Bem vindo, welcome. This is a multilayered and intentionally messy text (Denzin, 2003). Our lives, as much as yours, are messy. Our lives don’t have an introduction, a development, and a conclusion. Lives don’t fit neatly on a page. Lives are not organized enough to follow the traditional rules of linear academic writing. So, we invite and hope that you, the reader, will be with us in this short journey, where the beginning may be in the final pages, where glimpses are not always sequential, or don’t seem clear at first. Our lives and writing are convoluted, a set of interpretative narratives, back and forth in our own histories and stories. Even when not in a linear way, our autoethnographies are always moving back and forth from the personal to the political, from “personal troubles to public issues” (Mills, 1959, p. 8), from our biographies to history-in-the-making, back and forth, sometimes dancing, sometimes struggling to find our footing, but always leaning on each other, our long friendship, our shared Freirean pedagogy of hope.

In our autoethnographic explorations, in general and in this chapter, we try to offer our own understanding of what autoethnography is for us, how we rely on memories and reflections to reinvent, reinterpret, and recreate history, always looking for more inclusive possibilities for social justice. We will describe our thoughts on autoethnography in general, and betweener autoethnographies in particular, later in this chapter. For now, we want to start by saying a few words about where we want to arrive at the end of our journey in this life with/through/by embracing autoethnography as a way of knowing, living, being, and fighting for unconditional inclusion and kindness. We try our best to feel/think/write autoethnographies that create possibilities of imagining a utopian future with more dignity and respect for more people. In the spirit of resistance against ideologies of domination, we try to create representational double mirrors of our own encounters with injustice—situated, subjective, and hopeful.

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We both have been inspired by Paulo Freire and his Pedagogy of Hope (1995/2004). We have been teaching, writing, and collaborating believing that “[h]ope is an ontological need” (p. 8), perhaps even more so now that many democracies are experiencing a return to populist nationalism, full of intense and overt exclusionary narratives and unfriendly walls, founded on ideologies and narratives that intensify notions of Us against Them along ethnic, gender, class, sexual orientation, (dis)abilities, religious and immigration status.

In our book, Betweener Autoethnographies: A Path Towards Social Justice (Diversi & Moreira, 2018) we ask:

How do we get from Us versus Them to Us and Them?
Is that possible?
If so, how?
If not, how close can we get?
How do we get from Us versus Them to just Us?
Is that possible?
If so, how?
If not, how/why do we keep trying?
These questions are more urgent, more pressing than ever
Our survival depends on our ability to expand the notion of Us
The circle of Us
The spaces between Us and Them need to be filled with compassion, not hatred. With cooperation rather than zero sum propositions. With stories where We resonate with Their humanity, and vice versa. We have a long and hard road ahead. Alone, despair seems inevitable, paralyzing. Together, we might be able to keep Our bearings toward social justice. In times of increasing Us versus Themism. In times of greater exclusionary politics. In times when hope for social justice seems to have lost its way.

(p. 1)

These questions and themes are central to our work, and the aspects of autoethnography that we would like to explore here. As James Baldwin reminds us, “We’ve got to be as clear-headed about human beings as possible, because we are still each other’s only hope” (Mead & Baldwin, 1972, p. 45).

Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/1999), we call ourselves betweeners: (un)conscious bodies experiencing life in and between two cultures (Diversi & Moreira, 2009). Betweener autoethnographies for us is about how we, two Third World scholars who work in First World universities, believe the postcolonial/decolonizing discourse can enhance the concepts of inclusive social justice through a form of autoethnography that keeps asking readers to seek our shared humanity in our shared experiences of being caught on the side of Them when we feel we are part of Us. We all share experiences of exclusion, feelings of sadness, anxiety, and fear of not belonging to a meaningful collective, of being on the “wrong” side of the tracks, even when mostly living a life of privilege. We try to write autoethnographies that explore the in-between spaces we inhabit as an invitation for others to find theirs.

We are inspired by Norman Denzin’s (2006) thoughts:

Ethnography is not an innocent practice. . . . Through our writing and our talking we enact the worlds we study . . . it challenges, contests or endorses the official, hegemonic ways of seeing and representing the other. . . . Critical pedagogy, folded into and through performance (auto) ethnography attempts to disrupt and deconstruct these cultural and methodological practices performatively in the name of a more just, democratic, and egalitarian society. Democracy-as-citizenship is radically performatively, dialogical, transgressive, pedagogical.

(p. 333)

We write performative texts that have developed out of our personal experiences in the places we live and labor, and our embodiment of theories and narratives of conscientization in academic spaces and everyday lives. We think of betweener autoethnographies as academic and pedagogical performances that come from our histories, our displacements, our chosen and yet not fully chosen diasporas. We write from our mutt, half-breed bodies, in an attempt to disrupt and challenge the intense Us versus Them paradigm created by colonization and its ideological foundation, an ideology of domination with clear winners over losers, takers over givers, colonizer over colonized, men over women, binary over gender and sexual fluidity, profit over people, European settler over everyone else, detached standpoints over personal storytelling.

And Diaspora always includes some kind of loss.

Blood and bodies

Home, land, identities . . .

Betweener autoethnographies are the result of our lives, our encounter with each other, our questions and dialogues about the role of public intellectuals, our own roles, in relation to systems of oppression that continue to marginalize humans in poverty, in deprivation, in lesser categories of Them.

Betweener autoethnographies are the performance texts we use to critique the disembodied ways in which oppression continues to be constructed as necessary to the maintenance of order and the status quo, as punishment for those with the “wrong” hair, skin color, sexual desire, and those with dreams of unconditional inclusion and love. We seek to learn from and to write autoethnographies that focus on the lived experiences happening in the spaces between Us and Them, between fixed identity categories, between linear narratives of being and the messiness and juxtapositions of being human, between being the good guys and being the bad guys, between having stamps of approval and not having such stamps, no matter how hard one tries. We seek autoethnographies that have a laser focus on how ideologies of domination always attempt—and often succeeding—to justify exclusionary narratives, policies, and praxis. To us, betweener autoethnographies have a direct and clear intent to write ourselves into history as a way of creating counter-hegemonic possibilities of a more just world.

And so, again, we keep asking and insisting, “How do we (you the reader and us) find our communalities in our daily lives?” We can only experience life
through our bodies. And all bodies exist on the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, histories, geographies, and the basic human emotions: fear, anger, sadness, joy. And so, we keep returning to our bodies, to our common hopes, to our intersections, to our in-between localities.

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A fellow graduate student once told me in 2001 that to have lived in a totalitarian regime must have been bad, but I should feel grateful about the USA’s role in the military coup in Brazil in 1964, because, otherwise, I would have lived in a communist country.

Thirty-plus years under dictatorship
No presidential elections
No elections of any kind
Both Houses closed! No Senate, no . . . anything but Torture
Brazilians disappearing

The “lucky ones” in exile. Paulo Freire wrote the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in Chile. And then, he went to exile again because of the Chilean military coup, with General Pinochet coming to power backed by the USA and Great Britain. Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, hell, most of Central and South American lands lined up in a domino effect of military coups orchestrated and supported by the self-proclaimed leaders of the free world.

USA politics of interventionism all over the globe
The “land of the free” creating chaos
Grateful?

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Can you feel it?
Here and now?
The past is always with us in the present.

***

Why, one may ask, are we obsessed with decreasing the distance between Us and Them?
Because it is harder to hurt one of Us.
Because, as we tell our students, if we don’t change our performances, we are going to kill each other and the planet, even without meaning to do so.
Because, as James Baldwin (Mead & Baldwin, 1972) kindly reminds us, we are each other’s only hope.

***

We have found ourselves in moments of hopelessness in recent times, since 2016, seeing the proverbial pendulum swinging hard toward a politics of exclusion at the expense of the humanity in the Other. Discourses of hate and violence are too common. And then the same haters go to church on Sunday and praise God, in many versions and languages and temples.

Yet we try to remember that hopelessness is hope that has lost its bearings (Freire, 1995/2004).

And we have found our bearings in Frederick Douglass’ narratives of “an American slave” (1845/2003). Douglass found a way to keep hope for justice and human rights while facing institutionalized slavery, while being a slave himself, while suffering and witnessing cruelty beyond anyone could imagine feeling in their own skins.

From my earliest recollection, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace; and in the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed not from me, but remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom.

(p. 39)

Institutionalized slavery! The very worse humans can do to each other, and yet so prevalent in our history.

Douglass’ words, and the countless Others he represents, whose stories have been buried in the bloodbath of colonization, renew our sense of hope, our understanding that we must resist because we don’t have other options. These words assure us that change is possible. Douglass’ personal narrative is our “ministering angels” cheering us through these gloomy times. And yes, we *All* need his spirit and angels ministering over Us all in this time of gloom. We don’t have obvious solutions or clear paths to solve the present-day Us versus Them gloom, but we can offer our own efforts to survive, to keep hope alive, through a persistent ideology of hope and kindness. Autoethnography can’t stop oppression and exclusion alone. But it can serve as an ontological, epistemological, and ethical compass in schools, colleges, arts, and inclusionary movements.

***

We grew up under the spell and inspiration of a song by Milton Nascimento, one of the most influential Brazilian musicians of the late twentieth century, speaking about the open wounds inflicted by the European
colonization of the Americas. The song roughly translates like this:

American heart
I woke up from a weird dream
A taste, of glass and blood
A flavor of chocolate
On the body and in the city
A taste of life and death.

The American heart that the music of Nascimento speaks about is not referring to a person born in the USA. The song was written in 1972, in the hard years of dictatorship in Brazil. The American heart in the song speaks of, and comes from, genocide, slavery, European Conquistadores, and the mestigam of all peoples in the Americas, and the oppression imposed by the politics of race, gender, nationality, the deep and seemingly immortal narrative of hate and violence in Brazil, and elsewhere in the continent.

It was a political moment, where composers, artists, public intellectuals, and activists were looking for a Latin American form of identity to challenge borders and totalitarian governments all over the continent, with the USA as an exception. The USA was, for the most part, the economic and political supporter for the dictatorships in the other American nations.

***

At a national conference, the performer enters the stage to present her ethnographic work with Asian women. The professor speaks in an accented voice . . . and yes, the professor is White and U.S. American, a native English speaker, pretending to be a Vietnamese woman.

A burst of bile erupts in my stomach; here we go again; I want to leave the room
I want to run
Every time we speak a word in English, the accent is my companion
Our accented tongues! Can’t make a word without it. Our accented tongues marking us as foreigner and seldom in a kind way
Not from here
Not good enough for teaching, as we were told in grad school
Marked criminals
Illegals
Or simply not good enough.

The question about the performer choosing to impersonate an accented other to improve the show is a question for another time. What we can tell you is that it is not helpful to break the fourth wall with these audience members. Quite the opposite, it created an extra wall, similar to the one the U.S. president wants to build on the U.S.–Mexico border.

In that moment we were marked . . . the other, the foreigner, one of THEM!
It is not a good time to be an alien in the land of the free
Why not mark our communalities instead of our differences?

Why did that White woman feel like speaking the autoethnographic stories her participants shared in a fake accent instead of speaking in her own language and from her own White body?

Who can speak for whom?
Under what circumstances?
Isn’t the fake accent like a soft version of Black-face theater?
Or brown face?
Or colored accents?

Why mark the difference in cultures and representational power through an impersonation of a participant’s accent speaking in English for the benefit of the U.S. American researcher, especially when trying to show methodological sympathy and connection with a woman from Vietnam?

Why not mark our communalities instead of perpetuating the myth of a romanticized notion of cultural purity?

Drop that fake accent and attempt to be a stand-in for the Other. Inclusive ethical autoethnography needs to avoid the benign White liberal impulse to “give” voice to the Other.

This fake accent performance reminds us of Third World feminists’ resistance against uncritical White feminists’ representation of those under additional oppression, what Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) coined as “intersectionality.”

As Rosa Villafane-Sisolak wrote decades ago:

I am from an island whose history is steeped in the abuses of Western imperialism, whose people still suffer the deformities caused by Euro-American colonialism, old and new. Unlike many third world liberationists, however, I cannot claim to be a descendent of any particular strain, noble or ignoble. I am, however, “purely bred,” descendent of all parties
involved in that cataclysmic epoch. I despair, for the various part of me cry out for retribution at having been brutally uprooted and transplanted to fulfill the profit-cry of “white” righteousness dominance. My soul moans that part of me that was destroyed by the callous instrument . . . the gun, the whip, the book. My mind echoes with the screams of disruption, desecration, destruction.

(quoted in Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xix)

Our betweener autoethnographies attempt to highlight our common hybrid humanity; our common human need for air, water, and food; our common hybrid human need to speak in our own voices, tongues, and accents.

***

Raíces de América, an influential musical group composed of musicians from several Latin American countries, from Brazil to Argentina to Chile, helped us understand the colonization of Latin America through vivid and powerful songs during our youth. A song that has since informed our understanding of betweener autoethnography is called Fruto do Suor, roughly translated into English as the Fruit of our Hard Labor.

The opening verse goes something like this:

The new land is a paradise,
High corn and pure rivers.
Gold sleeps while greed is still absent,
The native was the master of the continent.
The conquerors came,
Then the Africans and the adventurers.
The proud native mixed with the slave:
The birth of a new American kind.

Race
Gender
Nationality
Ethnicity, religion, to name a few
Markers of difference and oppression. Dividers of us and them

Doing autoethnography is more than a way of life, more than simply the way we labor and make a living, more than a career that exists in a separate compartment of our identities. We stand on the shoulders of many scholars who highlighted the indelible connection between self and ethnography, who wrote our earlier paths from ethnography to autoethnography (Denzin, 2003; Goodall, 2000, 2008; Vande Berg & Trujillo, 2008). Autoethnography is also an ontological experience and compass, a lifelong and everyday mission for more justice and dignity for more people, and not only the ones who look like us or believe in the same values (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, 2018). We don’t wear uniforms when we do our research. We attempt to rethink our masculinity and hybrid mutt bodies. We try daily to decolonize ourselves by (re)examining how live, how we learn, how we teach, how we write about our intersectionality and constant encounters with, and unwitting participation in, ideologies of domination.

After all,
In the American continent, we all share this bloody history,
Nobody is off the hook.
Can we dare say that, in this place we call Earth, we all share this bloody history?

***

“I don’t have anything against foreigners. You are my friend!”

Familiar, right?
The gay friend
The Black friend
The trans friend
The different friend
Sometimes we hear, “It’s not really that bad, your families are not being separated at the border”
Aren’t they?
Should we really embrace the persistent tribal idea to only take care of our own?

The escalation of Us versus Themism is in many places. It is in Brazil, where we grew up, in the USA, where we live and labor, in our South American neighbors, in Europe, Asia.

Xenophobia is everywhere.
The rise of the global right, founded on notions of purity of race, culture, religion, and traditional gender binaries, is unmistakable in the political success of parties with anti-immigration crusades.

For us, who experience life between Brazil and the USA, it broke our hearts to hear homophobic chants recorded in the Sao Paulo subway to celebrate the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president, a politician who, when speaking of a Black settlement founded by afro-Brazilians stated, “They do nothing. They are not even good for procreation” (Forrest, 2018).

We both heard the words “criminal aliens” in the 2020 U.S. State of Union speech and cringed at how that made us feel bad, attacked, defensive, Othered. We cringed at how carefully the U.S. President
enunciated those words of exclusion, marginalization, and demonization of new immigrants. The night that Trump awarded the right-wing talk-radio host Rush Limbaugh the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Trump honored a man who for decades has degraded women, made racist comments, and rewritten the history of slavery and the plight of Native Americans. In 2013, Limbaugh stated that White people shouldn’t be blamed for slavery. “It’s preposterous that Caucasians are blamed for slavery when they’ve done more to end it than any other race,” adding that “if any race of people should not have guilt about slavery, it’s Caucasians” (Relman, 2020).

“I wouldn’t rape you because you don’t deserve it,” said Bolsonaro in 2014, in response to remarks made by congresswoman Maria do Rosario claiming he had encouraged rape (Forrest, 2018).

“Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?” A phrase said by Trump in November 2018 in reference to immigrants from Haiti and African countries (Smith, 2019).

In an interview with Playboy in 2011 Bolsonaro said that he “would be incapable of loving a homosexual son…. I would prefer my son to die in an accident than show up with a mustachioed man” (Forrest, 2018).

“Why don’t they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came,” Trump wrote on Twitter attacking Democratic Representatives Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts—all women of color (Smith, 2019).

“The dictatorship’s mistake was to torture but not kill,” Bolsonaro told a radio interviewer in 2016 (Forrest, 2018).

This xenophobia and ideology of exclusion is directly connected to larger global trends of record-breaking numbers of people being displaced and forced into refugee existence. According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), the annual Global Trends Report—released on June 19 2019—nearly 70.8 million people were displaced at the end of 2018. Some 13.6 million people were newly displaced during the course of the year (UNHCR, 2019).

Yet, the dominant narrative linking civil war refugees with terrorist organizations, with fear-mongering stories of the Other, still persists. And how could it not?

“We need to take care of our own” they say.
And the “domestic criminals” continue to thrive.

***

We return again to the Fruto do Suor song, which was considered the anthem of belonging and identity by Latin American migrating to Brazil after the 1980s. The second verse goes something like this:

Profit created the need for passport and stamps.
Hate idly raised walls.
The bayonet drew borders.
Stupidity has separated us into flags.

From north to south, aren’t we all Americanos? Don’t we all share a history of the genocide of the natives and slavery, the hardships of colonization?
Aren’t we all human beings, with similar desires to have good lives in this planet?
Why can’t we re-create a new history? From North to South, West to East?

We need to strive for a world where we all can taste chocolate!

***

Somewhere else, we also have asked, “can one erase the oppression on the marked body?” (Diversi & Moreira, 2009)

Our answer back then was and still is no! We are not trying to erase oppression, the bloody history and genocides about how we got here.

Police brutality
The state-sponsored genocide of youth of color in the U.S. and abroad
But can we try to find ways for healing?
Can’t we offer education, and the thousands of students we have taught, hope?

Can we promote narratives of inclusion, always mindful of Freire’s idea that only the oppressed can liberate the oppressor?

As Anzaldúa taught us (1987/1999), we ask to be met halfway.

***

“What brought you here?”
“Work.”
“What do you do for a living?”
“I am a professor.”
Then...
“No shit, really?”

***

The beginning

We, Marcelo and Claudio, became friends in our teen years
We both share the same nationality
We both grew up under a dictatorship
We both never imagined that we would, one day, be professors in U.S. American universities

However, we experience life in the opposite sides of the social class spectrum. Yes, we share the core of our ontoeipistemological endeavors (Barad, 2003) to autoethnography, but the significant difference of our authorial situatedness has led us to distinguished epistemological and methodological positions (entrance points), especially at the beginning of our academic careers. We joke with each other that Claudio comes from the streets and Marcelo from the library. If we wished to be together, we have to learn to respect, to be compassionate with each other, to find our middle ground, and cross the borders of social class. In order to nurture and cultivate our friendship, we had to become border smugglers.

We should not have been friends and yet against all odds A maddening love has kept US together!

If you ask Claudio, he would tell you Marcelo saved his life. Okay, the rich helping the poor. If you ask Marcelo, his answer would be the same—Claudio saved his life. Both love, honor and respect each other in their differences.

We found our in-between spaces. We are betweeners. Border smugglers from an early age. We stuck with each other even when life took us in different paths. Two teenagers trying to find their way in an unjust world, trying to improve their lot, belong to greater causes, have meaningful lives. Trying to find each other’s humanity. We didn’t know how to name it back then. We both honored and trusted our visceral knowledge (Diversi & Moreira, 2013).

We both feed in music and poetry, especially in music and poetry from a time that every American nation below the equator was under a dictatorship. When two young people were learning how to live and yearning for a utopian reality full of hope and love. We both, from our different social classes, were able to make sense of our lives and found each other in friendship, in solidarity.

Okay, it’s not surprising that
We both prefer the taste of chocolate instead of the taste of life and death that Milton Nascimento sings about! Don’t you?
Early in love, later in theory, we found common meaning in our betweener identities, always living and performing from the borders we have crossed TOGETHER!

Performing autoethnographically helps us to move from the personal to the political, helps us address the question of how social life is structured in a way that shapes and promotes certain forms of oppression. From the personal to the political, from theory to practice, from biography to history, from classrooms to our lives, we try to find our locations in between, our betweener bodies, to perform our versions of Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of hope, trying to decrease the distance separating us and them. And so we sing along with our brothers and sisters from the Raíces de América:

I have a son in this land,
It was a love without passports.
If the gestation was Brazilian
Don’t call me a foreigner.
Every stone, every street has a touch of immigrants.
They constructed with their dreams
a country that has no owners. (Our own rough and approximate translation from Portuguese to English)

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

As we wrote elsewhere (Diversi & Moreira, 2018), what we have been calling “betweener autoethnography” comes from a long tradition of self-reflexive writing that explores personal experiences and how these experiences connect autobiography to history (Denzin, 1997), how personal experiences connect with wider cultural, political, and social understandings (Ellis, 2004).

Autoethnography, as a field of knowledge, already has several comprehensive accounts and histories, with its own Handbook of Autoethnography (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013), here in its second edition, and several volumes dedicated to its history and place in interpretative research (Denzin, 2003, 2013; Ellis, 2004; Spry, 2011, 2016), to practical applications and internal tensions between analytical and evocative forms of autoethnography (Bochner & Ellis, 2016), and extensive collections of topics and styles (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015). Betweener autoethnography, to us, another variation in this large and rich collection, with an emphasis on calling attention to the spaces in between Us/Them, a space where we can all exist in greater harmony, in the experiences of being neither Us or Them, or being both Us and Them, in the common human experience of finding ourselves on the “wrong side of the track” even when existing in more privileged intersectionalities.

***
Analua and Francisco, born in the USA from foreign parents . . .
Frutos do amor sem passaporte!

***

Performing autoethnographically for us forces the writer/researcher to place her/his/their body in to history, making it impossible for any of us to escape the crisis of representation and ideologies of domination we inhabit. It attempts to make the illusion of neutrality to be just that, an illusion.

We are always inspired by the border smugglers who came before.

In 1964 Brazil, only people who were able to write and read could vote. Can you see the danger in Paulo Freire teaching the oppressed how to read and write the world? Literacy itself was often denied from the oppressed. What are the possibilities of the personal narrative, of this theorizing of the body, the writer/researcher’s body, as a form of empowerment to denounce and critique oppressive systems against those enslaved and otherwise conquered, colonized, and historically dehumanized? Border smugglers, like Paulo Freire who was raised with privilege in masculinity and ethnicity yet crossed the borders of social class in order to promote conscientization among the oppressed, show us ways to resist and dismantle oppressive systems.

We believe that Frederick Douglass, through his three autobiographical narratives as a person who escaped slavery to become a leader of the abolition movement in the USA (Douglass, 1845, 1855, 1881), was an earlier autoethnographer before the name of autoethnography was created. He used his personal narrative to change history, to critique, trouble, resist, and challenge systems of oppression, while also making a call to liberation, freedom, emancipation, and, ultimately, reconciliation and social healing.

In our view, folks like Frederick Douglass were autoethnographers telling critical stories of oppression, hope against all odds, and liberation in 1800s North America. Paulo Freire, Eduardo Galeano (1997), liberation theologists from South America, Franz Fanon (1952/2008), Edward Said (1978, 1994), and Homi Bhabha (1994) were doing the same. And so were Third World and Black feminists like Audre Lorde (1983, 1984), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/1999), Zora Neale Hurston (1935), and bell hooks (1981) and many others around the globe. Oppressed people from different histories and geographies had been writing self-reflexive personal narratives as cultural critique long before autoethnography became a recognizable and distinct form of ethnography in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Western academia. To us, betweener autoethnography is a way to create bridges with the past, with the ancient struggles against oppression.

Our different bodies, from oppressor to oppressed, often somewhere in between, breaking the line between performance (the done, the text, the performance) and performativity (the doing, the performing, the here and now), in our bodies; the doing and the done colliding in the performer’s body, in the moment of our performances.¹

And again, we do this project TOGETHER, with each other, with those who came before us, with those who are here with us, with those who will come after us!

***

We are a country of immigrants
We live in a world of displacement
Marked bodies making knowledge
Visceral knowledge of oppression reducing the distance between us and them.

We claim that visceral knowledge has been kept at bay (when not completely denied) in the social sciences in the English-speaking world. We claim that the dominant discourse in academia is still colonized by the ontological dualism of logical-positivism (that is, idealism versus materialism, mind versus body, fact versus fiction, science versus arts). In both our experiences as scholars, we have witnessed an endless string of self-proclaimed resistance scholars declaring to value lived experience while in the same breath continuing to privilege theory over practice, Foucaultian analysis of power over pedestrian narratives of blood and profanity. We are here to spread our wings and add to the visceral knowledge on oppression that we see as scarce in the social sciences in general and the critical postcolonial inquiry in particular.

(Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 33)

And so, we return to one of the central questions of our betweener autoethnographies:

Can we erase the oppression in the marked body? Oppressed bodies don’t have old scars . . . we have open wounds
Deeply inspired by the words of Paula Gunn Allen:

“We survive war and conquest; we survive colonization, acculturation, assimilation; we survive beating, rape, starvation, mutilation, sterilization, abandonment, neglect, death of our children, our loved ones,
In essence, that’s why betweener autoethnographies appeal to us: When we are making our written/embodied performance autoethnographically, we are using our personal lived experience, from our betweener locations, as a source, from oppression to privilege, as a collective biography. While this method explores the singularity of the experience, when performed by oppressed bodies, it gives name “to experiences of many through the experience of one” (Jones, 1997, p. 51).

As young men growing up in Brazil and trying to understand how colonization created so much inequality, exclusion, and oppression, we found meaning and courage singing with Raíces de América. They sang about how sweat fertilizes the soil and the seed does not ask whether it is Brazilian or immigrant, only whether the fruit is important. Like them, we also didn’t feel foreign, for we challenge your invented geographies. Like them, we felt that we were all the same race, the same people. Like them, we felt like brothers to all in daily life. And we sang it loud and teary-eyed.

It is important to note that the group Raíces de América wasn’t referring to immigrants in the USA. The song was about immigrants from fellow Latin American countries in Brazil. It was denouncing the violence of slavery and the genocide of indigenous people (past and present). Such patterns of exclusion, mechanisms of division have been present from the beginning of our times. Some say it is “human nature.” While we understand Stuart Hall’s analysis of Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “the pessimism of the intellectual” (Jhally, 2016) we are also a believer of his construction of the “optimism of the will.” If what we experience is “man made,” and yes it has been mostly men describing and representing human experience across our history, we, together, can make, remake, create things differently.

But we can only do this together! “We are each other’s best hope”

Using our lives as source for our betweener autoethnographies (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2000), two persons who should not have been friends and yet who madly love each other, we continue striving for narratives that unite US! All of US! And there are plenty of such narratives in our history as humans.

Saving one life at time, even if it is our own at first
One millimeter at a time
One student at a time
Looking for a place that lets us hope. It may be our classrooms and other educational settings
Where differences are being, can be, negotiated
Power in many ways is re-created
As it has been through our work
By us and you … as collective
Only TOGETHER do we find liberation
By us and you as different individuals, with different bodies in history
Moving towards a shared goal of inclusionary narratives of social justice
And it does not mean without conflict and differences

What it means is to meet each other in the half-way place, and yes, understanding how power operates, including our own, always!

What kind of knowledge/reality will be the outcome of this utopian project? We don’t know. We haven’t been there yet. As Stuart Hall (1986) reminds us, it is a project “without guarantees,” but we viscerally know it is our only hope.

We viscerally, and historically, know the words of our song,
Profit created the need for passport and stamps,
Hate idly raised walls,
The bayonet drew borders,
Stupidity has separated us into flags.
Only TOGETHER,
All of us,
TOGETHER,
Do we arrive at utopia

We teach thousands, we attend conferences, we write books and papers. We write letters of recommendation and support our students and our colleagues. Marcelo and Claudio cannot use Freire’s concepts to only make a manuscript look nice.

We both believe in education, in our roles as public intellectuals (Said, 1994)
As teachers, citizens of this place we call Earth
A planet for all of us
Especially in times of despair
In times we find ourselves between
HELL AND NARRATIVE
We dare to hope
That is our mission, our job, every time we stand to teach a class

And so, we keep insisting in doing, living, teaching, writing, performing narratives of inclusion.

Inspired by our muse, We resist because we must There are no other options!

NOTE

1. Pollock (1998) stated that performativity “becomes the everyday practice of doing what is done.” (p. 43). Denzin (2003) wrote the line separating performance from performativity disappears, or at least is blurred, in the moment of the performance, that “an improvisatory politics of resistance is anchored in the spaces where the done and the doing collide” (p. 11).

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