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On: 31 March 2014, At: 10:22

Publisher: Routledge

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## Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmm20>

### Body without organs: notes on Deleuze & Guattari, critical race theory and the socius of anti-racism

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Published online: 27 Mar 2014.

To cite this article: Awad Ibrahim (2014): Body without organs: notes on Deleuze & Guattari, critical race theory and the socius of anti-racism, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, DOI: [10.1080/01434632.2014.892498](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.892498)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.892498>

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## **Body without organs: notes on Deleuze & Guattari, critical race theory and the socius of anti-racism**

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My aim in this article is to epistemologically read Deleuze and Guattari (D & G) against critical race theory (CRT) and simultaneously delineate how D & G's notion of 'body without organs' can benefit from CRT. At first glance, especially for language instructors and researchers, these two epistemological frameworks not only compete against each other but in most cases also do not meet. For some, their utility might not even be as obvious given their philosophical and abstract nature. This article is conceptualised to show, in a modest way, their utility on the one hand and how, on the other hand, where and when they meet to create an 'anti-racism line of flight'. For those who are interested in race, language learning and institutional analysis, this is a line of flight that is full with infinite possibilities, twists and turns and pleasant surprises, which I hope to epistemologically explore.

**Keywords:** Deleuze & Guattari; body without organs; critical race theory; anti-racism; language learning

### **A prologue**

The Body without Organs (BwO) is a limit, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue; specifically, it is the limit at which all the *flows* flow completely freely, each into the others, so that no distinctions exist among them any longer. Described as 'flows', all things in the world, Deleuze and Guattari (D & G) add, including humans, desire to flow unconstrained. In this sense, what marks a 'flow' from another 'flow' is not its distinction but its saturation. For example, as I intend to theorise in the paper using personal narrative (see also Kubota 2014, the introduction to this special issue), race is a flow but what makes it distinct from other social categories (other flows, that is) such as gender or social class is how it is experienced by different bodies. The intersection of these flows of race, gender, social class, etc. generally, but more specifically in Canada, is directly implicated in the language we learn and how we learn it (Ibrahim 2008; Kubota and Lin 2009). Building on notions of identity, investment, desire and identification, Ibrahim (2008) has shown that, in an Ontario context, a group of refugee and immigrant continental African youth invested not in 'standard' English as a second language (ESL) but Black English as a second language (BESL). Focusing on intonation, identity and citizenship, Morgan (1997), Norton (2000) and Haque (2012), respectively, have shown that the intersection between race, language learning and institutional analysis is a 'line of flight' (a notion I will explain later) that, in Canada, is neither linear nor, unfortunately, without unpleasant surprises. In fact, Ibrahim (2008) has shown that this intersection was

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bodily experienced and has produced some of the most painful experiences with (individual and) institutional racism. So, instead of revisiting these contentions, my intent in this conceptual paper is to (1) build on D & G's notion of BwO, (2) introduce critical race theory (CRT) as an example of the BwO and (3) think through how this new 'rhizome' can feed into and further our understanding of anti-racism practices in general. My hope is that language instructors, researchers and learners will find these practices useful. Here, an unstated contention in the paper is that D & G are too abstractly epistemological, rhizomatically theoretical and they might benefit from being introduced to CRT. However, CRT can also benefit from reading D & G. Stemming from this dialogic moment, this intersectionality and deterritorialisation is a new product I am calling anti-racism line of flight, which has major implications for language teachers.

### **There is no one but multiple: Body without Organs**

You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit. People ask, So what is this BwO? – But you're already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic: desert traveler or nomad of the steppers. On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight – fight and are fought – seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated; on it we love. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 150)

We-humans-and-scholars, it seems, are born into an existing 'socius'. This is a monstrous machine, which is experienced in and through language. It is a metaphor of and for society where attractors and opposites can and do coexist. Their coexistence means a permanent presence of tension, a tug-of-war and ongoing struggle. There are no simple resolutions within the socius, we are forever left with the curse of improvisation and living (with)in tension. But, we-humans-and-scholars are so immersed into the socius that we forget ourselves and the very structure of the socius itself. In fact, we even forget that we live in a socius, a very sophisticated machine that is working on us primarily subconsciously and through seduction, a machine that is 'under way the moment the body has had enough of organs' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 150). For language learners, the socius is a linguistic 'field' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 150) that is immersed into from the moment one is grasping the sound, the alphabets, the metaphors, and eventually the culture of the language and heretofore the language of the culture.

As scholars, we are 'trained' into this machine, this socius, be it through an initiation into a particular field of study, e.g. language, or a development of expertise into an area of research, e.g. linguistics. As humans, however, we are exposed, seduced (usually hegemonically) and thus left either to adapt or adopt a full range of pre-existing societal norms, values, behaviours and ways of thinking and doing. This does not mean we become 'hypochondriac bodies', where 'organs are destroyed, the damage has already been done, nothing happens anymore' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 15). To the contrary, we still have subjectivity, agency and individuality but an 'inhibited' one, in fact an 'artificial' one. We come into the world already classified and categorised based on, among others, genitals and race. We are thus given names: black/white and man/woman. But, for D & G, this categorization is neither haphazard nor without power relations, and for our discussion, it is directly implicated in the linguistic norm we learn and how we learn it (Norton 2000; Morgan 1997). Indeed, our very first initiation into language as infants teaches us how to classify, how to behave in diverse situations and especially how to behave towards differently classified and categorised 'bodies'.

Our absolute challenge here, however, is to experiment with how to humanise and liberate ourselves and our bodies from this socius, this hierarchical order of society where power is distributed vertically. When it comes to racism, some might refer to it as ‘institutional racism’ (see Varghese 2014). As such, those on top either imminently oppress or create a structure, a machine and a (semiotic) language that helps continue their hierarchical position. Our experiment with becoming-human, D & G argue, begins with a name, by first conceptualising, understanding and naming this machine: Body without Organs. Significant to note, to *experience* BwO is not the same as *making* oneself BwO (174), and the two (*experiencing* and *making*) should not be seen as separate procedures or events. After all, we are not always consciously *making* ourselves; sometimes we are too exhausted so we *experience* the socius as it comes, only to find ourselves cut in half by the machine.

But what is BwO? Carefully reading Deleuze and Guattari (1987), I see BwO in a metaphoric sense as an assemblage that does not have an end or a beginning, structure or restriction; as a state of becoming we are always at work to attain, we can never get there and once and for all say: we have reached the state of BwO. Having no beginning or an end, no structure or restriction, as we shall see below, should not obscure its reality and bodily effects. After all, some of us do experience the said ‘institutional racism’. So, to grapple with this BwO, we must constantly ask not only what it is, but also (1) how is it fabricated, by what procedures and means (predetermining what will come to pass)? (2) what are its modes, what comes to pass and with what variants and what surprises, what is unexpected and what [is] expected?’ (152). Put otherwise, BwO is an assemblage of ideas, structures, histories and becomings. It is a ‘line of flight’<sup>1</sup> or a constant state of possibilities, territorialisation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. It is ‘the full egg before the extension of the organism and the organisation of the organs, before the formation of the strata’ (153). It is pure intensities.

A BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate. Still, the BwO is not a scene, a place, or even a support upon which something comes to pass. It has nothing to do with phantasy, there is nothing to interpret. The BwO causes intensities to pass; it produces and distributes them in a *spatium* that is itself intensive, lacking extension. It is nonstratified, unformed, intense matter ... [where] there are no negative or opposite intensities. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 153; emphasis in original)

If BwO is a ‘nonstratified, unformed and intense matter’ where ‘there are no negative or opposite intensities’, on the one hand, and that it is ‘never yours or mine. It is *a* body. It is an involution but always a contemporary, creative involution’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 164), then we need to reconceptualise the idea of the ‘body’ itself. The notion of the body, for D & G, involves both the anatomical body that each one of us has (the individual body) and all social formations where people are relationally dependent on something or someone (the institutional body). The body is a structural ‘whole’ consistent of different ‘parts’ or ‘organs’ and these organs depend on each other and each functions individually for the benefit of the whole (the institution, if you like). The parts within this whole, also known as ‘the entity’ (158), are signified or become meaningful only within a ‘field’ or a ‘plane’. By field and plane D & G are referring to a semiotic space, which has its own infrastructure, norms, values, expectations and ways of thinking and becoming. Thus, one may argue, there is no racism (the body) without a ‘field’ or a ‘plane’, where language is central, that allows it to flourish and creep in sometimes unexpectedly but mostly expectedly in the west (Stanley 2011).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to this organisation of the organs, this sophisticated and mostly subconscious process of becoming as ‘organism’. To explain let us take the example of the far-right organisation, which advocates for white supremacy, white nationalism and anti-immigration policies: The Ku Klux Klan (KKK). According to D & G’s conceptualization, the body (KKK) is made up of parts (or organs, that is, actual people and ideas) with identifiable characteristics (ways of thinking, dressing, etc.) that predispose the whole to certain habitual patterns of behaviour and action. But this does not mean a loss of individuality, so what makes the KKK a ‘body’ or a ‘flow’ is precisely the similarity to itself across variations. That is to say, it is how the parts conflate and feed into each other that variations are subsumed under that which the parts have in common. So, the KKK-body is grasped solely from the point of view of its generality, i.e. the general idea or norm attached to it. For language learners, a ‘table’ is not a separate signifier, but it should be understood as part of and within a whole semiotic, syntactic, morphological and cultural system.

When it comes to us humans, we all, without exception and in any linguistic field or power relationship, function as ‘organs of the organism’. Whether we like it or not, we are constantly named, categorised and classified – be it at work or school (managers, workers, students, teachers, etc.), in the family (father, daughter, etc.), in politics (Member of Parliament, Prime Minister, voter, etc.), or in the media (audience, producers, etc.). We are continually stratified, and for Deleuze and Guattari (1987), there are three strata on the body: the organism, significance and subjectification. As ‘the judgment of God, from which medical doctors benefit and on which they base their power’ (159), ‘the organism’ functions as a body’s whole articulation, that is to say as the complex ways in which a body presents itself in the given restrictions. The ‘significance’ functions as a space of semiotic accumulation and coagulation, which includes how the body gets interpreted and how it interprets others. As for ‘subjectification’ or ‘subjection’, it is the *fenêtre* or the window through which the body passes only to be looked at in exactly one way; and as a result of passing through that narrow labyrinth, it is forced to articulate itself in exactly that expected way and no other. Summarising these three strata, D & G put it thus:

You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body – otherwise you’re just deprived. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted – otherwise you’re just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement – otherwise you’re just a tramp. (159)

Two points to retain thus far: (1) as soon as we come into existence, through very complicated mechanisms including language, desire, belonging and love, we absorb the values of society and in turn obey them as we are expected to, or else we are called ‘deprived, deviant or tramp’. Therefore, unless she consciously takes herself out of the ‘system’, the child might end up absorbing institutional racism without ever knowing. That is why, (2) we must resist the organism, and our resistance will begin first and foremost by becoming conscious of the fact that we are supporting the organism and in turn our own suppression. Being trapped in this organism, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain, we find ourselves in a paradoxical, even paranoid if not schizophrenic, existence. We are taught using morality, ethics, religion and education that we must strive to overcome, to transcend oppressive and discriminatory societal values but, we are squarely trapped in the organism, which makes it impossible to fulfil this desire. We are left exposed heretofore to infinite dissatisfaction. To reverse this with the aim of reaching a

level of satisfaction we must make a radical shift from this oppressive, vertical hierarchy to a horizontal distribution of power. We must liberate ourselves and without a middle (wo)man we must talk to the liberated. We must talk to the liberated using our own voice and language, and that can happen only when we are conscious language learners. We must, finally, *make* ourselves Bodies without Organs. For D & G, when talking directly to each other as a liberatory linguistic event, there must not be any kind of medium between two liberated bodies. Only then can we commence to talk about the 'plane of consistency'.

To understand the plane of consistency, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) offer the idea of the 'rhizome'. Horizontally positioned, the rhizome is not a point we reach; it is a way of thinking and becoming. Tentatively, one may propose it as a radical way for language teaching and learning. Radically conceived, almost anarchist in nature, the goal of the rhizome is '[t]o reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I' (3). The rhizome, then, is a metaphor that is invoked and provoked for three reasons: (1) to question the verticality of power relation as it is currently existing in the organism, (2) to remind us and indicate our rootedness into the organism, from which we need to liberate ourselves (including the traditional ways in which we learn language) and (3) to indicate the multiple possibilities that we need to envision, work towards and become aware of their existence. To envision these possibilities, we need a plane of consistency.

For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), consistency does not mean homogeneity, but a dynamic holding together of disparate elements, parts or organs. The plane of consistency is an existential place of consciousness where we practice constant 'experimentation' and 'nomadism'. It is a radical place where we 'destratify' ourselves, that is, totally de-skin ourselves and abolish the three strata of organism, significance and subjectification. The plane of consistency requires us to get rid of most, if not all of our expectations and habits, including even language. To liberate ourselves we need to realise that the organism is not a judgement or fabrication of God but of people, a historical product that is kept there for a reason. So, how do we reach this plane of consistency? We cannot yet; not while we are existing in, conforming to and unquestionably absorbing the norms and values of the organism.

Nonetheless, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) offer us some possible ideas, or 'lines of flight' to think about as we attempt to work towards this plane of consistency. First, we need to 'conjugate the intensities produced' on and by each BwO, 'by producing a continuum of all intensive continuities' (158). In other words, we need to connect, help and push each other to 'think through' (Derrida 1996) how to abolish the oppressive structure of the organism and, in turn, become BwO. Second, this connection should be conceived as an 'assemblage' of people and ideas: a 'whole diagram' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 161) as opposed to individual efforts. Through this assemblage we can create a committed coalition at least to begin dismantle the organism (e.g. institutional racism). But, third, caution is necessary; we need to be mindful of how far and how fast we dismantle the organism. After all, 'overdosage is a danger', and to dismantle 'has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 160). Moreover, D & G add, '[y]ou don't reach the BwO, and its plane of consistency, by wildly destratifying' because those who do would empty 'themselves of their organs instead of looking for the point at which they could patiently and momentarily dismantle the organisation of the organs we call the

organism' (160–161). Put otherwise, consciousness – political, social or otherwise – does not happen overnight. If ever one has this feeling of an 'overnight consciousness', then one is in danger of harming not only her/himself but also most likely the people around her/him. Consciousness, after all, is not an event; it is an arduous and slow process.

Following the same line of thinking, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) remind us, fourth, not to 'throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever. This is how it should be done' (161). They write:

Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movement of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all time. (161)

Fifth, if we 'are in a social formation', crucially important is the need to see how this social formation 'is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are' (161). Then, finally:

gently tip the assemblage, making it pass over to the side of the plane of consistency. It is only there that the BwO reveals itself for what it is: connection of desire, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities. You have constructed your own little machine, ready when needed to be plugged into other collective machines. (161)

### **Body without Organs?: de/re/territorializing racism through CRT**

Taking the preceding conceptualisation, I want to do two things in what follows. First, I will introduce the broad strokes and tenets of CRT, and second, think about race and its epiproduct, racism, as the organism that is emotionally taxing and painfully experienced by those at its receiving end (Kubota 2014). I will, in conclusion, offer this juxtaposition as an 'assemblage' that anti-racism workers and students might find useful in the Canadian and other contexts, especially for language learners, teachers and researchers. Ultimately, I am arguing that Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) conceptualisation might be practiced in the most unexpected of places. That is, given the abstractly theoretical writing of D & G, I am proposing CRT as a helpful mechanism to concretely work through the notion of BwO. Introducing CRT, here is my way of grounding D & G and making them practically conceivable. CRT, on the other hand, can also benefit from de-skinning by opening itself to some conceptual deterritorialisation, to new lines of flight. This new assemblage is what I am calling *anti-racism line of flight*.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), CRT came into existence in the mid-1970s as a radical protest movement by scholars of colour within legal studies. Initiated by the African-American legal scholar and philosopher Derrick Bell, the movement was called Critical Legal Studies (CLS), and was set to question and expose the 'internal and external inconsistencies' of the legal doctrine and reveal the ways that 'legal ideology has helped create, support, and legitimate (North) America's present class structure' (Crenshaw 1988, 1350). 'Critical race theory is, thus, both an outgrowth of and a separate entity from ... critical legal studies (CLS)' (Ladson-Billings 1998, 10). Central to both CLS and CRT is the saliency of race and its documented outcome: racism (Dei 1996; Ibrahim 2008; Kubota and Lin 2009).

Race is not seen here as competing with or conceived against gender, sexuality, class, ability and other social categories. CRT highlights race precisely because it is probably the only category that brings chill in the air once it is mentioned (Ibrahim 2004). People

are uncomfortable talking about it and as CLS highlighted, race is legalistically, scholarly or societally either subsumed under ‘ethnicity’ or gets totally neglected (Collins and Solomos 2010). Yet, as an organism in North America, race is always-already present in every social configuring of people’s lives, even in all white towns (Nelson 2010). Moreover, given the dominant nature of whiteness in North America, ‘whites reach the conclusion that their whiteness is meaningful’ (Roediger 1991, 3). This is why we need to open up and deterritorialise race in North America, especially whiteness. For Ladson-Billings (1998, 9):

[i]t is because of the meaning and value imputed to whiteness that CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction [deterritorializing], reconstruction [reterritorializing], and construction [territorializing]: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power.

Recapping CRT’s contention and approach to race, Ladson-Billings (1998, 9) continues:

Our notions of race (and its use) are so complex that even when it fails to ‘make sense’ we continue to employ and deploy it. I want to argue, then, that our conceptions of race, even in a postmodern and/or postcolonial world, are more embedded and fixed than in a previous age. However, this embeddedness or ‘fixed-ness’ has required new language and constructions of race so that denotations are submerged and hidden in ways that are offensive though without identification. Thus, we develop notions of ‘conceptual whiteness’ and ‘conceptual blackness’ (King 1992) that both do and do not map neatly on to bio-genetic or cultural allegiances.

One can already sense what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) were talking about: that the organism (race/racism) is too complex and complicated, it is rhizomatic, absorbed and naturalised; so much so that, first, it requires ‘new language’ and, second, most people would have a ‘whole diagram’ (linguistic, semiotic and conceptual categories) tightly linked to whiteness (e.g. school success and achievement, beauty, middle classness, etc.) or blackness (gangs, basketball players, violence, etc.; see especially Leonardo 2009). As already indicated, this is by no means meant to create a modernist binary opposition between blackness and whiteness. Rather, following D & G, it is a testimony to ‘how, in a racialised society where whiteness is positioned as normative, everyone is ranked and categorised in relation to these points of opposition’ (Ladson-Billings 1998, 9). Not to your benefit, one could hear D & G repeating, ‘You will be organized’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 159), numbered, and categorised. Therefore, if we want to become BwO, the new monster or the organism we need to struggle against is no longer solely the broad category of ‘race’ but more specifically ‘whiteness’: its language, norms, values, ways of thinking and becoming; the hierarchical strata it creates; the symbolic and material capital it generates to its own benefit; and its ultimate product: white supremacy (see also Stanley 2011). This critique is one of the five principles of CRT, to which I will turn now.

### **Grounding the rhizome: foundational principles of CRT**

First, if it does not take it for granted, at minimum CRT begins with the notion that racism is an organism that is so much absorbed and naturalised that it is not aberrant any more, at least in North America. ‘It is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order’, Ladson-Billings (1998) contends, ‘it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture’ (11). Clearly, there is nothing natural about social order and social phenomena. They are socially

and historically specific and tend to work for the benefit of those who categorise, number and naturalise in the first place. Our strategy is to de-skin, destratify, unmask and expose the organism (racism) in its various forms, shapes, and permutations.

Second, CRT sees experiential knowledge and storytelling as two lines of flight for developing a CRT analytic standpoint. When CRT was initiated, the notion of storytelling as a legitimate mechanism for knowledge production was not a given idea. However, as Ladson-Billings (1998) has argued, deploying storytelling is a powerful tool to ‘analyze the myths, presuppositions and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down’ (11). On the other hand, the shared history of abjection and otherness is experienced by so many that it creates an assemblage, a coalition of people where one story is recognised as many. Therefore, the experience of oppression (be it racism or sexism) can be a powerful starting point for the making of CRT. Experience, moreover, does not know exclusion. So, ‘[t]o the extent that Whites (or in the case of sexism, men) experience forms of racial oppression, they may develop such a standpoint’ (11). For example, a white family who adopts transracially will, according to Ladson-Billings, no longer be white. They will become a racialised alterity or other. In sum, experiential knowledge and storytelling are deemed a crucial rhizome among CRT scholars precisely because they add necessary texture, ‘contextual contours to the seeming “objectivity” of positivist perspectives’ (11).

Third, CRT sees liberalism as a problem and mounts a fierce critique against it. To change the organism (racism), CRT argues, a monumental shift is required, but liberalism has neither the stamina nor the mechanism for such a change. In the USA, for example, it took close to 50 years to strike down the Jim Crow Law that segregated blacks and whites in the South (Bell 1992). Even though things do change in a liberal system, that change is so incremental and painstakingly slow that the Voting Rights Act, which restored and protected voting rights of African-Americans, was not passed until 1965 (Ward and Lott 2007). Liberals approach radical shifts with trepidation and agitation because they are comfortable and benefit from the current structure. They either do not understand the limits of current paradigms or find it hard to conceive that oppressed minorities can no longer sit-and-wait for change to happen. The urgency of the moment is a central line of flight for CRT; time will change nothing, people do.

Fourth, there are no guarantees in social, political and justice struggle. Indeed, related to the previous point of the liberal perspective, it seems that the main beneficiaries of civil rights legislation in the USA, for example, which is proposed to close the gap with minority under-representation in income and the job place, are white women (Zamudio 2011). This is a significant piece of information to acknowledge as we look at how far we have come as a society of unequals striving for justice and better moral compass. Yet, as we name this discouraging fact, we-the-categorised-other need a coalition, an assemblage first among ourselves and then with the majoritarian-white people. We need to think about the common lines of flight, points of interest and a rhizome under what Derrick Bell (2004) calls ‘interest-convergence’. In Canada, we see this interest-convergence with our aboriginal residential schools. A large coalition of aboriginals, other minoritarian groups and whites came together under the rhizome of justice, thus forcing the Canadian federal government to acknowledge historical injustices and seek ways to rectify them (Donald 2010; Haig-Brown 2003). This assemblage, one may argue, is unified by three common interests: (1) to understand how a regime of white supremacy has been created historically and maintained in our present day structure and paradigm, (2) to decipher the

complex and complicated ways in which this regime subordinates people of colour to the benefit of the organism and its different organs and (3) to challenge and change the unnatural bond between social orders, especially the law, and racial power.

Fifth, related to the point of storytelling, CRT scholars argue that the stories of 'ordinary people' are yet to be fully told (Zamudio 2011; Zinn 2010). This is because literary and research canons are in search for 'objective' and 'scientific' methodologies (Smith 2012). But the failure to make it to prominence in research and literature 'does not make the stories of ordinary people less important' (Ladson-Billings 1998, 13). Flipping the script (as we say in hip hop) by working upside down, CRT centralises the muted, silenced and neglected stories of the marginalised. It focuses on the role and the power of 'voice' as a line of flight that brings untold stories to the forefront and additional power to the discourses of racial and social justice, especially in the law and education. Here, experience 'can be a way to know and can inform how we know what we know' and storytelling, voice, and personal testimony are 'such fertile ground for the production of liberatory (praxis) because (they) usually (form) the base of our (knowledge and) theory making' (Hooks 1994, 168). To fully understand the power of storytelling, voice, and testimony, I want to tell two stories. The first is by Gloria Ladson-Billings and the second is mine. Check the following:

### ***Take I***

It had been a good day. My talk as a part of the 'Distinguished Lecture' Series at a major research university had gone well. The audience was receptive; the questions were challenging, yet respectful. My colleagues were exceptional hosts. But it also had been a tiring day – all that smiling, listening with rapt interest to everyone's research, recalling minute details of my own, trying to be witty and simultaneously serious had taken its toll. I could not wait to get back to the hotel to relax for a few hours before dinner.... My accommodation was on the hotel's VIP floor.... As I stepped off the elevator, I decided to go into the VIP lounge, read the newspaper, and have a drink. I arrived early, just before the happy hour, and no one else was in the lounge... Shortly after I sat down comfortably with my newspaper, a White man peeked his head into the lounge, looked at me sitting there in my best (and conservative) 'dress for success' outfit – high heels and all – and said with a pronounced Southern accent, 'What time are y'all gonna be servin'?' (Ladson-Billings 1998, 7–8)

### ***Take II***

Today was the last day of my trip to Toronto after a five-month absence in Ottawa. It was 1:10 pm on a sunny and an unexpectedly hot Sunday. It all began when I had just crossed the yellow light of Bloor Street West. I saw a white car curving into the bicycle lane and I heard hereafter a siren coming from it. When it was fully halted before my bicycle, I realised it was a police car. From it came veering a rangy White man with full gear, along with a clean and handsome gun. My immediate thought was that it must be the bicycle helmet since I was not wearing one; so I whispered to myself 'oh God, this is the first ticket of my life'.

He approached my bicycle and said, 'Have you ever been in trouble with the law before?' I said 'No'. 'Can I know why am I asked the question?' I added. 'You fit the description of a man we are looking for, who just snatched a bag from Yorkville; and I just saw you around the Yorkville area', he said... Looking sternly into his eyes, I repeated 'Can I know why I was stopped?' 'I told YOU Sir that you fit the description of a man we are looking for'. 'And what is that description?' I wondered. 'We are looking for a dark man with a dark bag', he said. My bag was actually light-blue. More with my eyes than with my voice, I repeated after him 'A DARK man?' Self-consciously, he exclaimed 'A Black man with a dark bag!' Before giving him my ID, he ordered me to lay down my (dark?) bag, which I did. With his order,

I widely opened my bag for anyone in the street to see. Since it was a tourist area, with the well-attended Bata Shoe Museum, everyone was looking into my bag. Some, I observed, pitied my plight and one White woman was smiling. Anyway, it was getting closer to 2 pm and my ride for Ottawa was to leave at 3 pm. At this point, I decided to use my University of Ottawa professor identification. After writing down my name and date of birth, he then announced to the dispatcher telling her 'All is OK now'. With no apologies, I was ordered to collect my affairs and my bag and, as he uttered it, 'You are free to go now'. (Ibrahim 2004, 81–83)

It is frightening how lightness (bicycling joyfully, in my case, or enjoying a relaxing moment, in Ladson-Billings' case) can so easily whirl into an unbearable heaviness, and how heaviness can cause so much pain. It is worth knowing that both Ladson-Billings and myself are full professors and in the case of Ladson-Billings, she holds the Kellner Family Chair in Urban Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. But that would not save us from the organism: racism.

These stories are told not to gain sympathy, we need none, but to underscore and showcase why CRT insists on storytelling as a central tenet and an important point in its paradigm. The stories are told also to demonstrate how the organism works in the everyday, how despite 'the scientific refutation of race as a legitimate biological concept and attempts to marginalize race in much of the public (political) discourse, race continues to be a powerful social construct and signifier' (Ladson-Billings 1998, 8). It is these stories, finally, that will further our understanding of the everyday racism, human degradation, and general annihilation of minoritarian bodies. They are not different nor do they occupy different strata than the ones told by Kubota (2014).

We need to 'name our reality' as Delgado and Stefancic (2001, 18) argue. We need to historicize, contextualise and situate our social reality, only then will we be able to understand and talk either with or back to others' stories. Through telling of our own stories, counterstories, revisionist histories and parables, moreover, we are able to preserve our psyche. Building on my own personal experiences, racism is haunting and emotionally draining. It demoralises marginalised groups to the extent of self-condemnation. Indeed, it is a major factor in school achievement or the lack thereof (Ogbu 2003). Storytelling thus becomes a healing mechanism, a medicine that makes us *wide-awake* (Rautins and Ibrahim 2011) and wards off the assault of racial violence and oppression. Storytelling, finally, can serve to awaken the oppressor as well. If the work of Paulo Freire (2000) has taught us anything, it is that oppressors are too oblivious to oppression. Indeed, they do not see it as oppression. Once rationalised, oppression is not only naturalised but it will cause little self-examination by the oppressor. Here, stories by historically marginalised groups can serve as the necessary catalyst to jar what Joyce King (1992) calls 'dysconscious racism'. Only then do we start the process of *becoming* (i.e. *making ourselves*) *Bodies without Organs*: becoming fully conscious and wide-awake.

### **Anti-racism lines of flight: an epilogue**

Juxtaposing the two rhizomes of BswO and CRT, I want to create a plane of consistency, drawing some anti-racism lines of flight and lessons learnt from this juxtaposition, especially for language teachers. To reiterate, lines of flight are possible new ways of thinking about something: anti-racism in my case. My approach is didactic and numerical, yet tentative and non-exhaustive:

- Categories of difference include not only race, class, gender, ability and sexuality, but also language, religion and culture, among others. These are all flows that flow freely but how they are bodily experienced saturate them making them distinct from other flows. Here, CRT scholars remind us as language teachers of the saliency of race, a saliency that stems from its social effects despite the concept's lack of scientific basis.
- Race is not superior or above other categories of difference, but it is one category that is consistently either neglected or marginalised. Even though it works rhizomatically as an interlocking system, that is, in concert with other social categories of difference, because of history and the law, race has a particular and peculiar history. It is this history that CRT attempts to highlight and trace the different ways in which it is still alive and present with us today. In language classrooms, this can be done by deconstructing the history behind the terms we use, e.g. 'white lies'.
- The assemblage, the coalition and the struggle is not about simply defining race, but abolishing its by-product, the organism: racism. Having accurate and faithful conceptualisation of terms is the starting point in becoming BwO. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the struggle is not purely linguistic and definitional but above all about how different bodies live these categories.
- Nonetheless, oppression is not hierarchical, hence there is no oppression that is more significant or privileged over others, and no form of oppression should be acceptable or tolerated. The racial discrimination cannot and should not be understood separately from other forms of discrimination; yet, given the history of the term in North America, CRT strategically essentialises race and racism for historical and political reasons and purposes.
- Becoming BwO is and can be a liberatory praxis. But to access it requires an exceptional level of consciousness, which can be reached only with an intensive level of what Nieto (2000) calls basic education. Beside reading, writing and becoming-literate (Masny and Cole 2012), basic education also involves accessing, making use, deploying and constantly opening up, questioning and deterritorialising language of power and the power of language. This is how we become and make ourselves BwO, create a coalition with other BwO and in the process dismantle the organism.
- Becoming BwO should not be a burden placed on a few, especially those of colour and the 'minoritarian'. We should do away with the idea that minoritarian groups should teach the majoritarian about themselves. In language classroom, when studying a 'minority' text, the minority student should not be looked at as the expert who is supposed to teach everyone. Instead, it is the absolute responsibility of the majoritarian to become conscious and teach itself. Indeed, since the majoritarian becomes majoritarian without realising it, introducing BwO as anti-racism line of flight to the majoritarian may be more important than to the minoritarian.
- Teaching, writing and talking about becoming BwO is a political act and choice in language classroom or elsewhere. Whether one calls it BwO or not, making our students conscious of their social environment and the choices they have is not a luxury. If one chooses not to address the process of how one can make herself BwO, that is a choice in itself.
- Minoritarians need to use their own voice and tell their own stories. Not only as a healing medicine, but as a way to deterritorialise and question the societal and historical mechanisms that delegitimate their lives, knowledge and experience. Doing so should not be an act of pity, a simple gesture of sympathy or an add-on to the already existing organism. It should be done to establish agentic and

liberatory rhizome, to multiply the assemblage of multiplicity and to root the rooted consciousness.

- In school or language classroom setting, becoming BwO is not a unit, a lesson plan or an event, but a plane of consistency that permeates all aspects of school and a revamping of everything educational. It is a radical praxis that shows how culturally programmed orientations may lead to different points of view and that our world views are linked to time, space, history, memory, identity and language.
- There is no One but Multiple. That is, we are forever multiplying, developing ‘the law of the One that becomes two, then of the two that becomes four.’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 5). If this is the case, then anti-racism line of flight should provide for a holistic understanding and appreciation of the human experience, comprising social, cultural, political, ecological, linguistic, and spiritual aspects: the link between mind, body, and soul. And the rhizome of education should attend to all these.
- We need to remind ourselves that, in educational contexts, especially in language classroom, no one rhizome or curriculum can cover everything in the world. Otherwise, it becomes an exceedingly superficial and trivialised voyeurism. Ultimately, all should feed into the assemblage of becoming BwO and thus familiarise students to think horizontally and vertically. Our gift to our students here should be to excite them to pursue their own knowledge.
- Called a ‘flow’, identity for anti-racism line of flight is central to the schooling process, that is, to making oneself BwO. Anti-racism line of flight recognises that students, these complex assemblages, do not go to school as ‘disembodied’ generic youth. They are influenced by their linguistic disposition as much as by their gender, class, racial, dis/ability and sexual identities. These are flows that affect and are affected by the schooling processes and learning outcomes. When it comes to identity, it is a luxury to be without racial, class, gender, dis/ability, or sexual identity – a luxury very few can afford (Ibrahim 2011).
- Anti-racism line of flight sees diversity and difference as a wealth that is available for the benefit of all. To do so is to tap into the linguistic and cultural knowledge of parents, guardians, and community workers and link the school and the community. Here, an inclusive school(ing) for the purpose of becoming BwO should mean a sharing of power, an active recruitment, retention and promotion of minoritarian staff and teachers, and an acknowledgement that different bodies bring different forms of knowledge.
- Finally, becoming BwO as anti-racism line of flight is a dynamic, ongoing process; one is always and forever in search for it, it can never be attained once and for all. No-one ever stops becoming BwO no matter how much progress one makes. This is because becoming BwO is relational, and to enable their students to become BwO, language teachers, for example, need to make themselves BwO. A centred (language) teacher – one who is radically conscious and wide-awake, one who is immersed in her/himself and her/his limits – is probably the best gift to her/his students, who, in turn, one would hope, are desiring to become BwO.

Defined as such, becoming BwO as anti-racism line of flight ‘challenges the falsehood of Eurocentric history, brings out its complexity and plural narratives, and it also fosters social cohesion by enabling students to accept, enjoy and cope with diversity’, Parekh (2000, 230) contends. As an education in freedom, becoming BwO is a rhizome through which we empower ourselves as language teachers, and in the process our students (language learners), so that we are all able to locate ourselves in time and space and

acknowledge our place in the socius, the machine and the organism – locally, nationally, and internationally – and at the same time critique the adequacy of that location. Only when we recognise and name our everyday realities – that which imperceptibly make us act, feel think and speak – can we begin the flow of de-skinning, deterritorializing, and de-stratifying the organism. Only then can we talk about becoming or making ourselves BwO; only then can we join our First Nations in their struggle for human dignity and claim a Canadianness that is conscious of its own limits.

### Note

1. For D & G, line of flight is a line of thinking, which refers to the infinite possibilities, the twists and turns and the pleasant surprises of making oneself a BwO, as we shall see later.

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