminate the complex and messy relationships of value incongruency and power that exist in the classroom between me, as the educator, the university and students.

Carolyn. Like Renée, I have also been in the postsecondary classroom as a part-time, adjunct/sessional faculty for approximately 10 years. Born in Canada to Chinese immigrant parents, I only "discovered" social work in my early twenties. I grew up and was educated in white spaces, thus becoming very skilled at performing whiteness, in hindsight, seeing it as a way of acceptance and a method to excel. Particularly resonant is Liu and colleagues' (2019) notion of being "racially innocuous," that one might "thrive" in white spaces or that "becoming racially innocuous may come with rewards such as proximity privilege" (p. 149). For many years, I strove to be more white and to fit into predominantly white educational and work spaces. It was through my professional employment experiences as a social worker early in my career working with Chinese immigrants and through further doctoral studies that I began to understand my own identity as a racialized person. The realization that I was not indeed white, and that I could come to embrace my racialized identity was trying, painful, and humbling, but ultimately a journey that was worth taking.

Concerns over race-based conflict and discomfort, and white performativity, still affect my teaching today; I often worry about offending white students when attempting to confront whiteness, and also simultaneously fear not doing my racialized students justice when not centering needed conversations on race, ethnicity, culture, power and privilege. Trying to meet the needs of all students, while recognizing the societal marginalization of some, while also trying to avoid being one of the marginalizing forces as a teacher with power in the classroom, continues to be a fine and tricky balancing act.

Mandeep. I am a second-generation Punjabi Sikh cisgender woman born on unceded land of Indigenous peoples, in a nation that we collectively call and know as Canada. As an uninvited perpetual visitor and second-generation immigrant, my physical occupation of this land comes at the expense of the Quw'utsun people, and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and *W̱SÁNEĆ* peoples who never ceded their territories to colonial Canada. I strive towards being a responsible visitor on these territories, while also being loud and vocal about the constructed injustices that continue subjugating and marginalizing historically targeted BIPOC communities. In everyday acts of resistance towards colonization, I resist the allure of calling this land home and work towards undoing colonialism and its impact on the diversity of communities that live on these lands. In the process of decolonizing my scholarship, teaching and service, I start by speaking out loud about the colonial roots and ongoing structures of colonialism in our discipline. I also critically reflect on how my research may be contributing to, or benefiting from, these colonial roots and work towards actively dismantling these patterns.

I often begin my classes by sharing powerful words of bell hooks, who describes how she came to theory as a place of healing and liberation. These words ring true for my own life journey, especially in formal educational settings. As a racialized woman, I have encountered and navigated painful experiences. In these moments I turn to books and theory as a way of understanding and critically thinking through my experiences. Education has been a liberation for me and through it, I gained freedom (hooks, 1994), yet to get to where I am today, I have endured racism, sexism, and multiple forms of rejection. I remind my students that the university has not always imagined particular bodies inhabiting these spaces and roles. In my teaching, I also spend time situating the kind of practice I have had the privilege of doing over 15 years in the human service field. As a practitioner and as an

educator, I have worked in multiple sectors including child and youth care, social work, adult education and community development. These disciplines show up in my teaching, particularly when I provide students with strategies to transgress the social systems they will be working in, in an effort to uphold social justice.

White Supremacy and the Postsecondary Classroom

Institutions are imagined with particular bodies, orientations, and ethics in mind, ones that center Western philosophical epistemologies and ontologies. In recognizing the foundation on which we stand when teaching, asking students to consider how social systems are constructed to stratify who has the privilege of teaching and learning in these spaces becomes essential. We recognize that "we are all implicated in systems of oppression that profoundly structure our understanding of one another" (Razack, 1998, p. 10). Every student, regardless of their social location, has come to the university with some level of privilege, and yet there remain those of us who are marked for marginalization because of our differences. As racialized instructors, our encounters with education are often painfully isolating. Working within these institutions as racialized instructors, we recognize that they are built on an already imagined idea of a professor and student, who were white cisgender able-bodied males with middle to upper class privilege. To embody anything beyond this means shifting a system with deep histories and norms.

Learning is often uncomfortable, yet we emerge transformed when we are able to think critically about knowledge, its production and our adoption of it, as well as the contradictions embedded in our socially constructed world. In these complex times, we resist the simplistic mandate to manage encounters between dominant and subordinate groups with cultural, racial, or gender sensitivity (Razack, 1998), which leads into the imperialist belief that if one possesses sensitivity to people's differences, we can overcome divisions by predicting future behavior. As Sherene Razack (1998) effectively argues, "without an understanding of how responses to subordinate groups are socially organized to sustain existing power arrangements, we cannot hope either to communicate across social hierarchies or to work to eliminate them" (p. 8). As instructors, we need to listen carefully, openly and deeply discuss power, privilege and oppression, encouraging this critical reflection in our students as well; consensus or harmony is not the ultimate goal, but rather meaningful discourse that deepens learning. These pedagogical directions center what bell hooks (1994) calls "education as the practice of freedom" (p. 4)—a standpoint that honors the sacred role we play in students' learning. We value the journey each student has walked into the classroom and into their work, and hold space to witness their stories as their instructor.

Discussing white supremacy in the academy is challenging and uncomfortable in part because it disrupts the notion that universities and postsecondary institutions are "post-racial" and are places where there is a free exchange of (sometimes controversial) ideas. Instead, what scholars are beginning to document and research are the ways in which institutions produce, protect and cater to "white comfort":

> …the constitution of who is made to be or expected to be uncomfortable and what kinds of difficult conversations are protected by [freedoms such as free speech]

> often reflects institutional practices designed to tend to white guilt and comfort. These projects of innocence making, reconciliation and absolution persist, while hatred and bigotry are left to make already marginalized groups (re) experience intergenerational forms of systemic 'discomfort' through race erasure, institutional silencing and invalidation, which often occurs specifically for the learning of dominant groups in the University. (Joseph et al., 2019, p. 169)

Dismantling pre-existing narratives and ideologies that exist in the classroom before we arrive creates classrooms that resist these dominant narratives. By de-centering whiteness we can create space for students who have not always been imagined in these spaces.

To begin the process of dismantling white supremacy, there needs to be an understanding of how to de-center whiteness. Even before the 2020 uprising in support of racial justice in the United States, sparked by the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police, and the renewal of interest and focus on anti-Black racism, scholars were calling out and recognizing the pernicious nature of whiteness. This includes the notion that white leaders and allies will need re-education to understand the impact of whiteness, power and privilege (as opposed to simply increasing tolerance, inclusivity or diversity) (Ash et al., 2020). Studies highlight the experiences of Black, Indigenous and other people of color in predominantly white spaces in the academy (e.g., Ash et al., 2020; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Joseph et al., 2020; Joseph-Salisbury, 2019; Louis et al., 2016; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). What these scholars have in common is a call to bring awareness to how whiteness dominates the postsecondary world. However, awareness is not enough. Awakening, should be followed by action, and for too long, the onus has been on BIPOC to accommodate and do the required labor.

One of the ways in which white supremacy manifests in the classroom is through racial microaggressions; this phenomenon has been increasingly studied in education, psychological and social work scholarship, and it impacts students and faculty alike (e.g., DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Louis et al., 2016; Nadal et al., 2014). Often, microaggressions take the form of something that seems innocent or unintended (e.g., such as playing "devil's advocate" in a discussion), but are actually ways that the speaker unconsciously or consciously communicates racist stereotypes. Since higher education encourages "diverse" ideas, this notion of devil's advocate appears pseudo-intellectual, when in fact, it (sometimes thinly) disguises bias.

Racial microaggressions "are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). The term "microaggression" is widely used but almost a misnomer since there is nothing "micro" about the cumulative effects of these acts. Studies have shown that beyond the negative psychological impact on BIPOC, microaggressions also significantly impact physical health (Nadal et al., 2017). In our collective experience, we know when microaggressions have occurred in the classroom because there is often a discomfort experienced by members of the class, with the ubiquitous elephant sitting beside

the instructor. It is in these moments when the elephant is most apparent; yet, no one is able or seems willing to name it.

Theoretical Perspective: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Since the 1980s and 1990s, CRT has provided a valid framework for understanding racial injustice. Scholars, activists and thinkers like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., W.E.B. DuBois, Malcom X, and Frantz Fanon have laid the foundation for thinking about race, critically. With these historical roots and voices, we see this concept growing as legal scholars and activists (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado, 1988; Harris, 1993; Harris, 1994; Matsuda, 1987; Williams, 1991) who wanted to understand why, nearly two decades later, key legislative promises of the American Civil Rights era remained unfulfilled. In one foundational essay, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1988), comments on the commencement of Martin Luther King Day:

> Although King's birthday had come to symbolize the massive social movement that grew out of efforts of African-Americans to end the long history of racial oppression in America, the first official observance of the holiday would take place in the face of at least two disturbing obstacles: first, a constant, if not increasing, socioeconomic disparity between the races, and second, a hostile administration devoted to changing the path of civil rights reforms that some believe responsible for most of the movement's progress. A focus on the continuing disparities between Blacks and whites might call, not for celebration, but for strident criticism of America's failure to make good on its promise of racial equality. (pp. 1332-1333)

The critical race response to the sliding back of racial progress takes its analytical cue from the critical legal tradition; a tradition that recognises the legal system as a key player in the creation and legitimization of unjust social structures in the U.S. However, critical race scholars argued that this arm of legal discourse should be bolstered with racial formation and systemic racism analysis, so that it can address the indiscernible ways that the law maintains racialized relationships of power. In other words, with meticulous attention to race coupled with a mapping of where law is assumed race-neutral, critical race theorists could make visible the ways that race and racism create law *and* are created by law.

Since its emergence, critical race theory's intentional race consciousness and scholarly resistance has expanded out of American legal studies, crossing both discipline (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Kolivoski et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006) and geographical borders (Pon et al., 2011; Tate, 2016; Yee, 2005). Specifically, over the past two decades, scholars have frequently engaged with CRT as a way to highlight the systemic racial injustices in higher education, including the racial injustices of teaching and researching (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Croom & Patton, 2011; Griffin et al., 2014; Harper, 2012; Hughes & Giles, 2010; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2016; Patton & Catching, 2009). This work is important because it illuminates a system at the behest of white supremacy. It does so by highlighting a system of segregated knowledge production (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002), by critiquing a system readily engaged with race whilst erasing racism, colonialism and white supremacy (Harper, 2012; Patton, 2016); by

validating the racial profiling experiences of postsecondary faculty (Patton & Catching, 2009); and by proposing practical and community-based applications of CRT within postsecondary contexts (Hughes & Giles, 2010).

Although the above mentioned do not capture the entire breadth and depth of CRT interventions into postsecondary spaces, we believe that the intentional race consciousness and structural determinism of critical race theory represents an ideal method for analyzing the relationship between race, racism, and power in the classroom. We believe this for several reasons. First, it is an ideal fit because we have seen how it successfully provides a framework for critiquing liberal ideas of equity and reform within the academy (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Second, we appreciate its use and validation of voice by communicating real life experiences of racialized peoples (Griffin et al., 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Finally, the critical race tenets are useful for providing a means of systematically studying contemporary race relations within institutions (see Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

In our own work, we draw from two specific CRT tenets for this paper. First, by way of Harris (1993), we make use of whiteness as property and Harris' argument that laws and policies legitimize the value of whiteness by structuring benefits to citizens because of whiteness. We apply this to a postsecondary context by exploring the hidden and not-so-hidden ways that the academy bestows benefits to whiteness and white adjacency, marks resistance as risky and undermines claims for racial justice. Second, we use the tradition of storytelling and counter-storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) to make visible the often-complicated classroom experiences of racialized faculty that are frequently ignored or consumed by narratives of progress. We hope these stories in the form of our case vignette will resonate with and validate racialized readers.

While we are excited to explore CRT interventions in the academy, we recognise that critical race tradition is not without critique. In particular, we note the critique of CRT emphasis of a Black-white or people of color-white binary (Ray et al., 2017). This point of bifurcation has meant that CRT has been slow to take up distinct yet linked histories of racial formation of different racialized groups as well as the material consequences that arise vis-a-vis white supremacy. For example, while CRT developed out of the experiences of Black Americans, there is no theorization of Blackness or antiBlackness (Dumas & Ross, 2016). The significance of this absence lies in the deeply anti-Black logic embedded in social, cultural and economic norms embedded in postsecondary institutions (see Walcott, 2014). Recognizing this, Dumas and Ross (2016) argue that in CRT, whereas Black people's experiences with race become default and generalizable, whereas other specifically named critical race sub-theories, also known as "crits," "...offer and benefit from more detailed, nuanced, historicized, and embodied theorizations of their lived racial conditions under specific formations of racial oppression" (p. 417).

A second, related critique of CRT comes from gaps in its explanation of racial formation, particularly at the hands of non-Indigenous thinkers, who have said very little about the perceived permanence of the settler state, its use of citizenship and rights, and sovereign Indigenous nationhood, these playing a role in racial formation. Instead, under CRT, Indigeneity has mostly become subsumed under the issue of race, with no connection to political and legal issues around sovereignty, Indigenous nationhood and the colonial

legacy of settler law (Smith, 2006). We take both of these critiques seriously because we recognize that anti-Blackness and settler colonization play roles in the academy and are built on anti-Black and settler colonization projects. This most certainly shapes how students and faculty experience and live within the academy. We understand that even at a time when liberal democratic states point to an end of formal colonialism and slavery, the ways of viewing land and race along with the rules governing racial relationships that grew out of colonialism and racism are carried forward into current institutions and ways of being. Their logics are still present and alive.

Decolonization and the Classroom

In situating our discussion on decolonization, it is important to acknowledge and recognize scholarship that has emerged in the past decade addressing decolonization and more specifically, decolonizing social work education (e.g., Absolon & Absolon-Winchester, 2016; Baikie, 2009; Baskin, 2011; Baskin & Sinclair, 2015; Bruyere, 1999; Clark & Drolet, 2014; Gray et al., 2013; Hart, 2009; Sinclair, 2004; Sinclair et al., 2009; Tamburro, 2013; Weaver, 2004; Yellow Bird, 2008). Two widely recognized scholars to contribute to the field are Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012) with their article *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, which articulates the crux of decolonizing education. The authors bring attention to the superficial adoption of decolonization language into educational spheres that erases possibilities of talking about the essential project that decolonization calls for: the repatriation of Indigenous land and life.

To decolonize education, social work practice, and policies, we must acknowledge how settler colonialism operates through multiple pillars, relying on racial capitalism and white supremacy as its foundation (Smith, 2016). Through resource extraction and exportation, settler colonialism works to "build the wealth, privilege, or feed the appetites of the colonizers, who get marked as the first world" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 4). Settler colonialism functions on managing Indigenous people, land and waters through "modes of control, imprisonment, and involuntary transport" (Tuck & Yang, 2021, p. 4). Recognizing that the Americas are settler colonial nations, the current structures of governance we understand and operate under are imagined through prisms of white supremacy and settler dreams of making this land home and never leaving. Settler colonialism requires land, resources, and ripping away any recognition of Indigenous peoples' sovereignty and culture (Tuck & Yang, 2012). This intricate organization of settler nations relies on the genocide of Indigenous peoples, erasing traces of Indigenous existence, a long and bloody history of slavery, and the displacement/migration of low-wage labor (Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Smith, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Racialized scholars are making connections between critical race theory and decolonization, while attending to the specific relationships that hold up the settler state, settler law and settlerhood and, in the process, speaking to what binds us together (e.g., Dhamoon, 2015; Hackett, 2019; Moreno & Mucina, 2019; Sharma & Wright, 2008). Questions of who is a settler within these settler nations shape these discourses and force Indigenous, Black and people of color to reflect on our relationship to land, to each other, and to our futurities as communities of color impacted differently by settler colonialism.

Yet the questions of who is defined as a settler and who is impacted differently by settler colonialism need ongoing discussion and unpacking. We often confront these questions when we have Black and racialized students in the classroom who ask pertinent questions about their position and role in decolonizing their selves and their practice.

When we consider a critical race perspective that comes from anti-colonial foundations, we recognize that it is not only about analyzing race, racism and power, but locating these relationships at the center of a project that normalizes racial capitalism and harmful relationships between Indigenous and Black people and people of color. In this sense, social work education is critical race work. This requires recognition of both global and local understandings of Indigenous and colonial histories, with specific understanding and appreciation of the land on which we live, teach and practice (Allan et al., 2019). Social work scholars Allan and colleagues (2019) call for an imagining of decolonial futurities in social work education that go beyond territorial acknowledgments and seek a new relationship beyond colonial frames; they write:

> We must also attend to our relationships and accountabilities to the Indigenous peoples and traditional teachings of the spaces we occupy in order to learn how to be good (decolonial) relatives and to transform the legacy of social work with communities and nations who have been on the receiving end of colonial violence. (p. 2)

To attend to the call for decolonization as social work educators, we must ask ourselves how are we contributing or supporting Indigenous peoples' fight for repatriation of land/water and life? How do we recognize, name and acknowledge the impact of slavery and displacement that continues to encounter a governance system that polices, punishes and persecutes Black bodies and Indigenous communities? The complexities of race and intersecting histories of colonization affect each of our entry points to this conversation, while shaping how we define our selves in the classroom. Social work education as a discipline is largely practice oriented, which pushes educators to make the connection between policy, theory and practice, engaging in how theories come to life in the field. Moreover, our engagement with decolonization in the classroom pushes students to consider how normalizing discourses created by settler colonialism and so much of what we practice is embedded in prisms of white supremacy, capitalism and settler colonialism. In a decolonial classroom, students are pushed to consider how they will take up this work in their practice outside of the classroom, which is the space for tangible transformative social justice change that considers decolonizing social work spaces.

We recognize that these are beginning entry points to discussing the theoretical foundations offering insights on how racialized educators can recognize and begin to wrestle with white supremacy in the classroom. This is not an exhaustive literature review and the theories offer particular entry points to the remainder of the paper where we move to illustrate the impact of white supremacy in the classroom by examining a vignette based on our teaching experiences; the vignette is analyzed using the theoretical frameworks above, followed by a discussion of the implications for social work education.

Table 1. Case I

In a class of 45 second-year BSW students, who represent a mix of diverse races and ethnicities, students listened to a podcast segment (Balkissoon & Sung, 2016) that illustrates an example of white fragility; a white male podcast host named Ian Power invites a racialized female journalist, Denise Balkissoon, to speak about racial issues. Power refers to a recent poll indicating that "minorities" are "insular," and talks about his own experience feeling excluded by them. Balkissoon disagrees that minorities are insular, and points out his assumption that all visible minorities are immigrants (as opposed to naturalized citizens or permanent residents). The conversation devolves from there, with the host eventually ending the interview abruptly, stating that he feels the guest is calling him a racist. In the classroom, students shift uncomfortably and many comment that they feel Power was indeed being racist by stereotyping "minorities" and the behaviors of racialized communities. As the instructor, I try to note how quickly some conversations can transform and move away from the original intent, how even with good intentions to speak about racial issues, these can easily be brushed aside. A racialized student immediately puts up her hand and says, "I don't think he had good intentions—why are you defending the white man?"

Analysis

Teaching and learning can create uncomfortable moments and this vignette brings back the discomfort, as well as the awkwardness of the learning situation. It is clear that whiteness has entered both the room (and arguably, was always there) as well as the instructor's teaching and unconscious. As a racialized instructor, the teacher has tried to assuage the white fragility and guilt that white students are likely experiencing by noting aloud that the host of the podcast had "good intentions." This further illustrates the effects of white supremacist thinking — that attending to white fragility and guilt are prioritized, that the comfort of white students is more important than the comfort of BIPOC students.

Using a critical race theory framework encourages us to consider what might have been happening for the instructor and students. While it was not within the instructor's conscious intent, it is clear that the CRT tenet of whiteness as ultimate property was at play. Kolivoski and colleagues (2014) write that "CRT asserts that Whiteness is the ultimate property value, leveraged to perpetuate advantages and privileges among Whites" (p. 270). The authors further draw from Harris (1995) when they write that "Whiteness can be transferred by rewarding people of color for conformity to White norms or sanctioning cultural practices that violate White norms" (as cited in Kolivoski, 2014, p. 270). This notion of conformity is demonstrated in the instructor as she weakly attempts to normalize the racist statements made by the podcast host and demonstrates her own (unconscious) attempts to approximate towards whiteness.

Harris (1993) posits that "whiteness shares the critical characteristics of property even as the meaning of property has changed over time. In particular, whiteness and property share a common premise – a conceptual nucleus – a right to exclude" (p. 1714). The notion

of the right to exclude further brings up the idea that the instructor is hoping to be included, to feel safe; her efforts to assuage the upset and discomfort in the class may be interpreted as a way of seeking inclusion. While there is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to be included (which can include things such as job security and positive regard from students and faculty colleagues), this also makes the racialized instructor side with whiteness, which ironically supports her own oppression and the oppression of racialized others. The racialized student who wondered aloud and demanded to understand why the instructor came to the defense of the white man in the podcast may have sensed this, and in her own way, was politicizing or making known that defense of racism is wrong. The instructor is fortunate that this student was particularly awake, not asleep and lulled into whiteness as property, and that the class climate was one where she felt she could and should speak out. By trying to accommodate the white students, the instructor has missed an important opportunity to open the discussion about how white supremacist thinking, white fragility, and tenets of CRT are playing out right in front of them, and are evident in the interaction that students heard in the podcast. It is regrettable that a student interpreted the instructor's comments as a "defense of the white man" but is also completely understandable.

For the students, particularly the racialized students in the room, there is a confusing message being communicated: is a teacher – no less, a social worker – not supposed to call out racism when it is seen, heard or experienced? Is the (micro-) aggressive dialogue between the podcast host and his guest not meant to be explored and further understood? Racialized instructors are constantly negotiating these invisible "racial contracts" when they enter the academy, which was not built or imagined with them in mind. The instructor in this vignette not only needs to contend with how to teach the curriculum and manage the class, but also, has the additional pressures of "representing" racialized peoples. This representation is both a privilege as well as a source of additional racially-related challenges that white instructors do not necessarily experience.

While this vignette speaks specifically to racial issues, let us also not forget how a decolonizing framework can help us understand how white supremacy has infiltrated the classroom. In this case, issues of colonization are not made visible in the room at all. While the content of the podcast certainly speaks to white supremacist thinking (i.e., "othering" non-whites), the instructor's comments following the discomfort having listened to the podcast also further colonizes the classroom by normalizing a white perspective. To decolonize would have meant to deconstruct the worldviews that lead to both the reactions and spoken sentiments of the students and the instructor.

Any conversation or engagement of minority communities or immigrant assimilation is a conversation about people of color who are expected to melt or integrate into a national identity. This national identity is imagined by and for settlers who embody whiteness and have invested in the extraction of resources in order to build this national identity, resorting to the genocide of Indigenous people, their land and waters, and the slavery of Black people who are continually shaped by these narratives. Yet in the podcast and in the classroom, there is a disavowal of what it means to even begin to have a conversation about nationalism, assimilation or "Canadian values"; the implication is that people of color approximate towards whiteness and contribute to the colonial machinery. The colonial machinery relies on national ideas that are intertwined with capitalist ideals that rely on the

resources deeply embedded in the land and waters of this nation. This machinery homogenizes who is and can be Canadian, all the while removing Indigenous sovereignty from the picture and the history of transatlantic and indentured slavery, exploiting and banking on Black and racialized bodies to produce the labor to continue making the west rich.

The instructor's behavior is also informed by the fact that postsecondary institutions often depend on positive student evaluations to invite adjunct or sessional instructors to return and continue teaching. Women and people from marginalized identities often receive lower student evaluations, which negatively impact their ability to be retained and promoted (Evans-Winter & Twyman Hoff, 2011; Lazos, 2012; Stanley, 2006). Research demonstrates psychological bias by students and negative misattributions towards instructors in postsecondary student evaluations (Coren, 1998). Educators who dare to bring up issues of race and racism may be judged harshly by students who resist learning about these issues; Evans-Winter and Twyman Hoff (2011) go so far as to say that student evaluations can be used "as weapons to speak back to and against, not only to anti-racist philosophies, but counter-hegemonic narratives that represent the diversity of their future teaching experiences" (p. 461).

Learning and discomfort are not mutually exclusive and yet, with the pressures of delivering curriculum while also trying to embody social work values, social work educators are often in a position where they do not want their students to be *too* uncomfortable. Teaching in a racialized body, coupled with the aforementioned desire for inclusivity and safety, can lead to hidden spots and surface-level teaching. For example, in this vignette, the instructor attempted to introduce content about race, racism and white supremacy into the classroom but had not anticipated the myriad of other factors outlined above that led to her own reactions in the classroom. This demonstrates the essentiality of self-reflexivity, good teaching mentorship, and the ability to analyze and debrief with trusted colleagues.

Implications for Social Work Education

The vignette illustrates both how subtle white supremacy can creep or explode into a classroom, as well as why it is essential that white supremacy be dismantled in academe. Whiteness has been internalized by the instructor, which speaks to the systemic ways it is normalized in our society and our institutions. As previously stated, awareness of these dynamics is not enough: action and activation are needed to dismantle what has been so long entrenched. Politicizing and not letting go of what can seem to be benign classroom moments, practices, and policies, is one way to take such action.

From a teaching perspective, the instructor might have felt compelled from the difficult moments in the classroom to be able to discuss openly with her students the dynamics that were noticed, or the "stuck" feelings they might have experienced. The instructor might have been able to enrich student learning by opening up a dialogue and discussion about the discomfort in the room, making an overt connection to the ways her comment reflected a white lens, arguably also a colonial lens, influenced by her own experience with whiteness. Perhaps not all instructors are comfortable with this level of self-disclosure; in

that case, it might simply be enough to begin a dialogue by proposing to students that whiteness had become centered in the room, and to ask them to discuss what they noticed, experientially, in small groups. Giving a name to that racial discomfort that is expected in the classroom when these moments become exploited would be another strategy to encourage student engagement. Further, the instructors might rely on trusted colleagues to debrief the interactions in the classroom, particularly for the instructor who needs to increase her own awareness of how she has used proximity to whiteness as a survival skill.

One may wonder, how and why do these moments occur, even in supposedly progressive spaces? The answer: because white supremacy has been given permission to take the focus back to what a number of scholars call a race to innocence (Fellows & Razack, 1998; Tuck & Yang, 2012). As racialized educators, we are expected to demonstrate respectability in the face of white privilege and colonial attitudes that center whiteness and innocence from the legacy of white privilege that comes from being a settler on stolen land. By taking up the position of educator or instructor as people of color, we are often asked to invest emotional labor in breaking down racism into edible and easy to digest pieces so that "well intentioned" white settler students can understand and in particular within social work, engage in social work practices with the racialized or Indigenous other ethically.

From a systemic perspective, instructors, particularly those in racialized bodies, need to question and stay awake to how institutional policies around evaluation, recruitment, retention and promotion are not at all neutral. It is we Black, Indigenous, people of color who are tacitly agreeing to the "invisible contracts," the invisible emotional labor attached to teaching in a racialized body, to continue to pursue social work teaching positions. Teaching in a racialized body often means being keenly aware of how being racialized affects teaching abilities, emotional capacities and the energy it takes to continue the pursuit of equity and justice.

For white allies, it is just as important to recognize, acknowledge and politicize how classroom dynamics can stay hidden and policies tacitly create benefits for some but not all.. If you are a white ally, consider these questions: On a colleague-to-colleague level, are you noticing and actively listening to how your racialized colleagues are doing? Do you integrate anti-racism content into your own teaching? Do you broach and denounce the construct of white supremacy and its many forms? Do you take on the necessary labor to dismantle white supremacy? How are you recognizing the land you stand and teach on and the history of displacement, genocide, and violence that sits below the classroom? How do we stay awake in the face of colonization and capitalist white supremacy?

Conclusion

This paper challenges all social work educators to politicize and make known how white supremacy comes into the classroom, and can take the form of microaggressions, covert racist undertones, benign interactions or awkward moments. We have used two main metaphors to highlight the challenges of teaching in a racialized body: first, the metaphor of wrestling the elephant that is white supremacy, that which does not want to be named or identified; and second, the metaphor of being lulled to sleep. It is imperative that we rise

from our slumber, when we have been lulled into false senses of safety and inclusion. We are not indicting the institutions where we teach; instead, we are calling attention to how postsecondary institutions have never been imagined with racialized bodies in mind, and are built on foundations of colonial and colorblind tenets. Critical race theory and decolonizing frameworks have also helped in the analysis of a teaching encounter that is presented in the form of a vignette. In particular, whiteness as property is explored as a way to understand how the instructor responded to white supremacy showing up in her classroom.

If you are a racialized social work educator, we encourage you to continue to stay awake to what student-to-student, student-to-instructor, and instructor-within-institution dynamics and policies surround you. One of the questions we have wrestled with as a group of racialized instructors is what it might mean to be a truly "free" educator – to be able to fully express ourselves, without the specter of white supremacy overshadowing us, and where we are empowered at individual, organizational and systemic levels to continue to combat the dominance of whiteness. Our sincere hope is that by using CRT and decolonizing lenses, we will be better equipped to fulfill the invisible contracts that are part of teaching as a racialized body, with a greater sense of clarity and purpose for our future teaching experiences.

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Author note: Address correspondence to Mandeep Kaur Mucina, Faculty of Human and Social Development, School of Child and Youth Care, PO Box 1700, STN CSC, Victoria, British Columbia V8W 2Y2. Email: mmucina@uvic.ca