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## International Graduate Students' Experiences with Race, Racial Identity, and Racialization at Home and in the United States: A Comparative Case Study

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INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH RACE,  
RACIAL IDENTITY, AND RACIALIZATION AT HOME AND IN THE UNITED  
STATES:  
A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

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## **Dedication**

To Daddy

*Though your body has taken flight, your inspiration remains with me.*

To Mama

*You are everything I aspire to become. You are my angel, and I owe it all to you.*

## **Acknowledgements**

Writing a dissertation is a labor of love, frustration, anxiety, elation, and exhaustion. Without an incredible support system, it would have been impossible for me to complete this work. I would like to thank my daddy, who inspired me to pursue a PhD to honor his memory. Above all, I thank my mama for being my strength, my heart, and my sounding board, and most of all, for her prayers.

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recognized and cultivated my strengths in “recognizing patterns in texts” before I fully realized my love for qualitative methods myself.

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## **Abstract**

As the number of students studying in the United States (U.S.) has risen, scholars have increasingly paid attention to multiple aspects of the international student experience. Despite the proliferation of studies addressing the topic of international students, few studies have explicitly addressed the ways in which international students' sense of identity may be complicated during their time living and studying in the U.S. Scholarly inquiries into how international students experience racialization and the American racial paradigm have been missing from the overall discourse around "the international student experience."

This dissertation study contributes to that discourse by examining international graduate students' experiences with race and racial identity in the United States. This study used a comparative case study methodology to examine the racialized experiences of five international graduate students at a university in the U.S. Southeast. The participants' home countries were Brazil, China, England, Nigeria, and Norway. Students' diverse experiences with race, racial identity, and racialization both at home and in the U.S. varied greatly depending upon the national context in which they grew up, their own social class, ethnic, and racial backgrounds, and the ways in which they have been racialized during their time in the U.S. The participants' narratives also highlight the complex interactions between race and place, both inside and outside of the United States. Furthermore, their narratives revealed that they perceived the significance of race in the United States to be heightened when compared to their home countries, and their

perspectives also converged around their observations the continued significance of race in U.S. life. The findings of the study challenge the notion that people fit neatly into hierarchies of racial identity development, particularly when the development of those models has been concentrated around fixed notions of blackness and whiteness. The participants' narratives suggest that faculty and staff pay particular attention to international students' social locations and prior experiences regarding race, social class, immigrant status, language use, and the norms of graduate learning.



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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*At home, people call me 'red man' if they look at the color of my skin, or 'half Chinese' - funny, they never mention what the other half is - if they look at my features; once, somebody even called me 'white boy,' which I am not. But in this land of overwhelming whiteness [the United States], because I was not white, I was automatically considered black... 'Black' was a device for them to simplify me, thereby subsuming both my individuality and ethnicity.*

~ Ian Sue Wing, International Student from Trinidad (Garrod & Davis, 1999)

Recently, Yue, who is one of my mentors, shared with me a very personal revelation. Yue is a Chinese woman who came to the United States over ten years ago to pursue a PhD and chose to stay here, becoming a U.S. citizen several years after graduating. Her background studying in Singapore, Germany, and the U.S. contributes to her characteristically fearless approach to every task she undertakes. About a year ago, Yue traveled to Hong Kong with several colleagues to do some accreditation work on one of the remote campuses of the university where they work. Her background (she is fluent in both Cantonese and English), combined with her competence and zeal for her work, made her the perfect choice for this assignment. Although the trip would take her away

from her family, Yue was thrilled at the prospect of spending some time in Hong Kong, serving a vital role as liaison between her Chinese and American colleagues.

The trip turned out to be discouraging, yet revelatory for her. Throughout her time in Hong Kong, she was disturbed by how her U.S. colleagues treated their Chinese counterparts and by how they treated her. Often, her Chinese colleagues' ideas were treated as trivial, or were pushed aside in favor of whatever the U.S. contingent felt was the proper course of action. When Yue went on social excursions with her U.S. colleagues, they ignored her insider knowledge, often treating her as though she was there only in the role of a translator. Feeling pushed to the margins, she found herself aligning with her Chinese colleagues, sitting next to them in meetings, working closely with them on projects, and spending time with them socially. Quite unexpectedly, her experience in Hong Kong shed light on disquieting experiences she has had throughout her time in the United States. Yue told me, "All this time, I've been thinking that there's something about *me* that people [White Americans] don't like. That they believe is a problem. In some ways, it hurt me more to realize that it's not something about me, it's something about *us*."

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

I open my dissertation with this story, and with Ian Sue Wing's quote, because I believe they demonstrate the ways in which dominant notions of race, ethnicity, and national identity in the United States get imposed on students who immigrate here, often in ways that may take years for them to grasp. My interest in international students' experiences with racialization in the United States was ignited by hearing about Yue's journey to Hong Kong and more importantly, how the experience had illuminated,

reframed, and *raced* some of her difficult personal and professional encounters in the United States. Indeed, throughout my time in graduate school, I have heard several of my close friends and colleagues, who are international students, wonder whether there was a connection between mistreatment they had experienced in various situations and their “ethnic appearance.”

Further, Yue’s story speaks to a gap in the literature around how international students come to understand how they are viewed through dominant social lenses in the United States in general, and through racialized lenses in particular. Yue’s story and Wing’s experiences demonstrate the ways in which a system of racial categorization gets imposed on international students in the United States. It is these kinds of stories that motivate this study, compelling me to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how race operates in the lives of international students in the U.S.

## **1.2 Background**

Students are migrating around the globe for higher education in increasingly large numbers, with more than 1.6 million students worldwide currently enrolled in institutions outside of their home countries. A large proportion of this migration has been in the direction of Europe and the United States. In fact, around 32% of all international students are studying in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2007). During the 2008-2009 school year, the number of international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities reached a record of 671,616 (Institute of International Education, 2009).

In recent years, international students in the U.S. have been the focus of much discussion in both popular media and the field of higher education. Though widely discussed, much of the discourse on and around international students has focused on the

economic benefits that the U.S. derives from student migration (Rhee & Sagaria, 2004), or on international students' process of acculturation in institutions of higher education (Church, 1982; Kono, 1999; Malarcher, 2004; Wang, 2004; Wang, 2009). Though public discourse around international students and their place in U.S. society has increased in the past decade, there has been little exploration of the potential shifts in identity that international students may experience during their time in the United States (Kaye, 2006; Park, 2006; Rhee & Sagaria, 2004). Despite a large number of studies on "the international student experience," few scholars have focused specifically on the ways in which international students may experience identity issues throughout their studies in the U.S.

One key aspect of international student identities that is likely to become complicated during their time here is their racial identity. Though it functions differently around the world, race is a powerful, global construct with political, economic, and cultural causes and consequences (Lake & Reynolds, 2008; Ong, 1999; Winant, 2001). The shifting dynamics of race are situated in continental, national, and local contexts (Mukhopadhyay, Moses, & Henze, 2007; Taylor, 2004). Globally, multiple physical markers associated with the notion of race (including the color of one's skin) serve as determinants of group belonging as well as one's social and economic location within societal structures.

Although race is a construct that operates globally, in many societies, it is not the primary way in which individuals and groups identify and organize themselves. Consequently, when international students arrive in the United States, the ways in which they understand and define themselves may not be primarily racial. Indeed, depending

on their own cultural contexts, students may forefront caste, religion, ethnicity, class, or nationality in their thinking about *who* they are. Though other elements of identity and belonging may be central to students' understandings of themselves, in the United States in general, and in the U.S. South in particular, race is often the primary organizer of identity, particularly for people of color. Thus, international students are likely to have racial categories imposed on them regardless of how they think of themselves.

While constructions of race in the United States are tied to global notions of the concept, scholars have argued that, in U.S. society, historical and contemporary constructions of race are rooted in a binary - one in which individuals are essentially regarded as either White or Black, or as White and Not White (Ong, 1999; Perea, 1997). This binary holds firm despite the fact that several different "races" have existed in North America since the arrival of Europeans in the 1400s. In addition to the indigenous natives who originally inhabited the land, the intervening centuries have witnessed countless groups immigrating to the continent, both voluntarily (e.g., waves of Irish, Italian, and Chinese immigrants) and involuntarily (e.g., Africans who were forced to come here through enslavement). As those groups have come here, racial categories have continually shifted - moving the boundaries of group belonging depending on the sociohistorical moment. As groups from around the globe continue to immigrate here, the lines of racial categorization continue to shift depending on a number of political, cultural, and social circumstances.

Consequently, the U.S. landscape upon which international students might experience their racial identity is complex and continuously changing. That landscape is one influenced by political, cultural, and social constructions of race (Omi & Winant,

1994; Taylor 2004), by processes of globalization and imperialism (Altbach, 1998; de Wit, 2002; Nayyar, 2008), and by the multiple contexts in which individuals experience their identities (Yuval-Davis, 1999). Most importantly, it is a landscape in which categorizing individuals based on their assumed race is a long-standing cultural practice. Racialization occurs when individuals and groups have racial labels and racial meaning imposed on them, often by external forces (Omi & Winant, 1994). This process is mediated by intra- and intercultural dynamics of gender, class, and nationality. Furthermore, it is a process highly influenced by local and global political discourses and relationships of dominance and subordination (Hill Collins, 2000).

It is upon this layered landscape that international students may find themselves within an American classroom, caught between a sense of marginalization and belonging, wondering where they fit in the tightly defined categories of U.S. identity. As the notion of race is deeply woven into the fabric of U.S. society, international students are likely to experience processes of racialization and racial identity construction via their interactions with individuals, communities, and institutions in the U.S. (Omi & Winant, 1994). Yet, as the research literature, as well as my personal experience demonstrates, international students may begin to realize that there is little room for them within the discourses on race in the United States and the Black/White binary. How, then, do these students make sense of their racialized experiences and their racial identity in a U.S. context in which race often seems to be the most important social identifier for non-Whites?

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

In his memoir, *The Accidental Asian*, Eric Liu (1998) reflects on his experiences growing up in the United States as the son of Chinese immigrants during the 1970s.

Liu's story highlights the realities of race in the United States outside of the dominant Black/White paradigm. Categorized by the vague and problematic label, "Asian American," Liu (1998) found himself questioning where he fit within the American racial landscape. Providing a partial answer to his struggles with his identity, he noted that "Asian Americans belong not to a race so much as a confederation, a big brown-and-yellow tent that covers a panoply of interests" (p. 73). As a person who does not fit into the often starkly defined racial categories in American society, Liu's struggle with his racialized self exemplifies the kinds of complex racial narratives I am interested in exploring.

In an effort to contribute to both the literature on, and the larger discourses within higher education regarding international students, this study draws broadly on theoretical concepts and perspectives taken up by critical scholars whose research examines notions of race, racialization, and the lived experience of race within the context of the global-local dialectic. The purpose of the study was to shed light on and critically examine international students' experiences with race in the United States. More specifically, using a case study approach, I explored international students' experiences with race, racial identity, and racialization, both in their home country and at a university in the U.S. South. Given that the primary way in which international students identify and define themselves may not "map on" to the notion of race as it is conceptualized in the U.S., the narrative focus of this study created space for the interrelated, but decidedly distinct concepts of ethnic and national identity to emerge. It is important to note here that I am fully aware of the way in which various other identities (e.g., social class, gender, or religion, etc.) intersect with race and give rise to particular experiences. Moreover, I



recognized that those identities might be central to how the students identify and define themselves. However, I chose to center race in an effort to interrogate the social constructedness of racial identity in varied contexts, and to examine the ways in which international students experience their identities in the context of U.S. society in general and U.S. university life in particular. To accomplish these intellectual goals, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Within the context of their home country, how do the narratives of international students reflect their experiences with race, racial identity, and/or racialization? What do their stories reveal about the ways in which they conceptualize those notions?
2. Within the context of the university in which they are currently enrolled (and its broader locale), how do the narratives of international students reflect their experiences with race, racial identity, and/or racialization? What do their stories reveal about the ways in which they conceptualize those notions?
3. In sharing their experiences with race, racial identity, and/or racialization, to what other aspects of their identity do they attribute significance? What is the nature of the intersection of these identities in their home countries and university contexts?

#### **1.4 Study Significance**

This study is significant for three primary reasons. First, the study contributes to gaps in the literature on international students by offering an analysis of the ways in which they orient to notions of race in the United States and how those orientations are informed by their socialized understandings of race, ethnicity, nationality, and other

aspects of identity in their home country. While researchers have examined myriad aspects of international students' identities, attention to race was acknowledged as a peripheral finding, rather than a central focus of interest (Diangelo, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Mwaura, 2008).

Second, this study offers in-depth case studies on international students from a variety of countries and continents, providing a diversity of perspectives from different social locations. To date, researchers have conducted in-depth studies of international students focusing on groups of students from one country or continent (Evivie, 2009; Malarcher, 2004; Mwaura, 2008; Nelson, 2008; Park, 2006; Rhee, 2006) or have focused on multiple students from multiple countries and social locations at a more superficial level (Church, 1982; Klineberg & Hull, 1979). Researchers have not, however, offered thorough comparisons of the experiences of students from a variety of national backgrounds.

Third, this study has the capacity to complicate U.S. racial paradigms and static theories of racial identity development, allowing for a fuller understanding of both how individuals experience the social constructedness of race, as well as how their experiences shed light on the limitations of U.S. racial categories. Thus far, studies examining racial identity have primarily focused on the extent to which individuals fit into static racial categories or have focused on the development of racial identity models that heavily reflect U.S. racial paradigms (Burrow & Ong, 2010; Carr & Caskie, 2010; Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell & Cross, 2010; Mercer & Cunningham, 2003). This study provides a space to explore and perhaps challenge existing notions of racial identity and belonging.

## 1.5 Definition of Terms

In this study, I draw on the following terms and definitions:

*Ethnicity*: A concept that refers to a sense of belonging to a group with a common national or cultural tradition (Omi & Winant, 1994).

*International students*: Students who are citizens of or grew up in a country other than the United States and are enrolled in a U.S. college or university.

*Nationality*: A concept that refers to a sense of belonging to a particular nation by origin, birth, or naturalization (Omi & Winant, 1994).

*Race*: A concept that is used to categorize human beings by attaching social meaning to individuals and groups based on physical characteristics (Gates, 2004; Omi & Winant, 1994; Taylor, 2004).

*Racial formation*: The historical and social process through which racial categories emerge and evolve (Omi & Winant, 1994).

*Racial identity*: The ways in which an individual perceives or experiences themselves racially (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999).

*Racialization*: The process through which individuals and groups have racial labels and racial meaning imposed on them externally (Omi & Winant, 1994).

*U.S. racial paradigm*: Prevalent racial landscape in the U.S. in which people are essentially categorized into White/Black or White/Non-White binary (Ong, 1999; Perea, 1997).

*Whiteness*: The concept that Whites and White cultural practices have been privileged and defined as normal. As such, whiteness has come to be

synonymous with being identified or categorized as American (U.S.) (Hartigan, 1999; Ong, 1999).

## **Chapter 2**

### **Conceptual Framework**

Drawing upon Maxwell's (2005) model for the conceptual framework of a research study, my study's framework consisted of three interrelated components: 1) the situated knowledge that I brought to the study (including assumptions that I hold based on personal, professional, and academic experiences), 2) the theoretical perspectives and concepts that informed how I approached the topic, and 3) existing research studies relevant to my focus. Together, these components provide a "conceptualization," or model of how I framed the phenomenon, and demonstrate the relationships between the various ideas and constructs that I explored in the study. Moreover, the framework helps to illuminate how I am positioning this research within an established arena of ideas and existing knowledge. Below, I provide a detailed explanation of each component of the framework.

#### **2.1 Situated Knowledge**

I entered graduate school seeking a degree in education research and measurement. Though I enjoyed my time studying in that area, I found myself drawn to the more critical, interpretive dialogues in which I engaged in a few of my elective courses. In particular, I found myself drawn in any time we discussed notions of social justice in education. When professors stumbled upon topics that questioned the very nature of schooling in our society, its deeper, unspoken purposes, and the relationships

between the messages transmitted in schools and dominant messages in society, I found myself both transfixed and ignited, and I began to envision my life's work.

This is how I was drawn into the Foundations of Education. My engagement with the interdisciplinary coursework in my doctoral program provided me with the theory and the data to support my critical perspectives. In my doctoral program, and in the projects on which I have worked with my advisor, we have focused intensely on the dynamic relationships among race, class, gender, and power in society and how they interact at every level of education from preschool through doctoral education (Bryan, Wilson, Lewis & Wills, 2012). Now, I bring these critical lenses to every topic with which I engage.

As a U.S.-born White woman who has never been an international student learning to live in a new national or cultural context, I have no experiential knowledge of precisely what it means to be an international student. Throughout my graduate school experience, however, I have studied and worked very closely with individuals who are, or were, international students. My extroversion and interest in learning about the experiences of those around me has led to some deeply impactful friendships with several of these individuals. In particular, there are two Chinese women with whom I have worked and shared close friendships for over five years. In addition to commiserating about demanding professors, unfair deadlines, or the ongoing struggle to balance academic and personal lives, we have seen each other through some very intense life challenges.

Throughout experiences both profound and mundane, we have had seemingly endless conversations about our cultural differences and similarities. We have laughed at

trivial differences, such as the preferred firmness of a mattress or what constitutes breakfast food, and we have grown more serious while discussing weightier, more fundamental differences related to child rearing practices or attitudes toward civic engagement and family relationships. One of these two women has a two-year old daughter who calls me “Auntie Ashlee.” During discussions with my friend about her daughter’s future, I find myself wondering what life will be like for her. In many ways, including legally, she is fully American, but she is also fully Chinese and likely to be regarded by many Americans as “Other.” As I reflect on what Liu (1999) shared of his experiences, I wonder if she always will be asked, “Where are you *really* from?” When she is asked this, it will be, in essence, a racialized inquiry. If her parents had been Polish or White Australian immigrants, she would be regarded as fully American and rarely, if ever, questioned about her “origins.”

Attempting to understand the experiences of my international student friends has brought together the personal and the academic. Over the past few years, I have found myself taking up critical lenses around race that I have encountered in my coursework and applying them to the experiences shared with me by the people who are important in my life. Interestingly, I found that the literature around race and racialized experience in the United States failed to reflect the experience of these international students. A closer examination of the literature around race, and around the experiences of international students, revealed space for a study that sought to develop an understanding of the racialized experiences of international students in the United States.

In addition to contributing to my interest in this particular topic, my academic experiences and coursework have significantly contributed to many of the assumptions

that informed this study. To understand how I oriented to this study and its topic, an explanation of the key assumptions, theoretical and otherwise that I brought to this research is required. The ideas that are most central to this study are: 1) race is a social construct that impacts how individuals experience the world; 2) while race is a concept that operates differently in different contexts, it is often, if not always, intimately tied to power; 3) notions of race in the United States are often restrictive and do not map on to notions of race, ethnicity, nationality or other aspects of identity that may be central to the lived experience of many international students, and consequently; 4) international students are likely to have racial categories with which they do not identify imposed on them during their time in the U.S. Finally, I believe that the lives of international students play out through a dialectic relationship between global contexts and local particularities. This study aimed to capture that global-local dialectic as it manifests in the experiences of these students.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.2.1 Critical theory.**

As a broad theoretical paradigm that has often been at the forefront of theorizing race and of arguing for the significance of race in structuring lived experience, this study of international students' experiences with race in the United States is grounded in and informed by aspects of critical theory. Several assumptions about race at the very core of this study extend from the work of critical theorists. First, critical theorists were among the first scholars to assert that race is an aspect of social life that matters on a global scale (Feagin & Hahn, 1973). Critical theory also argues that how people are identified racially impacts how they experience the world. Finally, critical theorists have focused



on the dialectics among race, power, and structures, and their work often demonstrates how those factors influence students' sense of agency, as well as their experiences with race on a global scale (Feagin & Hahn, 1973; Feagin & Sikes, 1994). Agger (1998) reminds us that critical social theories assume that "people's everyday lives are affected by larger social institutions such as politics, economics, culture, discourse, gender, and race" (p. 4). Importantly, theories such as Critical Race Theory, which centralize the role of race in society and in the lives of individuals, are direct extensions of critical theoretical perspectives.

### **2.2.2 Global theoretical perspectives.**

Because international students' experiences take place on a landscape of global power dynamics, it is useful to consider global theoretical perspectives that provide context for the ways in which students might experience race and racialization in the context of the United States in general, and at an American university in particular. One theory of global power that informed this study is dependency theory, which focuses on the global movement of policies and discourses, with some countries (i.e. "the core") exerting influence over other countries (i.e. "the periphery") (Wallerstein, 2006). Viewed through the lens of dependency theory, the U.S. serves as a core country (perhaps *the* core country) in the world system. This role carries over into the domain of the university. In their role at the core, U.S. institutions of higher education exert power over higher education policies and practices around the globe (Altbach, 1998). Globally, the strongest flow of students "has almost entirely been Third World people studying in and often remaining in the First World" (Rhee & Sagaria, 2004, p. 80), a situation which

contributes to brain drain and further global imbalance. Consequently, unequal power relations define the context and experiences of international students in the U.S.

An appreciation for the dialectic relationship between global power relations and local particularities is central to understanding international students' experiences with race in the United States. The global-local dialectic refers to the multiple ways in which global trends and policies play out dynamically within local contexts (Arnové, 2007).

Arnové (2007) warns that “common prescriptions and transnational forces...are not uniformly implemented or unquestionably received” (p. 2). Rather, he remarks that:

There is a dialectic at work by which these global processes interact with national and local actors and contexts to be modified and, in some cases, transformed. There is a process of give-and-take, an exchange by which international trends are reshaped to local ends (p. 2).

I view the global-local dialectic as vital to this study because it is within the complex global forces shaping student migration and dominant constructions of race that international students experience the local realities of U.S. higher education

### **2.2.3 Relevant racial concepts.**

For the purposes of this study, I drew from Taylor's (2004) definition of *race*, which highlights both the social constructedness as well as the embodied aspects of race. He defines race as “a way of assigning generic meaning to human bodies and bloodlines” (p. 15). Similarly, Omi and Winant (1994) offer the following definition of race: “A concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (p. 55). This definition of race challenges the tendency to dichotomize thinking of race as “an *essence*, as something fixed, concrete, and

objective” and thinking of it as “a mere *illusion*, a purely ideological construct which some ideal non-racist social order would eliminate” (p. 54). I draw upon these definitions of race because they acknowledge that racial categorizations and meanings are made based on the physical body, but I would extend those definitions by incorporating a perspective that is attentive to the arbitrary nature of those categorizations.

Recognizing the socially constructed nature of race, Gates (2004) remarks that race “pretends to be an objective term of classification, when in fact it is a dangerous trope” (p. 516). Further, he argues that despite the arbitrary application of racial categories, “race has become a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific belief systems” (p. 516). I would combine an understanding of race as a social category that is marked on the body (Omi & Winant, 1994; Taylor, 2004) with a sense of caution about the dangerous consequences of treating race as a concrete category (Gates, 2004). Consequently, I define race as a concept that is used to categorize human beings by attaching social meaning to individuals and groups based on physical characteristics.

This study is further informed by Omi and Winant’s (1994) notion of *racial formation*, which they define as, “the socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p. 55). In this view, race and the social meaning attached to race, are continually evolving in various ways across diverse contexts. Thus, the notion of racial formation “emphasizes the social nature of race, the absence of essential racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, the conflictual character of race at both the ‘micro-‘ and ‘macro-social’ levels,

and the irreducible political aspect of racial dynamics” (p. 4). Viewed from a racial formation perspective, both social structure and culture are central to understanding race.

For this study, I took up their understanding of race as being physically, socio-politically, and culturally constituted. These multiple constitutions of race occur through the process of *racialization*, which is defined as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group. Racialization is an ideological process, an historically specific one” (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 64). This definition sheds light on the ways in which individuals can have new racial labels and meanings imposed on them externally depending on the given moment in history and their given context. The notion of racialization has great implications for international students’ experiences with race, as many could find themselves subjected to a racial paradigm with which they may not identify, nor understand.

In explaining the *U.S. racial paradigm*, Ong (1999) argues that in U.S. society, race is a primarily binary construction, in which individuals are “White/Black” or “White/Non-White.” Similarly, Perea (1997) contends that the White/Black binary paradigm is “the most pervasive and powerful paradigm of race in the United States” (p. 133). Further, Perea (1997) defines the binary paradigm as “the conception that race in America consists, either exclusively or primarily, of only two constituent racial groups, the Black and the White” (p. 133). Scholars have argued that the binary racial paradigm limits racial discourse and understanding (Perea, 1997). In a similar vein, Omi and Winant (1994) argue that race has often been treated in a reductionist manner that fails to embrace the complexities of racial categorization and identification.

Following a substantial increase in the Latina/o population in the U.S. in the past 25 years, scholarship has increasingly addressed the racialized experiences of Latina/os in the U.S., challenging the dominant racial discourse around binary notions of Black and White (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, Ceja, Smith & Solorzano, 2009). Although academic discourses have expanded to include the racialized experiences of Latina/os and groups such as Native Americans (Brayboy, 2005) and Asian Americans (Chang, 1993), I would argue that much of the popular discourse remains centered on the normative “White” and the racialized “Other.” Thus, this study was grounded in an understanding that the binary paradigm remains prevalent in the U.S., and that the paradigm structures the lives of people of color. Therefore, more complex understandings of race, such as those I have adopted for this study (Gates 2004; Omi & Winant, 1994; Taylor, 2004) are necessary to understand the racialized experiences of international students.

A discussion of the U.S. binary racial paradigm is incomplete without an understanding of the central role of *whiteness* on the U.S. racial landscape. Scholars have argued that White identity has grown from centuries of racial struggles that have defined U.S. identity as White and have made the “color line” between Black and White the fundamental division in U.S. society (Du Bois, 1903/2003; Lake & Reynolds, 2008; Omi & Winant, 1994). Ladson-Billings (2004) argues that, in the United States, whiteness is the “criterion for citizenship” (p. 109), and she traces this practice from the nation’s earliest days, in which both the Constitution and the *Federalist Papers* defined citizens as White, propertied males to immigration policies up until the 1950s which explicitly labeled immigrants as “White” if they were to be granted citizenship and “not White” if

they were excluded from American citizenship. Hartigan (1999) argues that the project of defining and naming whiteness is vital because an understanding of Whites as race-neutral has furthered White racial domination, and has defined White cultural practices as normative - the standard to which all other racial groups are compared under the U.S. racial system.

Ong (1999) also discusses the interconnectedness of whiteness and U.S. identity. She notes “attaining success through self-reliant struggle, while not inherently limited to any cultural group, is a process of self-development that in Western democracies becomes inseparable from the process of ‘whitening’” (Ong, 1999, p. 266). The conflation of whiteness, citizenship, and class is demonstrated in the ways in which Irish immigrants and Southern European immigrants were once constructed as “not White” due to their class locations (Ong, 1999). Likewise, immigrants today, including international students, are subjected to such processes in which they are ordered “along a White-Black continuum” (Ong, 1999, p. 267). I have chosen the preceding definitions and understandings of race, racial formation, racialization, the U.S. binary racial paradigm, and whiteness to inform this study because they highlight the ways in which American conceptualizations of race simultaneously inhabit a space of reality and illusion in a way that equates U.S. identity with whiteness and does not necessarily translate globally. Since many international students may not find themselves represented in the U.S. racial landscape (Garrod & Davis, 1999), this study provided an opportunity to interrogate the social constructedness of race and how it plays out in the lives of these students. My intent was to shed light on both the socially constructed nature of race and the material realities in students’ lives that result from those social constructions.

#### **2.2.4 Global perspectives on race.**

The ways in which race and racial identity are constructed differently in different regional, national, and local contexts can be understood through a consideration of several specific examples of how race does or does not shape life in varied national contexts. On a global scale, projects to classify and stratify people racially have been shaped over time through national/local contexts (Mukhopadhyay, Henze & Moses 2007), European colonization (Fanon, 1963; Lake & Reynolds, 2008; Winant, 2001), global capitalism (Macedo & Guonari, 2006), and a myriad of other forces, many of which remain mysterious (Frederickson, 2002). Winant (2001) connects race (as it is understood today) with the global transformations of modernity, arguing that “race must be grasped as a fundamental condition of individual and collective identity, a permanent, although tremendously flexible, dimension of the modern global social structure” (p. 3).

As Mukhopadhyay, Henze & Moses (2007) point out, physical characteristics are not always considered an important basis for classification. They note that, “In Latin America and the Caribbean, even today, most indigenous groups use linguistic and cultural features for social classification rather than visible traits” (p. 146). They also note that, in addition to the caste system in India, a major basis for significant social divisions are “language or language-related cultural forms” (p. 146), and they note that ties related to linguistic similarity often intersect with other significant aspects of identity, such as religion. Continuing the theme that ideologies can be similar to race without being the same as race, Mukhopadhyay et al. (2007) provide an example from Japan. While Japan often claims racial homogeneity, a group called the Burakumin are “a significant minority, anthropologically speaking” (p. 150). Although the Burakumin are

physically and genetically indistinguishable from mainstream Japanese, they are considered, in Japan, as “innately physically and morally different and inferior to mainstream Japanese” (p. 150), and are thus relegated to the margins of society.

Another national example is South Africa. Winant (2001) contends that South Africa and its system of apartheid “has been emblematic of (and deeply implicated in) the construction of racial modernity” (p. 178). South Africa’s system of apartheid was legally sanctioned in 1948, with a rigid system in which individuals were classified as Black, White, Indian, or Coloured (Winant, 2001). Though all groups who were non-White were subordinated, their status within that system of subordination was determined by racial category. Racial classifications determined nearly every aspect of individuals’ lives from the kind of work they did to where they lived to where they shopped and sent their children to school. As was the case with racial segregation in the United States, the facilities and services provided to various groups were far from equal.

While South Africa has been deemed worldwide as a primary example of the damage done by rigid systems of racial hierarchy, Brazil is often heralded as having one of the most racially democratic and complex societies in the world. Winant (2001) describes the racial order in Brazil as a “tenacious color continuum, with ‘microsocial imbrications’” (pp. 220-221). He notes the Brazilian anthropologist Freyre’s work, which he described as celebrating hybridity and rejecting the sharp racial binaries embraced in other nations (Winant, 2001). Brazilian understandings of race are often contrasted with the inflexible color line in the United States, although Winant (2001) points out that the racial inequalities experienced by Brazilians of African descent is often overlooked. Despite the absence of strict, formal racial categorizations in Brazil, Winant



(2001) argues that “informal mechanisms of racial exclusion and stratification have remained strong” (p. 219). More recent work has discussed, at length, the growing movement toward racial awareness in Brazil driven by attention to the inequities that exist despite a formalized racial system (Daniel, 2006).

### **2.2.5 Racial identity.**

Acknowledging the difficulty and complexity of defining race around the globe, Chavez & Guido-Dibrito (1999) offer a broad understanding of racial identity. They argue that racial identity and its close but not identical counterpart, ethnic identity, are “critical parts of the overall framework of individual and collective identity” (p. 39). They assert that “ethnic and racial identity development models provide a theoretical structure for understanding individuals’ negotiation of their own and other cultures” (p. 41). Further, they state that connections based on racial and/or ethnic identity “allow individuals to make sense of the world around them and to find pride in who they are” (p. 41).

Much of the theoretical work on racial identity in the U.S. is focused on a model-based framework, presupposing that individuals move through stages of development if provided an opportunity to grow into their racial identity. Helms (1993) is one of the most prominent and well-cited theorists of racial identity. She has offered two major racial identity development models: a White racial identity model and a Black racial identity model. Each model offers a progressive movement through stages of identity, with the highest stage being an individual who is aware of racial inequality but is not paralyzed by or resistant to the existence of those inequalities (Helms, 1993). A prominent model of racial identity predating that of Helms is Cross (1978). Cross’s

model (1978) of Black identity development asserted that if one accepted one's identity as Black, it would have an overall positive influence on a person's mental health. Racial identity theorists following Cross have followed in this assumption.

Although others models of identity outside of the Black/White paradigm have been developed (see Kim, 1981; Ruiz, 1990), they have been peripheral to the overall conversation about racial identity in the U.S. In the cases of both Kim's (1981) and Ruiz's (1990) work, both Latino American and Asian American identities are defined almost exclusively in terms of the extent to which one identifies with White culture. The more prominent models, particularly those introduced by Helms (1993) and by Cross (1978), are very much based around the U.S. binary racial paradigm. Since race is one of the primary structures that shape life in the U.S., this means that many who study or immigrate to the U.S., as well as many U.S. citizens, have been almost completely left out of discourses around racial identity. Further, theories of racial identity tend to focus on static notions of race, allowing little to no room for nuance in understanding how individuals understand themselves racially.

### **2.2.6 Summary of theoretical concepts**

The theoretical framework for this study includes perspectives that interrogate global systems of power and privilege. The broad umbrella of critical theory informed my thinking about systems of power as they relate to participants' experiences with race, racial identity, and racialization. The racial theories that I take up in this study acknowledge the processes through which race is discursively constructed based on physical differences, and the notion of racial formation provides a framework for identifying some of the processes through which international students experience race in

both their home countries and the U.S. Furthermore, understandings of the binary nature of the U.S. racial paradigm, the privileged position occupied by whiteness, and the complex nature of racial identity are essential for making meaning of how international students are racialized in the United States. Finally, theories that explain global power relations provide context for thinking about the U.S. as a site that produces dominant discourses and policies around race and difference.

The theories explored here are those that helped in the framing and planning of the study by informing how I orient to race, racialization, and racial identity in the experiences of international students. Furthermore, they helped me to position international students within broader discourses around how U.S. universities operate as part of a system of global power relations. While I remain attentive to the theoretical perspectives that helped with the initial framing of the study, a related set of theories and concepts around race and the production of difference emerged from and helped me to make sense of the narratives that participants shared.

### **2.3 Review of Related Studies**

In order to contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which the international student experience is shaped by the U.S. racial paradigm, this study is situated within several areas of academic literature. Importantly, the study both adds to and extends the literature on international students' experiences in the United States. It also is informed by and speaks to studies on racial identity within the U.S. racial paradigm. Further, the study draws upon work that examines the racialized experiences of individuals, both within and outside of the U.S., who do not fit within the binary racial paradigm.

### **2.3.1 The International Student Experience**

The body of literature on international students who have come to the United States for higher education is vast, exploring multiple elements of the international student experience from a number of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. Yet, despite this substantial body of existing literature, a focused examination of the literature on the international student experience generally, and the ways in which U.S. concepts of race and ethnicity impact international students' experiences in the United States specifically, demonstrated the need for this study.

Studies on international students' experiences in the United States have been conducted in numerous fields, including counseling (Hijazi, Tavakoli, Slavin-Spenny & Lumley, 2011); education (Nelson, 2008; Park, 2006; Rhee, 2006; Tsai, 2009; Wang, 2004; Wang, 2009); higher education (Diangelo, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007); adult education (Erichsen, 2009; Mwaura, 2008); educational leadership (Evivie, 2009); curriculum and instruction (Dumbuya, 2000); communications (Kaye, 2006); psychology (Church, 1982); geography (Collins, 2006); and theatre (Skeiker, 2009). In addition to covering a broad array of academic disciplines, studies also have examined the experiences of international students from a number of perspectives. Studies have focused on the concepts of acculturation or cultural adaptation (Church, 1982; Kono, 1999; Wang, 2004; Wang, 2009); transformative learning (Erichsen, 2009), coping strategies for intercultural adaptation (Evivie, 2009), cross-cultural communication (Kaye, 2006), and sociocultural learning (Malarcher, 2004). These bodies of literature seem to reflect some consensus on the importance of spoken and written English fluency, financial security, and strong social networks for a thriving transition to life as a student

in a U.S. university (Church, 1982; Dumbuya, 2000; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Kono, 1999; Wang, 2004; Wang, 2009). However, despite the prolific research around international students, only a few studies have explicitly examined notions of race, ethnicity, nationality, or other salient notions of identity and belonging and their impact on the lives of international students.

Rhee (2006) looked specifically at the narratives of Korean women in U.S. higher education. In her study, she wove her own experience as a Korean woman in higher education with the narratives of two other Korean women who traveled to the U.S. for graduate school. In considering the value of combining her narrative with that of the two other women, she remarked:

Through the narratives of these two women, I was able to re/member the social, cultural and historical contexts in which I became a Korean woman in US higher education. In this way, I argue that this study makes up our singular and collective voices through autoethnographical writing in a different hue (p. 599).

Her analysis covered both her own and the other women's perspectives, including their encounters with U.S. imagery and power in Korea, and their narrations of how they arrived in their current locations within the U.S. higher education system. In those narrations, Kyungmi, a doctoral student in chemistry, found herself drawn into a large community of Asians and Asian Americans. This experience, according to Rhee "engendered [Kyungmi's] new identity as a person of color who shared common (cultural) experiences and histories with other communities of color" (p. 606). Rhee concluded her exploration by arguing that scholars of international and higher education,

“must learn how to theorize and work through the contradictory workings of colonized memories, nationalized, racialized, gendered and classed realities” (p. 610).

Lee and Rice (2007) interviewed 24 international students from 15 countries about their experiences with discrimination and cultural intolerance in the United States. They placed their analysis under the framework of “neo-racism,” attributing students’ discriminatory experiences not to matters of cultural adjustment, but rather, “inadequacies within the host society” (p. 381). Consistent with the U.S. binary racial paradigm, they found a clear “divide in the experiences of White international students and those of color” (p. 393). Students of color consistently reported feeling that they had experienced discrimination and often attributed that discrimination to race. In particular, students from especially politicized regions like Latin America or the Middle East experienced the greatest discrimination. Lee and Rice’s work demonstrates both the salience of the U.S. racial binary and of global political and public discourses on the lives of individual international students.

Another study focusing on notions around race and power on a U.S. college campus is Diangelo’s (2006) work in a graduate level research methods course. More than one-third of students enrolled in this particular course were international students, and about 50 percent of the class consisted of either Asian American or Asian international students. The researcher observed a session of the three-hour research course near the end of the semester and performed a poststructural analysis on the ways in which whiteness operated during the class session by examining speaking patterns and group dynamics during the class. Through the analysis of patterns of interaction, Diangelo found that the White students in the class essentially controlled the classroom

space and set the course for discussions. Further, the researcher found that the course instructor and the guest lecturer in the course affirmed the perspectives of White students and made little to no effort to encourage and reinforce the international students of color. In fact, Diangelo argued that, within the classroom space, “Whiteness also provided a framework within which the voices and perspectives of the international students were deemed irrelevant. I contend that if those perspectives had been seen as valuable, they would have been sought” (p. 1997).

One study of international students with findings explicitly linked to students’ experiences of race in the United States is Mwaura’s work (2008) with Black African international adult students. In this study, the researcher employed a phenomenological approach to interview 13 students from eight African nations (including Kenya, Botswana, Tanzania, Liberia, Ghana, Uganda, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe) about their lived experiences in the U.S. around cultural issues, academic issues, and around how they adjusted to attending a predominantly White institution (PWI). Participants also participated in a focus group through which, the researcher contended, “new meanings were derived out of this social interaction” (p. 139).

Within the space of the PWI, Mwaura (2008) found that students’ racialized experiences were related to 1) becoming aware of one’s skin color, 2) perceiving differential treatment, and 3) distrust and cultural insensitivity. Students were often mistaken as African American. Mwaura (2008) noted that students’ “realization that they were ‘Black’ and a ‘minority’ took place when they enrolled into predominantly White educational institutions” (p. 208). In fact, many of these students had little to no awareness of race or racial identity prior to coming to the U.S. because of the largely

racially homogeneous populations of their home countries. Only through their time spent at a U.S. did these students become aware of and begin to live the experience of “being Black” (p. 207).

Few studies of international students focus on the ways in which the multiple, complex, and overlapping identities of international students shift and change during their time in the United States. This study relates most closely to work which focuses on the ways in which individuals experience varied aspects of their identity differently in a new context. The specific focus of this study, however, was on race, racial identity, and racialization rather than on broader terms, and it addressed the experiences of students from multiple regions of the world.

### **2.3.2 Studies of Racial Identity in the United States**

In large part, the body of literature on racial identity reflects the problematic tendency for racial identity theories to focus on measurable, fixed notions of race (Cross, 1978; Helms, 1993). A review of these studies demonstrates that, although they do reveal much about race in the U.S., they assume a linear development of racial identity, primarily based around the U.S. racial paradigm (Burrow & Ong, 2010; Carr & Caskie, 2010; Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell & Cross, 2010; Mercer & Cunningham, 2003). Therefore, they do not allow space for complication or nuance in understanding racialized experience.

In a study conducted by Burrow & Ong (2010) on African American doctoral students experiences, the researchers clearly shared my understanding of race as a nuanced and complex notion; in fact, they asserted that they understood racial identity as “a multifaceted construct that frames the significance and meaning individuals place on



their race” (p. 385). Their research, however, was still based on model-oriented notions of racial identity. For their study, they gathered data from a sample of 174 African Americans who were either current doctoral students or recent graduates of doctoral programs. The framework through which they conceptualized race consisted of four dimensions of racial identity: centrality, regard, ideology, and salience. Importantly, centrality is defined as “the extent to which race is a principal component of one’s identity” (p. 385). Participants in this study completed a Black identity inventory instrument at the study’s onset and, for 14 consecutive days, they completed a variety of measurements intended to capture daily stressors, as well as their perceived daily exposure to racial discrimination. These researchers found that those doctoral students who reported race as central to their sense of self were also more likely to report that they had experienced racial discrimination and resulting psychological distress.

Scholars have also begun to theorize aspects of White racial identity, though still with a heavy focus on static models of identity development. Mercer & Cunningham (2003) noted that “the study of racial identity in college students is growing in importance in the U.S. where demographics indicate an increasingly racially diverse population” (p. 217). Their study of 430 White college students was primarily concerned with investigating the strength and meaningfulness of the White Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (WRIAS). Through principal components analysis, they found that the WRIAS measures four dimensions of White identity. Of those four dimensions, two (i.e., Racial Diversity and Perceived Cross Racial Competence and Comfort) related to a positive White identity, while two others (White Superiority/Segregationist Ideology and Reactive Racial Dissonance) related to negative White identity. In closing, they recommended a

multifaceted approach to developing theories of White identity development. Yet, the approaches they recommended were based primarily around developing measurable models, rather than exploring individuals' lived experiences of race based on the categories imposed on them.

Despite the number of studies that have examined racial identity in the United States (primarily adhering to static, Black/White binary models of racial identity development using measurable concepts) few studies have examined the experiences of young people in the U.S. who do not fit within the Black/White binary racial paradigm, nor have they explored notions of racial identity as they pertain to individuals who have had racial categories and labels forced upon them or explored how they experience the world as a result of those imposed identities. In my review of studies, I found few studies of racial identity that went beyond the binary White/Non-White racial paradigm in the United States. One such study was Min & Kim's (2000) study of ethnic and racial identity formation narratives for Asian Americans. In the study, the researchers asked 15 young professionals to write narratives around their experiences with their ethnicity focusing on: "1) experiences of prejudice and discrimination, 2) retention of ethnic culture, 3) ethnic vs. non-ethnic friendships, and; 4) ethnic and pan-ethnic identities" (p. 738). The participants' narratives in the study revealed that they often experienced painful processes of socialization into their identities as "ethnic," beginning in their childhood with cruel, clearly racially-biased taunting. Often, it was through these very experiences that these young professionals began to develop a sense that they were being racialized as "Asian" outside of their particular national or ethnic group. The most salient finding in this study revolved around the participants' struggles to "come to terms

with their ethnic and racial identities” (p. 750). While the study’s authors focused most explicitly on ethnic, rather than racial identity, their work reveals much about the perpetual otherness experienced by those not fitting within the U.S. racial paradigm. They note that many of the essayists in their study attempted, as young adolescents, to reject their identities as non-White, but that, as they grew and encountered the ways in which others perceived them, many “realized that they could not dismiss their differences, particularly their non-White, physical differences. Growing up, these young people became increasingly aware that, regardless of their efforts, they would not be accepted as completely ‘American’” (p. 751).

Studies of racial identity focusing on Asian Americans, Latino Americans, and other groups of U.S. citizens who do not fit within the binary racial paradigm in the U.S. provide important perspective for understanding the racialized experiences of international students. But what about those students who travel to the United States for higher education, having never been socialized into that racial paradigm? This study provides a missing perspective on the experiences of individuals who reside in the United States, but who do not fit into those categories because of their skin color and/or national origin.

### **2.3.3 Summary of Related Studies**

To date, studies of international students in the U.S. have covered many aspects of their experiences. Those studies suggest that international students face a myriad of challenges in adjusting to life in the U.S. Importantly, the literature reviewed suggests that students’ experiences in the U.S. vary depending on how they are racialized, classified, and positioned based on broader political discourses, such as those around

immigration or terrorism. The current literature has not, however, contributed to an understanding of how international students in the U.S. experience processes of racialization. Furthermore, the literature has not offered insights into the ways in which international students' understandings of those racialization processes are informed by their experiences in and the historical contexts of their home country. This study contributes to those discourses by explicitly focusing on international students' experiences with and perspectives around race, racial identity, and racialization both in their home countries and in the U.S.

Studies of racial identity have shown that developing a strong, positive association with one's racial background can lead to the development of critical consciousness around race. The literature around racial identity, while plentiful, has predominantly focused on model-based frameworks that treat racial identity as static and uncomplicated. Indeed, this literature rarely examines the racial identities of people who do not fit into the particular paradigms of race that are foregrounded in the U.S., nor does it interrogate the extent to which racial identity is emphasized or ignored in non-U.S. contexts. This study broadens discourses around racial identity by engaging international students from a variety of national backgrounds in discourse about their own racial identity and their experiences with processes of racialization across the contexts of their home country and the U.S.

In this chapter, I detailed the conceptual framework for this study. That framework includes the situated knowledge that brought me to this study, the critical, racial, and global theories that frame the study, and a summary of some of the bodies of literature to which this study contributes. In the next chapter, I describe the study's

methodology. The study methodology includes my epistemological orientations, an introduction to the study participants and context of the study, the processes through which I collected data for the study, and methods I used to analyze, make meaning of, and represent the data.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Methodological Orientation**

Though I regard multiple methods of inquiry as capable of offering substantial contributions to the production of knowledge, I find myself orienting toward research problems that lend themselves to qualitative inquiry. Particularly, I find qualitative methods of inquiry most appropriate when considering the multifaceted nature of human experience and when exploring the complex interactions among culture, behavior, and aspects of individual and collective identity in society. As Richardson & St Pierre (2005) remind us, “Qualitative work carries its meaning in its entire text” (p. 961).

Of particular relevance to this study, Denzin & Lincoln (2005) argue that, currently, we are in a moment within qualitative inquiry in which “the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community” (p. 3). The kinds of critical conversations Denzin and Lincoln (2005) hope for encompass many of the themes related to the racialized experiences of international students. Indeed the complex interactions between race and gender, class, nation, religion, region, and community, are precisely what this study explored. Thus, I chose qualitative methods of inquiry to explore international graduate students’ experiences with race, racial identity, and racialization in the United States.

Glesne (2006) uses the term “qualitative” to “refer to practices that seek to interpret people’s constructions of reality and identify patterns in their perspectives and behaviors” (p. 9). It is precisely toward those ends that I chose qualitative methodologies to explore international students’ experiences with race in the United States. Maxwell (2005) notes that one goal of qualitative research is “understanding the context in which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions” (p. 22). The contexts that I was most interested in understanding through this study were students’ local contexts in their home countries, their local contexts here at a university in the U.S., the interaction between those contexts, and notions of race in the U.S. Another goal of qualitative research that was central to this study is “understanding the process by which events and actions take place” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 23). I was especially interested in understanding the processes through which students develop a sense of their own racialized identity through their experiences at a U.S. university. Further, I anticipated that the “inherent openness and flexibility” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22) of a qualitative methodology would allow space for unanticipated phenomena to emerge. Given the unexplored and inherently complex nature of the topic, I fully expected for the unexpected to emerge from students’ articulations of their racialized experiences.

## **3.2 Research Approach**

### **3.2.1 Case Study**

Yin (2009) defines case study as an inquiry that, “investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Because of its attention to the interrelationships between context and phenomenon, I chose a case study

approach. The approach relies on collecting data from multiple sources; this reliance derives from an acknowledgment of the nearly indistinguishable intertwining of context and phenomena (Yin, 2009). Particularly, the case study approach provides a space to explore the local particularities of international students' lived experiences with race and racialization and the ways in which those experiences are situated in the multiple contexts of academic programs, the university, and U.S. society.

Consistent with the aims of this study, Stake (2006) notes that using a case study method is appropriate when the researcher hopes "to learn about [each case's] self-centering, complexity, and situational uniqueness" (p. 6). I take up Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg's (1991) argument that a case study approach, which draws from multiple sources of data over a period of time, provides a dynamic method for studying the complexities of individuals' meaning making and how that is situated within broader societal constructs. Because a holistic approach is a common characteristic of case study research, I believed that it offered the possibility of generating a deeper understanding of the broader social structures that influence individuals, their choices, and their experiences (Feagin et al., 1991). Importantly, Stake reminds us that a case study is not necessarily a methodological choice but rather "a choice of the object to be studied" (Stake, 2006, p. 2). For this study, I defined "the case" as each individual international student.

I agree with scholars who assert that case study research is strengthened by presenting multiple cases around the phenomena of interest to the researcher (Feagin et al., 1991; Stake, 2005). In addition to focusing on the particularities and contexts of each case, the comparative case study method enables the researcher to better understand the



phenomenon of interest. Exploring multiple cases around a given phenomenon can “lead to a better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases” (Stake, 2005, p. 446). Therefore, I employed a multiple, comparative case study methodology (Stake, 2006) to examine the racialized experiences of international graduate students at a public university in the southeastern United States.

Previous studies of international student experiences have used case study methodology. For example, Evivie (2009) used a case study methodology to study the experiences of African international students in the United States. Specifically, this case study presented data collected from six African international students (both graduate and undergraduate), examining both the challenges they faced and the strategies those students used to overcome the challenges they identified. For this study, “the challenges faced by African international students” (p. 105), not the individual students who participated in the study, was treated as a single embedded case, with multiple units of analysis (i.e., African international students) being used to investigate the phenomenon of interest. The primary data collection methods for Evivie’s study included a survey given to a broad population of African students at the university and a series of in-depth interviews conducted with six of the students. Evivie (2009) introduces each of the six participants using “vignettes composed of selected passages in their interview transcripts that tell their story” (p. 127).

The case study approach used in Malarcher’s (2004) study more closely resembles this study. She employed a comparative case study methodology to investigate the adaptation processes and experiences of four South Korean students in the United States. Participants in the study first responded to a questionnaire, which was then used

by the researcher to inform a series of interviews with each participant. Finally, all four participants in the study were brought together for a focus group in which the questions posed were based on the participants' responses in the individual interviews. To capture the cases, Malarcher (2004) engaged in two processes of analysis: 1) constructing narratives of each case and 2) conducting cross-case analysis for themes across data collected from all participants. For the individual cases, students' experiences were "rendered in written form as biographical monologues in the individual case analysis" (p. 45). The cross-case analysis for this study was conducted using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) system that utilizes open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

### **3.2.2 The Centrality of Narrative Inquiry in Building "Cases"**

Broadly, Clandinin & Murphy (2009) regard narrative research methods as those that inquire into how, "lives are lived, told, retold, and relived in storied ways on storied landscapes" (p. 598). Chase (2005) offers a helpful explanation of what constitutes a narrative. She contends that narratives may be written down or spoken and can be "elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview, or a naturally occurring conversation" (p. 652). Though the concept of narrative can vary in its meaning, the notion of storytelling, of imposing meaning and pattern in the otherwise disconnected events of life, is central among all narrative approaches. Stated succinctly, "narratives are strategic, functional, and purposeful" (Riessman, 2008, p. 8). Engaging in narrative inquiry during the study assisted me in the data collection process and also guided the representation of the cases, and the comparative analysis across cases (Reissman, 2008; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). The series of interviews that served as my primary sources

of data collection for the cases invited participants to engage in storytelling and meaning making around their racialized experiences.

Narrative inquiry approaches provide a lens into the both the ways in which participants understand the broad social and cultural contexts of their experiences and how participants' identities were impacted by those experiences. Thus, I drew on what Chase (2005) refers to as the sociological approach to narrative inquiry, particularly "how [participants/narrators] make sense of personal experience in relation to culturally and historically specific discourses, and how they draw on, resist, and/or transform those discourses as they narrate their selves, experiences, and realities" (p. 659). Accordingly, Riessman (2008) notes that narratives can travel beyond the domain of the individual, also functioning at the community, group, or national level and serving as a way to understand how participants' stories are connected to "the flow of power in the wider world" (p. 8). Further, Chase (2005) remarks that narrative inquiry can provide a focus on identity - an aspect of narrative inquiry that also informed this study. Through the elicitation of narratives, the researcher "highlight[s] the 'identity work' that people engage in as they construct selves within specific institutional, organization, discursive, and local cultural contexts" (p. 658).

Johnson-Bailey's (2010) work capturing the narratives of African American women informs this study. As she draws connections between the local particularities and uniqueness of each participant's experience, and the collective understandings that arise from narrative, she concentrates on the meaning-making aspect of sharing one's experiences, remarking that "narratives are a way of understanding the world around us, our communities, and our families" (p. 77). Her research also explores the ways in which

narratives can be used not only for “personal exploration and learning” but also “how life experiences shared among a cultural group can become a source of empowerment” (p. 77).

In Nelson’s (2008) work on the experiences of Nepalese students in the United States around issues of identity, solicitude, and imagination, she draws heavily on narrative approaches in both the collection of her data and the re-presentation of her results. She engaged in conversations with seven current Nepalese students and three Nepalese people who were recent graduates of U.S. universities. Specifically, Nelson’s study draws on the interconnectedness of personal identity and narrative to uncover students’ perspectives on themselves and their relation to Nepalese society.

Demonstrating a critical hermeneutic orientation, Nelson emphasized that she regarded her interactions with these students as conversations rather than as interviews. The data for the study were presented in the form of a text that weaves the narratives of the participants; in the researcher’s words, her “voice as a researcher is present but does not dominate the text” (p. 117).

### **3.2.3 Study Context**

The large research-intensive university in the U.S. Southeast in which I situated this study provided a rich context in which to examine international students’ experiences with race, racialization, and racial identity. The institution, whose history is rife with instances of racial discrimination and exclusion, makes an especially compelling site for examining race and racializing processes; the university is, in many ways, a microcosm of the state in which it is located<sup>1</sup>. During the period of reconstruction after the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen not to include citations for the university’s history to protect the anonymity of the study site.

Civil War, the university admitted African American students for a period of about four years after which the state's governor closed the university for three years for the express purpose of preventing African American students from attending. Following this, the university reopened as an all-White institution. In the 1950s, a dean of one of the university's colleges was fired for expressing support for the institution's racial integration, which did not occur until the mid-1960s. In the 1960s, high-ranking university officials began requiring applicants to take and pass the SAT, not as a measure of students' capacity to be successful academically, but for the explicit purpose of excluding African Americans from admission.

Today, the university remains a predominantly White institution (PWI), and numerous buildings on campus are named after historical figures whose legacies exemplify the state's racist history. Neither the student body nor the faculty reflect the state's population, which has a significant percentage of African Americans and an increasing number of Latina/os. I believe that both the historical legacy of racism and the continued significance of race on the campus where this study was conducted made it an ideal site for exploring international students' raced experiences.

Another reason I chose this university as the study's site was because of its large international student population. I chose to focus specifically on international graduate students because graduate students comprise the largest segment of the international student population at the university. My assumption that graduate students are more likely to live off-campus also influenced my choice to focus on graduate students (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). I suspected that, because they often live outside of the university, graduate students might be more likely than undergraduate students to interact

with U.S. culture in a prolonged and meaningful way. None of the participants in the study, for example, lived in campus housing.

The international population of graduate students at the university was larger than the population of international undergraduate students. For the 2011-2012 school year (the year during which I conducted this study) the university reported 1,009 enrolled international graduate students (about 15% of the total graduate student population) In comparison, 585 undergraduate international students (about 1.5% of the total undergraduate population) were enrolled during the same year<sup>2</sup>.

The overall international student population at the university consists of students with citizenship in approximately 118 countries. Of those 118 countries, just eight countries have a population of 20 or more graduate students who are enrolled at the university (see Table 1). The three countries with the largest representation of international graduate students at the university are China (32%), India (14%), and South Korea (8%).

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<sup>2</sup> To protect the anonymity of the university at which the study was conducted, I have not included a citation here. The demographic student data for this study were obtained from the university's institutional research and assessment office.

Table 3.1  
*Countries with more than 20 international graduate students enrolled*

Country of Origin	# Enrolled Fall 2011	% of Intl Grad Student Total
Turkey	22	2.18
Iran	25	2.48
Taiwan	32	3.17
Mexico	39	3.87
Bangladesh	48	4.76
South Korea	79	7.83
India	144	14.27
China	323	32.01

At the institutional level, the university houses an international student office, which hosts welcoming events, orientations, and year-round activities and outings for international students as well as providing numerous other support services. The university's international student office website provides detailed information for international students on issues ranging from housing to coursework and enrollment status to visas and travel, and international student advisors also personally assist students with a variety of challenges. The university was selected because of its especially troubling racial history, its continued failure to reflect the racial demographics of the state in student enrollments, and its large international graduate student population.

### **3.3 Participant Selection**

In selecting participants for this study, I was influenced by Patton's (2002) assertion that qualitative researchers should choose a sample that "consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely" (p. 234). The most important criterion for selecting participants was the students' sense that they have

stories to share regarding their experiences with race, racial identity, and racialization during their time in the United States. Selecting a small number of participants enabled me to capture the richness and depth of the experiences of each participant.

In selecting study participants, I drew from Patton's (2002) notion that small but diverse samples yield both "high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case" (p. 235) and that "important shared patterns cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity" (p. 235). Therefore, I chose to include five participants in this study. I used purposeful sampling, aiming for "maximum variation" across several characteristics (Patton, 2002, p. 234), including participants' home countries and continents, the ways in which I thought participants might be racially identified in U.S. terms, the graduate programs in which participants were enrolled, and the circumstances that brought the person to the United States. By including students from a number of different countries, I aimed to better understand the ways in which students' experiences with race, racial identity, and racialization are situated within their country's particular historical and contemporary discourses around race and other forms of difference. I also sought to include students who were likely to be racialized in a variety of ways in the U.S. (e.g. "White," "Black," or "Latina/o") in order to examine how the U.S. racial paradigm may be imposed on students based on physical attributes. Finally, I included students from a variety of graduate programs because some graduate programs have large populations of international students while others do not, which I felt might have an impact on students' experiences.

Participants were recruited using multiple informants in my personal network of graduate student colleagues and friends (international and domestic), faculty members,



and personnel in international student services. After an international student was nominated as a potential participant by one of my informants, I sent them a personal email to determine their level of interest in participating. If the international student was interested in participating, I set up a time to meet with them in an informal setting (usually a coffee shop) to discuss any questions or concerns they might have had about the study. After our initial meeting, all five participants agreed to participate in the study.

Ultimately, study participants came from five different countries and four different continents and had been in the U.S. for varying lengths of time. Caroline, who is from Brazil, is a 25-year old master's degree student<sup>3</sup>. She works closely with the international student population at the university, serving as a coordinator for a program that brings international students together with local middle and high school students. Caroline first came to the U.S. for her undergraduate seven years ago and moved to a different university within the same state to pursue her graduate degree. Huihui, who is from China, is in her 30s and is a PhD candidate. She came to the U.S. for graduate school about five years ago, first getting a master's degree in Boston before traveling south to pursue a PhD. Ananda, who is from England, is 31 years old and is pursuing a PhD. He came to the U.S. three years ago to enroll in the program but had spent two summers in Northeastern and Midwestern U.S. cities as a camp counselor prior to that. Daniel is a PhD candidate from Nigeria. He is in his early 30s, and came to the U.S. for his PhD about five years ago. Finally, Sven is originally from Norway. As a U.S. citizen, Sven does not fit the traditional definition of an international student, but I felt that his perspective as a dual citizen of both countries who, in his own words, "can be

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<sup>3</sup> To protect participants' anonymity, I have not included their degree programs here. The participants were from a variety of programs in diverse fields across the social sciences and professional programs.

like a chameleon or something,” would add to the richness of the study. Sven, who is in his 40s, was completing his PhD during our interviews and has since moved on to a faculty position.

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

#### **3.4.1 Interviews**

As is characteristic of collecting evidence for case studies (Yin, 2009), I used multiple methods of data collection for each participant’s case. As the primary data collection method for each of the case studies, I conducted a series of three in-depth interviews during which participants were invited to share their experiences with race and other aspects of identity that have been salient in their lives across national contexts. I constructed interview protocols based on a modified version of Seidman’s (1998) guidelines. The in-depth, phenomenological interviewing technique recommended by Seidman (1998) consists of a series of three interviews, focusing first on a participant’s life history around the topic of interest, then moving to the participant’s present experiences with the topic of interest, and concluding with a session in which participants are “asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences” (Seidman, 1998, p. 12). Based on these guidelines and also on literature around life history interviewing (Atkinson, 1998; Bertaux, 1981), I constructed a series of three interview protocols designed to help address the study’s research questions. After initially envisioning the scope of each interview and devising loosely-structured interview protocols, I pilot-tested each protocol with a close friend who was an international graduate student at the time. She and I listened back through the recorded interviews and discussed her experience of being

interviewed, and she helped me think through alternate ways of asking questions if my U.S.-based framing did not resonate with participants.

Ultimately, the revised series of interviews were ordered in the following manner. The first interview in the sequence (Appendix B) provided the context of the participant's life up until the point at which they moved to the United States, moving from their experiences in the home outward to their communities, regions, and national contexts and investigating the influences that the participant felt were important in shaping her or his identity. The second interview (Appendix C) focused specifically on how race, racial identity, and racialization manifested in the participant's lived experiences in their home country and also invited participants to share their story of how they came to live and study in the U.S. In the third and final interview (Appendix D), participants were asked to describe their experiences with race, racial identity, and racialization in the U.S. both within and outside of the context of the university, and they were also asked to engage in meaning making around all three interviews, including making comparisons about the meanings attached to race in different national contexts. Seidman (1998) advocates remaining fairly close to his proposed interview structure, a sentiment that Manen (1990) shares when he advises that the researcher should "be oriented to one's question or notion in such a strong manner that one does not get easily carried away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere" (p. 67).

Primarily, the reason I employed in-depth interviews as my principal mode of data collection is because the purpose of this study is to "uncover and describe the participants' perspectives on events" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 102). I further agree with Marshall and Rossman's (2006) assertion that "the participant's perspective

on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it (the emic perspective), not as the researcher views it (the etic perspective)” (p. 101). By engaging with participants in a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, I elicited richly detailed narratives about their lived experiences as racialized subjects both in their own national contexts and here in the United States. I believe that, in addition to providing a forum for eliciting their narratives of lived experiences, in-depth interviewing served as a process through which participants made meaning of those experiences in a safe, mediated space. Interviews provide “the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see” (Glesne, 2006, p. 81).

### **3.4.2 Historical/Contextual Research**

In her discussion of gathering archival materials for qualitative studies, Glesne (2006) contends that, “To understand a phenomenon, you need to know its history” (p. 65). Given the focus on multiple data collection methods and on deep contextualization emphasized by the case study method (Stake, 2006), I consulted historical and scholarly works related to race and other relevant categories of identity and difference in each participant’s home country to further contextualize and enhance the cases (Grbich, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2007; Stake, 2006). Doing so provided a fuller impression of the patterns within and across each case and allowed me to “perceive a relationship of ideas or events [that were] previously assumed unconnected” (Glesne, 2006, p. 65). Patton (2002) emphasizes the role of historical information in qualitative research; in particular, such information “can shed important light on the social environment” (p. 284). For each participant’s home country, I conducted a review of the historical, social, and cultural contexts, focusing particularly on the notion of race and also examining the various

aspects of identity that are most significant in the participant's home country. Moreover, I examined the ways in which the social/cultural history around race and other aspects of identity that participants mentioned as salient in their lived experience spoke to and against U.S. racial paradigms.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

#### **3.5.1 Individual Case Analysis**

When using the case study approach, the ideal analytic strategy is to allow one's theoretical orientation and research questions to guide the analysis of your data (Yin, 2009). I began the analysis process with the conceptual and theoretical notions related to race around which this study was built. Those concepts and theories, as well as my specific research questions about international students' experiences, assisted me in determining which elements of the data to attend to most closely. Allowing those overarching theoretical perspectives and questions to guide my analysis also assisted with the organization of the cases, as I engaged in the process of building a framework for thinking through and examining each case.

I began the analytic process as I listened back through and transcribed each interview, journaling about the patterns that emerged as I transcribed. This process helped me to identify the areas that required particular attention to context. Once I completed the transcription of the interviews, I compiled the data from all three interviews and the historical and contextual information I had gathered around each case. Once the data were compiled and organized, I sifted through the data for each participant, inductively identified patterns in the data, and developed a preliminary codebook. Glesne (2006) regards coding as "a progressive process of sorting and defining" (p. 152).

Throughout the analysis process, I treated the codebook (Appendix F) as a dynamic guide, as I continued to pass through the data, allowing for new codes to emerge and existing codes to transform as needed. Codes were grouped as major codes and sub-codes (Glesne, 2006), with the major codes representing the most central concepts and themes arising from the data. As I moved from coding to interpretation, the connections between the codes applied and the central theories and concepts guiding the study began to emerge. This is the stage that Coffey and Atkinson (1996) characterize as the “move toward generalizing, noting and questioning the relations between variables and finding conceptual and theoretical coherence in the data” (p. 47). Throughout the individual case analysis, when possible, I aimed to preserve large chunks of the data in order to allow participants’ stories to be communicated narratively as they were initially told (Grbich, 2007).

### **3.5.2 Cross-Case Analysis**

Cross-case analysis offers an interpretation across cases around the phenomenon of interest (Stake, 2006), thus adding robustness to the case study approach (Yin, 2009). Prior to performing cross-case analysis, I organized each transcript according to a uniform framework to assist me in identifying key concepts and themes across cases. In particular, I noted which sections of the text helped to address each research question, allowing for section of the participants’ narratives to speak simultaneously to multiple research questions. As I read and re-read through transcripts, I used inductive, thematic coding (Grbich, 2007) to identify patterns and to make comparisons between the cases. After applying the codebook to the cases using the commenting function in Microsoft Word, I pasted the sections of text and the codes applied to them into a Microsoft Excel

spreadsheet to allow for ease of sorting and cross-case comparison (Appendix H). This analytic process offered an opportunity to highlight both the uniqueness and similarity across cases. To conduct cross-case analyses for this comparative case study, I drew from the thematic approach proposed by Riessman (2008), who advises that one of the points of entry into the data for the narrative analyst is to think about “what the narrative accomplishes” (p. 8). A thematic approach seems to provide the best framework for thinking about such questions while keeping the concept of narrative central in the study.

Within the narrative paradigm, the thematic approach allows the researcher to maintain the entirety of the narrative rather than fragmenting it into small chunks of data. Thematic analysis lends itself well to working within existing theoretical frameworks such as the ones I utilized, which can “serve as a resource for interpretation of spoken and written narratives” (Riessman, 2008, p. 73). One characteristic that attracted me to thematic analysis is its tendency to situate the immediate, local context of the story itself within a broader social context. Therefore, in addition to grouping chunks of data according to which research question it addressed, I also categorized portions of the data as pertaining to the “broad national or regional” context or attending to “personal or local” experience, again, with some sections of the text attending to both. This system of coding (see Appendix E) allowed me to attend to the global-local dialectic as I analyzed across cases to address my research questions.

### **3.6 Methodological Considerations**

#### **3.6.1 Trustworthiness**

In his discussion of the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry, Maxwell (2005) urges the researcher to ask herself “How might I be wrong?” I appreciate this way of

framing issues of trustworthiness, and I took steps throughout the research process in an attempt to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study. In order to address the credibility and confirmability of my study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I incorporated triangulation of data sources, member checking, and a reflexive research journal into the research process.

Credibility refers to how confident a researcher can feel in her findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and triangulation is central to ensuring credibility. The notion of triangulation is built into the case study approach. Yin's (2009) definition of case study reminds the researcher that case study inquiry assumes there will be "more variables of interest than data points" (p. 18). Therefore, case study researchers must rely on collecting "multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (p. 18). My reliance on multiple data sources, including a multi-interview sequence, continued correspondence with participants, and documents and contextual information I collected, contributed to the triangulation of sources in this study. To further the credibility of my findings, I attempted to engage in a process of member checking. Asking for feedback from others, including both participants and colleagues, is regarded as "a valuable way to check your own biases and assumptions and flaws in your logic or methods" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 112). In keeping with my commitment to member checking, participants were invited to verify my transcripts of their interviews, attend presentations of the study, and to review my interpretations prior to my presentation of the work. The intention was to provide an opportunity to correct or fill in any gaps in information and to provide feedback or clarifications about the interpretations included in the case studies. Perhaps due to the nature of graduate study (and in the case of Sven, a



position as a new faculty member), all five participants indicated that, while they were pleased to have been part of the study, they were too busy to review documents or to attend presentations.

The notion of confirmability refers to a researcher's addressing concerns about the impact of her own biases and interests on her study findings. To address the confirmability of this study, I engaged in a reflexive research process by keeping a research journal in which I noted, attended to, and questioned the theoretical notions, concepts, and experiences that I brought with me to the study. In my research journal, I also made note of methodological decisions and kept a record of how my thinking developed around various aspects of the study.

### **3.6.2 Role of the Researcher**

One of the challenges and benefits of qualitative research in general and of case study method in particular is that the researchers herself serves as the data collection instrument. Interactions between research participants and researcher are always mediated by the researcher's identity. Throughout the research process, I sought to remain attentive to dynamics that I believed might be influential to the study; specifically, I anticipated that particular dynamics might influence my interactions with participants, including the rapport within the interview space and the kinds of narratives produced from those interviews.

My positionality as a White, female middle class researcher from the U.S. South might have influenced participants' comfort level when speaking with me about their experiences of racialization here in the U.S. To an extent, I was asking my participants to be willing to engage in a critique of dominant identities that I embody. That is, as a

racially White, U.S.-born Southerner, I invited participants to share their experiences with having U.S. racial categories imposed on them at a university in the South. I occupy many positions of privilege within the U.S. context, and I was particularly concerned that those dynamics would influence my interactions with students who do not identify as White. Though I challenge myself to remain aware of it, I bring my whiteness into any room or scenario I enter. The same was true during the interview process, and I sought to remain attentive to the fluid ways in which power operated in the interview space.

Furthermore, I approached this work with particular assumptions about how race and racism operate within a U.S. context. Those assumptions included an acknowledgement of the privileged role of whiteness and the historical and structural disenfranchisement of non-white groups. Although I believe these assumptions to be grounded in the literature, I also understood that my beliefs around race are primarily based on my experiences and readings around race and racism in the U.S. context. Therefore, I recognized that my assumptions about race could obscure my interpretations of participants' experiences, and that they might perpetuate a U.S.-centered understanding of race. Because I recognized the impact of my existing assumptions about dominant racial paradigms as I began the study, I was prepared to hear participant stories that challenged my assumptions and that pushed fixed racial U.S. boundaries. Since race operates differently across contexts, I also was prepared to hear stories that complicated the tight racial categories that dominate U.S. racial discourse.

In some ways, the shifting dynamics of power might have worked in a way that facilitated rapport with the participants. In particular, I shared the experience of being a graduate student with each of the participants. Our shared status as academics-in-training

might have helped participants to feel more comfortable with me throughout the data collection process and may have neutralized some of the more traditional power dynamics between researcher and participant.

One dynamic that required attention was language. My identity as a monolingual English speaker means that I cannot communicate in any other languages. Three of the participants were not native English speakers (Caroline, Huihui, and Sven). Thus, I initially anticipated that they would likely be reconstructing ideas and concepts in English when the flow of the interview could be more natural in their native language. Because I met and informally “chatted” with each participant prior to our formal interviews, I evaluated the flow of communication and anticipated communication barriers that might arise due to language differences. Since Daniel was raised in an English-speaking household, I was less concerned about our ability to clearly communicate complex ideas with each other. Although English was not the language spoken in Ananda’s home, it was the language of his entire education (primary, secondary, and tertiary) in England, and I therefore also felt comfortable with our ability to communicate. Ultimately, because Sven had been in the United States since he was a young teenager and speaks without a noticeable accent, I do not believe that language was a barrier in our communication. Similarly, for Caroline, since she had been in the United States since she was 18 years old and also speaks with little to no noticeable accent, I feel confident that language did not impede our communication with each other.

Huihui was the only participant with whom I felt that language might influence our communication with each other, and I took several precautions to ensure clear communication between Huihui and me within the interview space and in our subsequent

email communications. I was particularly mindful of using English idioms and jargon particular to the United States that might confuse or frustrate Huihui. As I reviewed the interview transcripts, I found that I was far more likely to ask clarifying questions of Huihui to ensure that I was correctly interpreting the stories and experiences she shared with me.

Further, as we discussed race and other aspects of identity around which shared meanings can be elusive, I brought working definitions of terms such as race and ethnicity to the interview space so that the interviewee and I could share understandings of terms. At the conclusion of the focused life history interview (Interview 1), I asked participants to offer their definition of “race,” and then I offered my own definition. When an interviewee used the term “race,” but I suspected they might be referring to what I would understand as “ethnicity,” I engaged them in a discussion around the meanings they attached to the two terms.

This chapter attended to the methodological considerations of the study. I reviewed my epistemological understandings of qualitative research and provided the context for the case study. In this chapter, I also introduced the study participants, described the methods of data collection, and addressed the ways in which I sought trustworthiness in the study. I concluded the chapter by examining the ways in which my positionality oriented me to the study participants. In the following chapter, I present the individual cases of the five study participants, attending to the historical contexts of their home countries.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Individual Case Studies**

#### **4.1 Huihui: A Case Study<sup>4</sup>**

##### **4.1.1 Identity and difference in China**

China is one of the oldest continuous civilizations in the world, with a history dating back through more than 5,000 years (Keay, 2009). For much of that time, China was ruled by a series of dynastic families, ending with the Qing Dynasty, which ruled China from 1644 to 1912 (Keay, 2009). During the late Qing Dynasty, China's trade and conflict with European colonial power, as well as the impacts of its own colonial efforts in other countries, began to influence China economically and culturally. Dynastic rule of China ended in 1912 with the establishment of the Republic of China. Since that time, a variety of internal and external forces shaped China's national character, from the brutal conflicts with the Japanese during World War II that left much of the Chinese economy in a pitiful state to the emergence of the Communist Party and the People's Republic of China to the more recent impacts of economic globalization on the Chinese economy and its relationship with the rest of the world (Keay, 2009; Starr, 2010).

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<sup>4</sup> Qualitative interviewing is an individualized process and the information shared can vary greatly between participants. The way I constructed participants' narratives depended a great deal on what was shared, what was not shared, and the amount of researcher narration I deemed necessary to provide a coherent and accessible representation of each participant's story. Because Huihui shared much of her story through brief responses to my questions, both the interview space and the presentation of her case study required more co-narration from me than the case studies of the other participants.

Despite the financial openings that have begun to occur in China, the Chinese government has continued to exert intense influence over its citizens (Starr, 2010). Throughout the height of the Communist regime, schools and other government entities promoted the notion of the “ideal Chinese citizen” who always places the interests of the nation ahead of her/his own interests (Mullaney, 2011; Starr, 2010). Furthermore, the government’s process of molding the citizen attempted to erase or ignore other aspects of difference or inequality, such as remaining class differences, ethnic and/or linguistic differences and relations, and attitudes towards girls and women that remain prevalent in some Chinese families (Starr, 2010).

Mullaney’s work (2011) examines the 1954 Ethnic Classification Project, through which the Chinese government settled on and then reified the notion that China consists of the Han ethnic majority and precisely 55 ethnic minority groups. He argues that, in a sense, the discourse of 56 *minzu*, or ethno-national groups, constitutes a dominant discourse around ethnicity in China. He says this dominant ethnic discourse is essentially that:

China is a plural singularity, this orthodoxy maintains, composed of exactly fifty-six ethnonational groups (*minzu*): the Han ethnic majority, which constitutes over ninety percent of the population, and a long list of fifty-five minority nationalities who account for the rest. Wherever the question of diversity is raised, this same taxonomic orthodoxy is reproduced, forming a carefully monitored orchestra of remarkable reach and constituency: anthropology museums with the requisite fifty-six displays, ‘nationalities doll sets’ with the requisite fifty-six figurines, book series with the requisite fifty-six ‘brief histories’ of each group, Olympic

ceremonies with fifty-six delightfully costumed children, and the list goes on.

Fifty-six stars, fifty-six flowers, fifty-six *minzu*, one China (Mullaney, 2011, p. 1).

Beyond the dominant ethnic discourse of the fifty-six *minzu*, the government has left little to no room for further discussion about China's ethnic diversity.

Regionalism also plays a strong role in establishing difference in Chinese society, as ethnic groups often live in isolated regions and even Han Chinese, who live in different provinces within China, often have unique dialects (Mullaney, 2011). While the affirmative action policies enacted to assist ethnic minorities in educational and workplace settings have been beneficial to many, these policies have bred some discontent among the Han majority in China's very competitive educational and employment sectors (Sautman, 2010).

Corruption, power, and social class have continued to be a part of the systems of inequality that stratify China. Those who work for the government are able to send their children to stronger schools and are also more capable of getting their children into jobs working in the government themselves (Wedeman, 2012). Despite claims of equality for everyone in China and despite educational processes that often attempt to prevent Chinese people from noticing social class disparities, differences based on the job and income of one's parents is a strong determinant of one's own life outcomes in China. Thus, social class has continued to be a fairly fixed category through which Chinese citizens' futures are often determined (Sautman, 2010; Wedeman, 2012).

Finally, one of the most internationally acknowledged social issues within China has been the historical dehumanization and devaluation of girls and women. Because of the patriarchal emphasis in much of traditional Chinese society, many Chinese families

have preferred boys to girls (Mann, 2011). Although fewer families are now embracing this “anti-girl” way of thinking, some families continue to view girls as undesirable children (Mann, 2011). Huihui’s experiences with identity in China intersect with notions of majority Han ethnicity, the relationship between language and identity, and with the continued devaluing of girls in some families.

#### **4.1.2 Huihui’s Experiences in and perceptions about China**

Huihui is a PhD student who grew up in the city of Taiyuan in the Shanxi province of China. Woven throughout Huihui’s story is her rebellious spirit, fueled by a desire to exceed her family’s expectations of her and to differentiate herself from a family that she views as neglectful and unambitious. She grew up in family in China that struggled financially, and both of her parents worked in restaurants. Her parents met at a restaurant where they both worked. When Huihui was growing up, both of her parents spent a lot of time working, and they often worked during the evenings. As a result, she spent a lot of time with her grandmother and other family members who lived in the family house. When I asked Huihui to tell me about her family and the kinds of values and lessons she learned from them, she told me that she “doesn’t want to be like other people.” When I asked her to tell me more about that, she said that, regarding her family, “like if they don’t want me to do something, I will do it. And they don’t want me become somebody, I will become somebody.” As we delved deeper into Huihui’s attitudes towards her family, I learned that she is from a family that places a high value on male children. In her words:

All my family, they like boys. They don’t like girls. And I’m the first girl in my family, and they still don’t like me. I have two cousins from my uncle who are



older than me. And I'm the first girl. Then, after me I have a female cousin who's – how many years? – six years younger than me? Yeah. And, but we're not the favorite of our family... They like boys so much that they don't even like care too much about us. And also, so because they don't care about you, they never expect you to be successful. And, so whatever you do and however you do and whether you are doing well or not, it's not an issue to them.

As a result of her family's low expectations of her, as well as their teasing (she told me stories about how her relatives have laughed at her for various things she has wanted to do in her life), Huihui has pushed herself even harder toward particular accomplishments. For instance, Huihui is the only person in her generation of the family to attend university: "to study abroad. To do all my degrees and higher area. To do everything independently. None of the boys in my family can do anything like this." She described her "stubbornness" as stemming from becoming accustomed to doing everything for herself. Her parents and other family members seemed disinterested in cultivating her talents as a child, and she recounted several stories of her family members taking the boys in the family on special trips and outings and not inviting Huihui or her other female cousin.

Huihui has an uncle who came to the U.S. and worked in a restaurant for four years prior to opening a medical clinic. She says that he has been a role model for her, "not as a person," but rather in his pursuit of success in the U.S. Prior to her arrival in the U.S., Huihui had spent almost her entire life in Taiyuan where, "I was born and I grew up and went to university and worked." The neighborhood where she grew up had homes situated close to each other, and neighbors often sat outside and talked with one another

in the evenings, chatting or playing cards. She told me that neighbors enjoyed her visits and would often come and get her to spend time with them when they cooked food that she liked. When Huihui was 18, she and her family left the neighborhood because of construction, but prior to that, so many members of her family lived there that her high school classmates referred to the street where she lived using her family's surname.

When I asked Huihui about the role that her community played in her life, her response reflected the class hierarchy that exists in China despite its Communist-controlled government. She told me that, when she was in elementary, middle, and high school, people cared very little about where you are from, "but they care a lot [about] what kind of job your parents are doing. And they care a lot how you do in school." She is extremely proud of the fact that she is only the second person from her non-affluent neighborhood to attend university.

I asked Huihui to tell me about her city and region within China. She described Shanxi Province as "not the best part of China." As she said:

My province is famous for its coal mines, so it's dirty. It's very dirty there. And a lot of people outside the city are rich because they're, almost like every family has their own coal mine there. It's illegal, but it's just there, and they earn a lot of money out of that. And, people don't...well, I think a lot of people just look down on people from there because it's not a very good province or place. And people...it's not like Beijing or Shanghai, so developed.

When we discussed the characteristics of different parts of China, Huihui explicitly differentiated herself from Chinese people who are from the South of China, who she describes, unflatteringly, as "clever." As she explained, the sort of cleverness to

which she referred did not mean that they were smart. Rather, as she put it, they “like to take advantage of people.” In contrast, she described people from her province as being “nice” and went on to differentiate the people of Shanxi from the people of Southern China. She said that those differences are very clearly manifested in the contrast between the men from her hometown and “Southern men” (men from the South of China). She said that men from the South of China are “not very man,” and when I asked if she means they are not masculine, Huihui responded, “not from appearance, but from the heart.” Part of what she believes makes them “softer” is a certain level of “cleverness.” In her perception, “people from the North [of China] are, they don’t really care about those meticulous things, but people from the South [of China], they care about those things....and they care about *everything*. Detail. Every detail.”

Huihui shared that many people in China hold negative assumptions that people from the North of China are weak. She disagreed, explaining that people from the North are not weak; rather, Huihui believes they have intentionally chosen not to engage in particular conflicts around resources and power. She explained:

Yeah...some people will think like, ‘we’re from the North’ or that part of the country, and we are like stupid. We tend to be taken advantage of by other people. But no we are not. We see everything, but we just don’t want to say. And we don’t want take advantage from other people, so as long as it doesn’t hurt me, then I just let it go. But we’re not like...people, they thought we’re stupid...[they think] we don’t even know this, we don’t even understand this part, we don’t even see this part. WE DID.

Huihui characterized the relationship between her province and the South of China as being “like a parent and a kid.” She said, “We know everything the kid is going to do and what the kid is thinking about, but just let it go!” She particularly attributes this “cleverness” and tendency to “take advantage of other people” to people who live in Shanghai.

Huihui identifies strongly with being Chinese. When I ask her what it means to her to be Chinese, she says, “Well, no matter China is good or not, I won’t say I’m not Chinese. I’m just, I’m Chinese. I don’t care how people think about China.” With an acknowledgement that every country “has its bad side,” Huihui said that she cannot think of another country to which she would rather be attached. Aloud, she mused rhetorically, “Do I wanna be American? Be called American? No. Never.” As our conversation delved more deeply into the notion of “being Chinese” and what that meant to her, she explained:

It’s like...it’s like your parents. You don’t like a lot of parts of that, but in your deep part, it’s just part of you or already being part of you. And we used to talk, say – give example – when we talk about that part with my friends or something, we say, we just say all bad things about China. But, during Olympic games, we always want China to win. And we feel good when China wins.

With regards to perceptions around race and ethnicity in China, Huihui’s experiences seemed similar to those shared with me by colleagues and friends from China. At first, she said, “we don’t have ethnicity in China.” Then, she clarified, “Cause, although, we have like all of the minorities, and the Han is the majority, but it’s really not a big issue in China now. Or at that time. So, we really don’t have that

ethnicity problem, so we never think about that.” After discussing ethnicity in China, Huihui and I began to explore her perceptions of race in China. She quickly responded that race was not a concept that resonated in China when she was growing up. As I began my questions about what race looks like in China or what she knew about race as a concept, she simply replied, “We don’t have race in China,” which she quickly followed up by saying, “I never thought about this problem [race], and I didn’t even know about this word until I came here [to the U.S].”

Though race was not an issue that resonated with Huihui in China, she emphasized, however, that, “class is an issue. Or like, wealthy people and poor people is kind of an issue. Or power.” Huihui personally experienced the class hierarchy in China, as she grew up in a household that, in U.S. terms, would probably be called “working class.” Throughout middle school, Huihui attended a school in which her social class background set her apart from her peers. She explained:

During the middle school years, most of my classmates, or most students in middle school, they’re from privileged families. Like, which means their parents or grandparents are from the government. Holding very important positions there, like the governor or some positions like that. So, you can imagine the difference, the distance between us. So the teacher of course liked students from those families.

By contrast, at Huihui’s high school, there was less difference between the social class locations of herself and her classmates. As a result, she felt a sense of belonging in her high school. She describes her high school experience more positively. Huihui served in the role of class president, and she organized events that many of her classmates

attended. She remarked that there was a sense of solidarity and even familial belonging among her peers. In her leadership role, she felt that she was largely responsible for building the sense of solidarity in her class. She often served as a cheerleader for the rest of the group, encouraging them to do better than other classes on their tests.

When we returned to the topic of Huihui's experiences in her socially mixed middle school, she expressed some contempt for the more privileged students:

Mm-hmm. And also 'cause I don't care? Like some people, you know, they like to climb higher to be like those privileged kids. But I never – you *know* I am a rebelling person! I don't wanna *be* them. Although I'm not as good as them. I don't wanna be them. I just wanna be myself. I stick to my family background.

It doesn't matter. I can tell them, like, 'I'm from a poor family, but I don't care!'

When I asked whether Huihui had any aspirations to be like the privileged students in her school, she responded:

No I never. And I never, I never...see, some people...in this kind of situation, some people will think, 'Okay, when I grow up, I wanna be like their parents. I wanna be a governor, or...' I never. I'm not interested to be in their world.

[scoffs] I know what I want, and I know what I don't want. Yeah, you can earn a lot of money, but I don't like that. I don't care if I can earn a lot of money or not.

Huihui noticed some differences between herself and her more privileged middle school classmates, and she was not inspired to be like them. She told me, "Yeah. I just don't feel like we're in the same world. And, I'm not interested in them. And I don't like the way they communicate or interact. So superficial, sometimes, it seems to me."

Huihui and I also discussed the extent to which her family's social background impacted how others treated her and thought about her. In her high school, she mentioned that her classmates cared much more about each other as individuals rather than being concerned with family background. In contrast, she noted that for her middle school classmates, "I just don't feel like we're in the same world." Her schooling experiences left Huihui with the sense that she preferred spending time with students who had similar backgrounds to her own to being in school with students whose parents were in positions of power and privilege within the Chinese government.

Since Huihui has been in the U.S., she noted that there have begun to be more conflicts between ethnic groups in China. As an example, Huihui pointed to the recently escalating conflicts between Han people and what she calls "a special minority group" in Xinjiang province. Huihui remarked that one of her professors in her Master's program at a New England university challenged her assertion that there are no racial or ethnic conflicts in China. The professor stated that the Chinese government's numerous policies targeting ethnic minorities for advantages in educational and employment opportunities as well as their exemption from governmental policies like the "one-child policy" indicates that there must be existing inequalities that these policies seek to correct.

Huihui explained that, unlike racial groups, ethnic groups in China often cannot be identified based on physical characteristics, but rather are differentiated based on cultural and linguistic characteristics. "But most of the time the minority, most of them live together." Huihui attributes recent conflicts between Chinese ethnic minorities and the Han majority to manipulation from outside groups who "take advantage of this minority group." Huihui's perception is that:

The Chinese government is trying to do the best to make sure they are treated fairly. ‘Cause like in each city, there’s a school only for kids from Tibet, so they can get into the city to learn and to study. ‘Cause their education there is kind of, mmm, bad. So every city has a school for them. And they go there free. It’s a boarding school, and it’s totally free for them.

According to Huihui, two of the groups outside of the Han majority that are significant in Chinese life are the Hui and Man because, unlike more geographically isolated ethnic groups, many of the members of the Hui and Man live in cities alongside the Han. She differentiated the Man from the other groups who “live in a special area and have their own costumes and everything.” When I asked how Huihui feels she fits into the Chinese ethnic categorization, she says, “I don’t think there’s an issue there, but sometimes when we were in school, we wish we were minorities so we could get advantages [laughing] to get into the university or to do some other stuff.” To clarify her meaning, I asked if her wish was related to the fierceness of the competition, and she responded that although she and her classmates would jokingly make that wish, they did not “feel like it’s an issue or like, ‘Oh, it’s so unfair to us!’ – we never feel like that.”

Though she does not feel that there is a concept in China that is precisely synonymous with “race,” I asked Huihui about her experiences with the different physical characteristics that impact how people are viewed and treated in Chinese society. In addition to a brief comment regarding how Chinese people heavily favor more attractive people, the conversation quickly turned to the heavy preference for whiter skin color and the extensive efforts that women make to whiten their skin. She explained:



Well, Chinese people – you know, all Asian people, they like fair skin. So every day they try to whiten their skin. They use all the skin care products has ‘whitening effect’ on there [laughs]... ‘Cause there’s a Chinese saying that, ‘Whiteness can cover all the ugliness... ugliness.’ ‘Cause if you have fair skin, then you will be pretty. No matter how ugly you are.

When I asked Huihui where she thinks the preference for whiter skin comes from, she replies, “I dunno. Well, I guess people just think it looks pretty.” In fact, scholars have proposed that, indeed, this association with whiteness and beauty throughout Asia stems not from a valuing of Western European beauty norms, but rather is a reflection of historical social class differences (Wagatsuma, 1967).

Another area of identity that is sometimes linked with social class in China is language and dialect. When I asked Huihui about the languages that she and her family speak, she enthusiastically shared that her hometown has a dialect, the Taiyuan dialect, which is part of the Jin family of Mandarin Chinese. She told me that the current trend is that young people do not like to speak the local dialect, favoring “the standard Mandarin” instead. The preference for Mandarin even extends to the ways in which parents speak to their children. Though parents speak the local dialect to each other, Huihui told me that parents in Taiyuan often communicate with their children in Mandarin. In her own family, her younger cousins have followed the Mandarin trend, with the older family members praising the younger generation’s embrace of Mandarin.

In keeping with her general disposition, Huihui prefers not to follow this trend and enjoys speaking her dialect with family and friends who also are from the region. When I asked whether her preference for the dialect is in any way linked to her identity,

she said it is not. Rather, speaking the dialect allows her yet another way to differentiate herself from those around her. She did note, however, that those who favor Mandarin do so because they believe speaking the local dialect has negative social class connotations. For her, however, she said that since she can speak several languages, she does not feel the need to mold herself to the current trend towards speaking only Mandarin. Huihui said, “Why should I just sacrifice the dialect? I can pick any language.”

I believe that Huihui’s explanation of what she learned in school about Chinese-ness may explain some of her reluctance to attribute any of her own beliefs to broader social forces. When I asked what kinds of beliefs and values she learned in school, Huihui tells me, “Well, I don’t think Chinese people stress identity. Because they cultivate everybody to be the same person.” When I ask her to expand, she explained:

They want you to be...they really want everybody to be the same person. They set these kind of rules for you. Everybody should follow the same rule to do the same, be the same. To be this good. To study this. Like that...person...they will set a role model for you, and everybody should learn from this model.

And...[laughs]...that’s China.

As we spoke more about how Chinese citizens are molded and controlled by the government, Huihui discussed the efforts to mold everyone into “the same person.” Huihui explained the Chinese government’s process of shaping ideology as follows: “They will say, ‘this is what [it is] to be a good student, good child.’ But, if everybody do the same thing, that’s a good thing to be Chinese. To them. That’s how people, like how Chinese government control mentally.”

Huihui went to university in her home province of Taiyuan, and she remarked that, unlike many universities in China that only enroll students who come from the province in which they are located, her university, “recruit[s] students from all over the country. So, all of my classmates, they are from different provinces or cities. Like, my dorm, we have six people in – each of us was from a different place.” This was the first time that Huihui had substantial interactions with people from outside her province. She and the other girls living in her dorm got along very well, and she said that they all enjoyed discussing their hometowns and the kinds of food that their families eat. The girls enjoyed hearing and attempting to imitate one another’s accents and dialects.

Huihui remains close with friends that she made when she was at the university. I asked whether her experiences impacted how she thought about people from the southern part of China. She said that, although her perception that people from Southern China are “kind of clever” remained a part of how she made sense of her experience, she says, “They’re still clever, but they didn’t do any harm to me. They can be my friends. But I don’t think because of that, they’re not clever.” She retains her preferential attitude toward Northern Chinese and would still prefer to make friends with someone from North China rather than South China because, “I just don’t wanna waste my time and trying so hard to figure out whether that person will hurt me or not.” She remarks that:

Chinese people don’t pay attention to identity because, you know, under their education, they don’t educate people to realize or to know their own identity. So they educate you to be one person. A role model for you. So everybody should be this person [who] loves the Communist party, who loves Chinese government, who love China, err like this. So, they don’t pay attention to identity. Mmm...I

think people who stay in China, they probably don't care too much about that, and [those who] stay here, maybe care a lot about that.

Huihui also describes her university experience as one that encouraged her to be more independent, and in fact, to prefer doing activities alone to doing them in groups.

In China, gender has historically been a way of assigning value to human beings, and Huihui's experiences growing up in China were heavily gendered by her family. Huihui often felt mistreated and unappreciated by her family because she is a girl. I picked up on what I interpreted to be disdain for her family, as Huihui rejects many things they consider valuable. She stated that if she had been given the opportunity to become a boy when she was a child, she would not have taken that opportunity because, "I don't wanna be a boy to please them - I don't want them to be happy. I just wanna be a girl and make them *not* happy. And the better I am, the worse they feel. I'm happy about that." She applies this thinking to her own academic success as well, saying (hypothetically) to them, "You want boys to do well? And the girls not doing well? No. I don't want you be happy. I will do well, and you boys won't do it well." Ironically, Huihui's male cousins, who were showered with attention and praise as children, have had female children, while she and her female cousin both have sons. Huihui appreciates this irony and does not want to allow her family to celebrate and revere her sons. She explained her thinking as follows, "You don't value me, and I don't give you the opportunity to value my boy...because when you value them, you're telling me you don't value me."

I asked Huihui how old she was when she realized her family's attitudes toward girls. She replies that it was at a "very young age." She recalled that if her male cousins

were displeased with something that was happening, her father and her uncles would appease them by buying them clothes. Huihui speculated that her male cousins' current living conditions – which she describes as “struggling every day for their life” – is a result of the spoiling that family members showered onto them. Thus, “they don't know how to live.” In contrast, Huihui was given much less support, and she feels this has made her a self-sufficient and independent person. Rather than being explicitly spoken, Huihui's family demonstrated their preference for the males in the family through action. She says that the preference was shown, “more in daily life...and they just show that continuously, so I can realize that. Some people might not even take....care too much about that, but I am [the] kind of person, I am very, very sensitive.” Her sensitivity to the kinds of injustices that her family perpetrated against her is one of the only things that Huihui would like to change about herself.

#### **4.1.3 Huihui's experiences in and perceptions of the United States**

Huihui recalled some of the messages she and her classmates were taught in school about how “America is so bad,” and she remembers being taught about the exploitation of young workers in America's capitalist system. She noted that, “I have never been a critical thinker. Whatever they say, I will just remember that and take my test.” Earlier in our interview, Huihui had explained that, as a child, she imagined America as a very dark place. I asked if she thought those perceptions had come from the kinds of things she was taught in school and she agreed, explaining, “because I have never learned anything good about [America].”

Though Huihui told me that race was not a concept with relevance in Chinese society, I asked her to define her current understanding of the word. When I asked what

she thought of when I just said the word “race” (as distinct from racism), Huihui said that, “the immediate image come to my mind is the different skin colors.” Since race is not a concept that resonates in most conceptions of Chinese society, Huihui noted that race was something that she began to notice after her arrival in the United States. Reinforcing the notion that race in the U.S. is set up along a binary, Huihui’s basic definition of race is “like those conflicts and issues between the White and the Black.”

Though she does not fit into one of those two categories, she noted that she feels race impacts her experiences in the U.S.:

Well. I never thought about this problem, and I didn’t even know about this word until I came here. So, I will say race is like those conflicts and issues between White and Black. But now I feel like it’s between different countries because as I’m teaching undergraduates, I can feel the attitude they had toward me. So, maybe if you want, maybe next time, we can talk more about that. Because that’s only part I feel about race. And also because of those kind of issues to happen on immigrants. Like how they control, you cannot have like driver license or this or that.

Despite her perceptions of the United States as a dark place where primarily negative things happened, Huihui had a strong desire to travel to the U.S. for school for many years prior to coming here. In some ways, her hopes for studying in the U.S. stemmed from her enduring aspiration to demonstrate to her family her ability to succeed. When Huihui was in elementary school, her uncle moved to Alabama where he now owns a medical clinic. When Huihui was in middle school, she realized that she wanted to study in America and aimed for that goal throughout her years in school.

Upon finishing her undergraduate degree in Taiyun, Huihui took a teaching job at a Chinese university until she was able to come to the U.S. As soon as her financial situation allowed, she enrolled at a university in Boston to pursue her Master's degree. While there, Huihui took a job working in the university cafeteria. As a result of some of her experiences during her Master's program, Huihui began to develop positive associations with life in the United States, and she compared it favorably to China. For instance, she had two different bosses in the cafeteria where she worked, and each of them treated her fairly. She explained her experience working in the cafeteria and how it differed from working for someone in China in this way:

And then, um, the supervisor there, he was very, very nice to everyone, to student. But that's very different from China, 'cause Chinese people. You know, like hierarchy's very important there, so they think, you're a student, so they're not nice to you, they yell at you, do a lot of bad things to you. But here, no. They treat you very, very fairly. And well. Are nice to you.

Another positive incident also reinforced Huihui's developing favorable perception of people in the United States. While she was working on her Master's degree, she had an accident, and a group of strangers rushed to help her. Again, she contrasted this with what might have happened in a similar situation in China:

Especially, like, at Boston, I had an accident there once. I tripped down, and my glasses flew away, and my nose, like, all bleeding!... And an old lady came, and...she said, 'Wait. I will call somebody who has the phone to call an ambulance.'...and a lot of people were there just trying to help me. They're sooooo nice, they were. And then, when the ambulance came, they just left.

They're soooo nice. So, I said, 'well it would never happen in China.' It's impossible. Nobody will help you at all. Like, when I was lying down like this in China, people will only circle around you, looking at you without helping you.

To some extent, Huihui attributes her early positive experiences in the U.S. with a certain sense of awe at being in a brand new context. Time spent over the years in the U.S. in three different states has afforded Huihui with more lenses through which to assess her experiences. Huihui applied for and was accepted to multiple graduate programs, but she chose the one in which she is currently enrolled because the program offered her funding. Now, Huihui sometimes wishes she had chosen to attend a program at a different university because she feels that, to some extent, she has not received fair treatment in her current program.

Huihui emphasized that what she and other international students truly need is someone who realizes that to treat them equally is not to treat them fairly. In many ways, they need special treatment or additional information that U.S.-born students may already understand or know. The example that Huihui provides involved a peer review of her teaching. She explains that, "How could we international students know we need a peer review? Know that people will do peer review? Because they talked about that, and then you know, 'Okay, everybody gets one.' And then later you realized, okay no, they never did one to you." Although non-international students in Huihui's cohort have received reviews of their teaching from faculty during their first semester teaching, she has never had her university teaching evaluated by a faculty member.

Furthermore, Huihui has expressed the feeling that, although race and racial inequality (including issues surrounding immigration) in schools are hot topics of



conversation in class and are heavily researched by faculty members, “I don’t think anybody is trying to help [those students]. They’re [faculty] doing this for their own benefit. Research benefit. Who actually carry out any practice in schools? Nobody.” Rather, Huihui feels that faculty in her program discuss and research inequality for purposes of career advancement.

In addition to feeling that the faculty members in her program have not been helpful in offering the assistance she needs to be successful, Huihui has begun to notice other ways that she has been discriminated against or what I might call “othered” here in the U.S. She tells me that there are certain places that she does not go shopping because she is treated differently from other customers:

So I guess I started to feel like, mmm, not only African Americans, but also, like we [Asians] are treated unfairly. Because like Walmart, when I use credit card, they ask to see my ID. They said it is for everybody, but sometimes when I check out, nobody see my ID. So, it’s just for me, maybe. Like for Asian, or...I don’t think they will see White people’s ID.

She also tells me that, before coming here, she had no expectations that she might be treated differently because she is from a different country. However, during her time here, her lenses for picking up on discrimination have been sharpened. She explains:

I don’t think I, I don’t think I realized those things until maybe [sighs] until several years later. ‘Cause at the beginning, I don’t think there’s discrimination or anything. I never feel like I am different. But then, I don’t remember if it’s in Alabama or here, I started to realize that people treat you, sometimes it’s obvious, differently...maybe before, I didn’t think there will be discrimination on Chinese

or people from other countries. But then, after I had the knowledge. When I heard there is discrimination, then I started to look at this. At, to see if it is. It's like somebody tell you, 'Okay. That person hate you.' So, then, next time when we talk, after we talk about something, and then I go home...I will start think back to see, 'Okay. During that talking process, did that person discriminate on me or hate on me or show anything?'

Acknowledging that it can sometimes be difficult to discern the reasons why one is being treated in a particular way, she stated "and so you sometimes can experience or feel that, but you can't say it out. You just don't have, like, evidence to show that. But you can feel that." After living in the U.S. for a longer period of time, Huihui has slowly begun to develop the lenses to understand when she is being "othered." I would argue that, although she might not interpret her treatment in particular U.S. settings in racial terms, her being asked for identification and being otherwise made to feel as though she does not belong, is an act of racialization.

#### **4.1.4 Interpreting Huihui's experiences**

Huihui's experiences with various aspects of identity, both in the U.S. and China, highlight several important aspects of difference and power relations in both contexts. First although Huihui did not articulate it as such, her experiences growing up with parents who struggled financially and her resistance to adopting the norms established by her privileged middle school classmates lead me to believe that Huihui is a class-conscious person who is aware of and, on some level, rejects dominant discourses in both China and the U.S. Her observations about the resources and privileges allocated to groups that are in power in China (specifically, those who work for the government)

indicate that she is aware of the privileged position occupied by some groups in Chinese society. Furthermore, the way that Huihui explained her feelings of being marginalized both in the educational and public spheres in the U.S. indicate that she also is beginning to turn a critical lens on the dominant discourses of equality in the U.S.

Despite China's efforts to promote the notion that it is a "classless" society, Huihui's experiences indicate that social class may continue to play a role in producing unequal power dynamics in China between individuals who work for the government and those who work in service industries such as restaurants. Furthermore, her embrace of the Taiyuan dialect as others in her community promote speaking Mandarin in the home also suggests that she is conscious of the role that language plays in identity, and she may also be aware that the use of dialects in China is sometimes tied in with notions of social class. Furthermore, Huihui's feeling that ethnicity is not particularly important in China and her assertions that when minority ethnic groups are unhappy with their treatment, they are simply being manipulated by outside forces, leads me to ask about the role of dominant ethnic groups in constructing a narrative around ethnic unrest. I find myself wondering if Huihui's status as a member of the dominant Han ethnic majority functions similarly within China to how whiteness functions in countries like the U.S. That is, being a member of the dominant group and its cultural practices may prevent individuals from understanding the ways in which these categories function in order to produce different outcomes for categorized groups.

Huihui's understandings of race in the U.S. as "the issues between the Black and the White" illuminate the strength of the binary discourse around race that continues to be dominant. Her experiences in her doctoral program highlight the lack of much-needed

mentorship provided to international students. Finally, Huihui's gradual understanding of the ways in which she has been othered in the U.S., including her experiences being repeatedly asked for identification when making purchases, point to the everyday ways in which international students are racialized, at times without even being aware of it.

## **4.2 Sven: A Case Study**

### **4.2.1 Identity and difference in Norway**

In contrast to the home countries of the other participants in this study, Norway was not an imperial power and it was not colonized. Historically, Norway has been a largely racially (White) and religiously (Christian) homogeneous country. The modern history of Norway as an independent nation state began in 1905 when it peacefully seceded from Sweden, which controlled Norway for almost one hundred years. Prior to that, Norway had been under Danish control for more than four hundred years (Eriksen, 1993). Perhaps because of this relatively short period of complete independence, Norwegians have been eager to clearly establish their national identity outside of the broader Scandinavian identity (Eriksen, 1993). Recently, discourses around immigration in Norway have centered on questions of who "belongs" in Norway and what it means for diverse groups of European and non-European immigrants to adopt a Norwegian identity. Like other Scandinavian countries, Norway was Christianized in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and since then, Protestant Christianity has been the most prominent religion in the country. The primary language spoken is Norwegian, with some Norwegian dialects that non-dialect speakers typically find to be intelligible. As one of the least densely

populated nations in the world, rurality also has been a central characteristic in how Norwegians have defined themselves historically (Eriksen, 1993).

Norway also has a group of nomadic people known as the Sami, many of whom travel across the borders of countries like Sweden and Denmark as well. Though their language, customs, and lifestyle set them apart from other Norwegians, the Sami are light-skinned and would be raced as White in a U.S. context. Until the 1960s, Sami identity was heavily stigmatized in Norway, and their whiteness allowed Sami who lived in more ethnically mixed areas to hide their identities to prevent discrimination. An interest in protecting the rights of ethnic minorities, however, emerged in the 1960s and 70s and with that emergence came a renewed focus on valuing the Sami ethnic identity and making policies that protected their rights (Eriksen, 1993; Semb, 2012).

The politics of Norway are “marked by a peculiar democratic ideology, which we may tentatively label egalitarian individualism. Equality and the integrity of the individual are in other words believed to be highly valued” (Eriksen, 1993, p. 6). Because of the value of egalitarianism, Norway’s legal and political systems have been designed to promote equality. Norway’s open immigration policies and its acceptance of asylum-seekers over the last 30 years, which derives from the value of equality, have become a source of political debate and have challenged traditional notions of what it means to be Norwegian (Phelps, Blakar, Carlquist, Nafstad, Hilde & Rand-Hendriksen, 2012).

The majority of immigrants to Norway hail from European countries such as Poland or Sweden, but a large number of those seeking political asylum have come from African and Asian nations (Statistics Norway, 2013). As immigrants from countries like

Pakistan, Somalia, and Iraq, the image of the Norwegian as White and (at least culturally) Christian has begun to shift (Statistics Norway, 2013). Despite their open policies and historical commitments to egalitarianism, Norwegians find themselves grappling with questions about language, race, religion, assimilation, and belonging (Knudsen, 1997; Wiggen, 2012). Though the discourses around immigration in Norway have become even more salient in the last ten years, Eriksen (1993) spoke about the challenges facing Norway as it accepted increasing numbers of “non-European immigrants” throughout the 80s and 90s. Even then, he remarked that, although the overtly anti-immigrant groups in Norway are on the margins of political life, “suspicion, fear and myths, especially targeting Muslim immigrants, abound” (Eriksen, 1993, p. 15).

In the intervening years, the percentage of the Norwegian population who are either immigrants or the children of immigrants rose from 4.3 percent in 1992 to 14.1 percent in 2012 (Statistics Norway, 2013). Thus, the conversations around immigration and belonging in Norway have become even more urgent. With a large influx of non-White, non-Christian immigrants, Norwegians have been forced to think about what it means to claim a Norwegian national identity. Some political parties in Norway, such as the right-wing Progress Party, invoked populist rhetoric around how Norwegians’ culture and “Muslim culture” are incompatible, while others within Norway have pointed to the country’s culture of egalitarianism as a reason to continue immigration policies that welcome asylum-seekers and other immigrants (Wiggen, 2012).

Amidst this ongoing discourse around immigration in Norway, a tragedy occurred. The perpetrator of the terrorist attacks in Oslo, Norway on July 22, 2011 who killed 78 people was motivated by a disdain for the continued open immigration policies

in Norway. Many Norwegians responded to this event with shock and horror and were forced into reflection around their views about immigration and Norwegian identity, but the political debate around immigration has remained largely unchanged by the event (Wiggen, 2012). So, Norwegians currently find themselves grappling with a clash between the values of equality and justice that they have embraced for many years and questions about belonging and assimilation of non-White immigrants (Wiggen, 2012). Sven's experiences have been shaped by the relative homogeneity of the Norway in which he grew up, and he is very much engaged with the ongoing conversation about race, immigration, and who is able to claim Norwegian identity.

#### **4.2.2 Sven's experiences and perceptions of Norway**

Sven is a new PhD who just began his first faculty job. To understand Sven's experiences, it may be useful to know that, had I not known that he was Norwegian, I would not have suspected that he is not U.S.-born. Sven is White, and he does not speak with a noticeable accent. Of the study's five participants, Sven least fits the traditional definition of an "international student." In fact, Sven is a U.S. citizen. Despite this, I invited him to participate in the study because he spent large portions of his childhood in both Norway and the United States, and he has had several long-term, multi-year stays in Norway.

Sven was born and spent most of his childhood in Norway. He is the second youngest of five siblings, with one older brother, two older sisters, and one younger brother. Sven's parents immigrated separately to the United States in the late 1950s and met in San Francisco. His father is Norwegian, and his mother is Swedish; Sven explains, "Swedes and Norwegians back then didn't normally get together because they

were different. Sweden and Norway have kind of had this longstanding kind of cultural battle between themselves.” Like many Norwegians and Swedes, his parents are Lutheran. After a brief career as a carpenter and a stint in the U.S. Marine Corps, Sven’s father became ordained as a Lutheran minister, married Sven’s mother, and returned to Norway shortly after they wed in 1965.

Upon returning to Norway, Sven’s parents started a ministry in Brumunddal, Norway, where Sven was born. He described Brumunddal as, “a kind of rural, Scandinavian place. A lot of farms, calf farms, pig farms, tractors on the main road, people stopping and saying hello. I walked to school.” Sven felt that his parents’ ministry “comes into play a lot with my identity.” He explained that, through his father’s different ministries, the family moved around a bit in Norway and spent some time in Sweden prior to returning to the United States late in Sven’s childhood. He grew up speaking Norwegian, Swedish, and English. Importantly, Sven has encountered “everything you can imagine” in terms of schooling experiences, attending public and private schools in both Norway and the U.S. and intermittently being home schooled.

Despite the seemingly idyllic setting of Sven’s childhood in Norway, he tells me that he did not necessarily feel as though he and his family belonged in Brumunddal. His sense of not belonging was due in part to his mother’s being Swedish, to his family’s missionary travels to the United States, and to particular aspects of his father’s ministry. He explained why he often felt as though he was an outsider in his small Norwegian community:

Because with the background that my mom had and the fact that we had been to the United States set us apart a little bit. The fact that my father was a minister, a



pastor also set us apart. Because he was ministering to this particular community. And my father was vocal against the evils of society there that were happening - um, you know, if there were - it was interesting, he was against...what would you call....not against but he was working with people who were struggling with alcoholism, working with people who were struggling with pornography. He was helping people who were on the streets and, and so he was unpopular among some people and very popular among other people. But, his ministry automatically, um, put the family kind of as outsiders in a way because we really were different than some of the others. So, religion had a play in kind of separating me from others in a way as well.

He continued to explain that forming lasting friendships was difficult for him growing up, in part because he and his family moved around quite a bit. Therefore, “family was my primary source of nurturing, nurturance.” Due perhaps in part to these aspects which separated his family from others in the community and also due to Sven’s tendency to be “a very shy person by nature,” Sven experienced fairly severe bullying as a child, particularly during the fourth grade. He was teased and taunted by classmates about his red hair and freckles, and he recalled being spit on by a child who was bullying him. Sven’s teachers were not proactive in combating this bullying, so he was frequently afraid to go to school. Though this experience was painful and difficult for Sven, it helped him come to a realization about the limits of personal ideologies based on equality. He explained that, as a child, this experience brought him to a realization that, “everyone may be equal, but not everyone shares in the ideal of presenting themselves in an equal way.”

Throughout our conversations, it was clear that Sven's views about race and racial identity across multiple contexts were centered on notions of equality. He shared that, in part, this was due to his upbringing in Norway. Consistent with Norwegian notions of egalitarianism, when I asked about what values were important to him growing up, Sven responded that:

A very strong value we had growing up was 'everyone is equal.' You know, there isn't one person that's better than another, and even there's not really one person that's smarter than another? Everybody's smart in different ways. Some people are street smart, some people are smart in working with the garden, some people are smart in reading books, and you know, we're all really equal when it comes to...and then that was a value that was always really important to my parents growing up.

Because of Norway's largely racially homogeneous, White population, Sven did not grow up with race as a typical conversation topic. In many ways, Sven's earliest understandings and attitudes toward racial difference were shaped heavily by his earliest interactions with a person of color in Norway. When Sven was a little boy, a boy from Nigeria moved into his small town and attended his school. Sven and his classmates were fascinated with this boy who seemed to be so different from them. He described his interest in his new classmate and the ways in which this interaction set the foundation for future interactions as follows:

And, everybody wanted to hang out with this guy because he was the coolest, different. He was just, he was very dark and very energetic. Very lively and fun. And, I remember thinking kind of to myself, 'I kind of wish I was like him. I wish

I was Black and I wish I was from Africa, and I wish I was energetic, and I wish I was social.’ So, I had that kind of idea growing up as a kid that, that people were unique and very valuable. Now, this story will come into play later on because it's a story that kind of, I learned that people treat people differently because of skin color. So this initial perception set the foundation for me for learning later on.

I asked Sven if this was the first time he had interacted with a person of color. He replied, “Yes, yes. And it was a really, really positive experience and it made me realize that a person from a different culture really had a lot to offer.” Though his Nigerian classmate’s skin color made an impression on Sven, it was not the primary thing about him that was interesting to Sven. As he explained, “I looked more at this person was very unique and noticeable. But I wasn't just thinking about color, skin color. I thinking about...he was unique. The way he acted, the way he communicated was really, really cool. Real exciting.” The discussion around how this boy was different from Sven and his other classmates, both culturally and racially, continued in Sven’s home. He described going home and telling his mother about his new classmate:

And here's a person of African descent, and he's different...’Why is he different, Mom?’ ‘Because he's from Africa.’ ‘Okay, so why else is he different? What else?’ ‘Well, he acts different. He's very talkative.’ - You know, Norwegians are kind of more reserved. - But he's very, very talkative, and he's very expressive with his hands. And so, and so I asked myself as a kid, well what is that? He's from a different background, he's from a different family. He's from a different

culture. And, and even though we may not have used the term, 'race', it was something we talked about.

This early interaction with a person from another country, whose culture Sven felt was very different from his own, made an impression that lasted throughout Sven's life. As a result of this interaction and others like it, he developed a set of ideals that centered on a person's humanity being much more important than nationalistic identities. He explained this influence as follows:

So that, as a child, along with other experiences I've had, kind of solidified this thing that we're all kind of human citizens instead of Norwegians or Swedes or American. And that we are unique no matter where we come from. And that was kind of - and I still have that view today. That, I am Norwegian, very Norwegian. I'm very American in many ways. I'm very Swedish in many ways, but I'm human.

In addition to being ideals his parents valued, Sven saw his belief in egalitarianism and equality as deeply Scandinavian in nature. He explained:

And that's inherent in the Scandinavian culture, too. That we're all equal. Not just race and background or religion, but male/female, child/adult. Children in Norway have rights that children in America don't have. And, a ten year old speaks, people stop and they listen to what the ten year old has to say. And they don't just brush it off because a child is speaking. Just like if an old person is speaking. It's valuable because they're human and they have some sort of input.

As a dual citizen of Norway and the United States, Sven strongly identified himself as Norwegian. Prior to the advent of the internet, Sven made great efforts to stay

current with events in Norway, often driving up to New York or other major cities with some regularity in order to access Norwegian newspapers. He still watches the evening news in Norway.

Sven's Norwegian identity also manifests itself through language. He explained that he strongly identifies with Brumunddal, Norway because, "I was born there, and I speak the language. I speak the local language. So, there are many different dialects in Norway, but I can speak and understand the way they, those few thousand people speak." Furthermore, Sven's continued engagement with the local Brumunddal dialect has allowed him to maintain a positive sense of connection with the place. He described his ties to the language:

It's very small with a certain way of speaking and joking around and slang. So much that when I went back to Norway to work there, people thought I was a local person. I was able to keep that language and so that was, that was important for me. Even though I was outside of it - I've always been outside of it, but I've always been able to be part of it.

Anders Behring Breivik's trial unfolded during the time when I was interviewing Sven. Because Breivik's motives were outlined in a manifesto that denounced Norway's open immigration policies and the influx of non-white immigrant groups into the country, I had intended to ask Sven about the role that the massacre has played in how Norwegians think of themselves, but the topic arose organically. Given everything that Sven had told me about the egalitarian nature of Norwegian culture, he and other Norwegians were very concerned about what the event means for Norway's future. He told me that, as a result of this event, Norwegians were, "struggling with their own

values, here. And this is challenging and shaking up the whole system.” He explained how, in part, Brevik’s ideologies are an extension of public reactions to the broader political atmosphere and current immigration policies in Norway.

I believe that, in many ways, the sentiments of many Norwegians about open immigration policies and the ties between national identity and language sound familiar to the kinds of debates and arguments that are made in the U.S. Sven believes, however, that most Norwegians have renewed their commitment to egalitarian values as a result of the tragedy:

When I was working over there and did my study over there, there are a few people who have milder, you know a milder version of – anytime you have immigrants that come in, people that are not ethnically Norwegian and then Norwegians start to lose jobs for example because this person is willing to take the job for less. You know, anytime you have something like that that happens there’s going to be some sort of resentment. You know, ‘if these people weren’t here, then my son might have a job.’ So, there starts to creep in this little tiny resentment toward people that really don’t understand Norwegian or don’t even want to speak Norwegian. You know, [in a Norwegian accent] ‘Why would somebody not want to speak Norwegian? It’s a dying language! People need to learn Norwegian!’ And they’re forcing people to speak Norwegian and adapt to the culture.

Although Sven acknowledged the concerns and resentment that some Norwegians have expressed to him about the growing population of immigrants, he does not feel that

Breivik's attack or his motives for the attack are at all representative of the views of most Norwegians:

And so, yeah, there is a little bit of that resentment there. But, I think, all the people believe that this [Breivik terrorist attack] is completely an aberration of this tiny resentment that they may feel. But, of course, they feel some guilt there. They're like 'man, I have had a little bit of feeling about this. And then we have this extreme guy that does this, and so I don't know that I can feel resentful anymore. I don't know that I can, you know, I have to maybe swing the opposite direction.' And most of them are doing that, to kind of separate themselves from this action. So, so yeah. To answer your question, there has, I've come across people. The majority of people, no. But a small percentage of people, maybe 10 percent of people have some resentment towards immigrants coming in, yeah.

As in many countries, discourses around immigration and belonging in Norway are linked with race. Sven's ideas about race and racial difference are consistent with his holistic and humanistic view of the world. Though his definition of the term "race" began with an explanation of race as primarily based on physical attributes, he eventually moved into a description of race that included things like religion and ethnicity. He defined race as follows:

Well, when I think of the term 'race', I think of, of course many different aspects. So I kind of have a holistic approach to race. And it involves of course what your appearance is, physical features, anything from skin color to hair color to eye color to how tall you are, how short you are.

In further elaborating on his understanding of race, Sven expanded the notion beyond physical appearance to encompass multiple aspects of identity, including religion and ethnicity. He continued:

And, then...and then there's the religious piece. To me, that's kind of part of an identity for me. And then you have kind of the ethnic background. So growing up in Norway, I was born in Hamar, Norway, and that automatically - well, my father was a Norwegian when I was born...and in America you have to, you have to...if you're born in America, you become an American citizen - in Norway, you have to be born in the country and have at least one parent who's Norwegian. So you can't, you don't just become Norwegian without having a parent who's Norwegian. So, later on understanding this, I realized there was it was a part of that, that kind of fit into the bloodline [aspect] of being Norwegian. So I grew up thinking I was Norwegian and Scandinavian, but then I had my mom who was Swedish, so that made me Norwegian-Swedish.

#### **4.2.3 Sven's experiences in and perceptions of the United States**

Because Sven was just 13 when his family immigrated to the United States, his perceptions of the U.S. were based on Norwegian television shows and magazines that portrayed U.S. pop cultural images like “cowboys and Indians.” In fact, Sven recalls being a young boy and reading a Norwegian children's magazine that depicted “American cowboys and Indians.” Largely, he saw the U.S. as a place where things were bigger and better. Sven elaborated on this notion:



So, my ideas were kind of like - this is kind of how it still is. It was a fantasy world, really, but - So I'd heard a lot about America. They had big amusement parks...big roads, big cars. Delicious food. They had cartoons.

Sven's parents reinforced positive perception of the U.S. as a "land of opportunity." He provided examples of the kinds of messages that his parents shared with him about the U.S.:

It's one of these things that has kind of been pervasive throughout my childhood is that, 'You can do anything you want to in America.' 'You can become anything you want to.' But we also believe that in our family too. It was kind of a family belief, too. But America was also very exciting because it was a land of opportunity.

Sven's father's missionary work led the family to travel throughout the U.S. South, and in 1980, they eventually moved from Norway and settled down more permanently in the U.S. Sven recalled struggling through a "really tough" transitional period when the family first moved. He explained the struggle:

But, it was a struggle for me as well. So language was one thing. Just adapting to culture. I remember stepping off the plane in 1980, and a lady looked at me, a very nice flight attendant. She said [in Southern drawl], 'Welcome to South Carolina, darlin!'. And I looked at her, and I wondered why she was calling me 'darling'. You just don't do that in Norway - Unless you know somebody really well! But they're really friendly in The South and that was a really nice thing, but it was, but it was also a shock.

Upon arriving in the U.S., Sven began attending a private religious school where he encountered some of the same problems with fitting in that he had experienced in Norway. Already a quiet child, he struggled at first with English and “was trying to figure out how to communicate.” Sven found himself, “gravitating to people who were, who were marginalized. People who really weren't part of the ‘in group’ or whatever.” His group of friends included several boys who were teased for having acne, braces, and greasy hair and also the few African American students and students from other countries who attended his small school. Around the age of 16, however, Sven experienced a dramatic social transformation. He recalled:

I realized I was very, very shy. I was very...quiet. And, for some reason just one morning I woke up and I said, ‘I'm not gonna be shy anymore.’ And I made myself talk to everybody. Just to expand my world. And between sixteen and when I graduated, I ended up becoming very popular.

As Sven became more popular and joined multiple clubs in school, he used his newfound popularity to try to bring together groups of students who did not often interact with each other. Although he did not tie this experience directly to racial differences between groups of students, I posit that this vignette in Sven’s life reflects his general disposition of curiosity about difference.

Sven’s experiences of traveling through Alabama and other Southern states with his parents’ ministry brought him in contact with people of diverse racial and religious backgrounds. He shared the kinds of experiences he had traveling to various church denominations in the U.S. with his father’s ministry and how those experiences began to open his eyes to the kind of racism that permeated life in the United States:

And then I came to America at age 13. And I realized people do really treat people differently in certain cultures. I, I met an African American...a guy who had really been subjected to, to torment by people growing up. And, he was describing the experiences he had gone through. And I'm horrified thinking that people could actually do that. And he tells me it's by somebody who looks like me.

This experience and others like it deepened Sven's understanding of the dissonance between the values with which his parents had raised him and some of the racist social norms in the U.S. South. For example, he shared how a friend of his was traumatized by racism as a child:

I met a lady who had grown up in the South. And she, as a child, lived on a street and there were pickup trucks. . .driving down the street with the. . . confederate flag or rebel flag...And they would yell out these negative terms and racial slurs and euphemisms and all these things as they were driving up and down her street, which was an African American street. And she was, she was terrified as a girl, little girl, seeing all that looking out the windows through her blinds. These people just like angry and upset with her because she's Black and she's different.

After sharing his friend's experience with overt and frightening forms of racism, Sven grappled with the implications that kind of racism for him as a White man:

And, and so I understood that, that there's some mean people out there who really have evil intent in their heart. And race just happens to be one avenue they can use. They use other avenues too, disabilities or whatever, to pick on people. And so this becomes their way to vent. So, but these, these and other experiences start

to color who I am as a person because I realize I have to separate myself from who I am visually to a person.

Sven reflected further on the ways in which, although he understands the U.S.'s history of racial oppression and what that racist history means for the legacy of whiteness in the U.S. context, he hopes to interrupt people's assumptions:

When a person looks at me, many people automatically assume I am a certain person. And I want them to realize when they talk with me or get to know me, that I'm not necessarily who they think I am. Not because I really want to just blow their mind about that I'm different than when they think I am, but I really wanna challenge them, like I have been challenged. That things are not always as they seem. We all are really very complex people who have a lot of different backgrounds and experiences that make each person unique.

Sven also discussed the ways in which his whiteness has allowed him to blend in as an "average American." Here, Sven evokes the power of whiteness as a marker for belonging in the United States. He discusses the ways in which he is racialized as White in the U.S. context and what that means for his visibility as an immigrant:

People would see me as an average American, White boy. Caucasian boy. Until I'd open up my mouth and came up with an accent. Now, I've lost the accent. So, now they just look at me as an average American. Um, you know, I can speak Southern, I can eat grits and talk about football, even though I really don't like football that much. But I can talk about football and touchdowns and, you know, I can fit in as an average American.

Sven recognized the privilege associated with his whiteness and his ability to

blend in and not let others know that he is originally from Norway. He acknowledged that he uses his dual identities as United States-ian and Norwegian to his advantage when he can. For example:

When I realize that there's a certain place I go where a foreign-speaking Norwegian, then I'm gonna be an average American. When I go to Norway, for example, and go through customs, then a lot of times I speak English. Because I get more respect. If I speak Norwegian, then they'll make me wait longer, they'll...but then if they're [Norwegians] questioning my nationality, then I talk about...those things that they know. That they grew up on.

#### **4.2.4 Interpreting Sven's Experiences**

The ways in which broader issues of power and privilege in a society influence an individuals' experience of those categories was evident in Sven's narrative as a White man. Though Sven openly discussed issues of race and racism in the South and elsewhere, he seemed hesitant to name or interrogate his own racial identity. In fact, as he and I spoke, he shared a number of personal philosophies that seemed to reject the notion of racial identity altogether. I speculate that, in part, the way that Sven described himself, his identities, and his beliefs relate strongly to his professional identity as a counselor and also to his upbringing in both a home and a (Norwegian) society that highly valued notions of equality. Beyond his professional identity, however, the theories that frame this study require that I interrogate the role that Sven's whiteness plays in his hesitancy to discuss his own racial identity. By naming his whiteness and its potential role in the narratives he shared, I do not seek to discount Sven's commitments to equity and social justice. Indeed, he did acknowledge the ease with which he can

assume a fully Americanized, Southern U.S. white male identity, and he recognized the privilege attached to those identities:

Yeah. I can be American. I can be very American. I can be...I can be Southern, even. I can be Northern. I have family, my sister lived up in Pennsylvania. I can be Norwegian, Brumunddaling. I can be, I dunno, I guess I'm like a chameleon or something. In Sweden, I can pass for a Swede. It's - and the reason is because all of that's part of who I am. It's part of my culture, part of who I am. So...But I am Norwegian. I have a Norwegian passport. I'm a dual citizen. I have a Norwegian passport and an American passport, so...I have the ability to work, to live in both countries, both cultures. I'm European, but I'm also American. There are some things about Europe I don't like. Some things about America I don't like. Some things about America I love, and some things about Europe I really love. So, it's sort of very complex. You know?

Furthermore, Sven's commitments to attend to dynamics of power and privilege within his professional context are evident in his description of his own dissertation research and what he hopes it can accomplish:

I've wanted to figure out a way to, to equalize, power differentials that exist in the world. So much that my dissertation has focused on the power differential between clients and counselors...Clients come to counselors because counselors are supposed to help them solve their problems. There's automatically a disadvantage there. And I wanna balance that out. I want to empower the voice of the client in a therapy session. So, I see this as related to all of this because I've got this desire to, to just do whatever I can in my field to make sure that I,

that I equal the power differential. To help equal the power differential, and give voices to the marginalized people and the people who need to have those voices. You know, if they can't speak for themselves, to be the loudspeaker for them.

Sven's upbringing in a Norwegian society that valued humanity and equality, his family upbringing, and his professional and personal commitments to examining and understanding difference have led to his interrogatory approach to understanding how race, racism, and other forms of exclusion operate in U.S. society. Sven acknowledges the ways in which his whiteness is tied to power, allowing him to be more fully accepted into White-dominated U.S. society, and he finds himself grappling with the responsibilities associated with acknowledging White privilege. Ultimately, Sven approaches White privilege as something that makes him responsible for pushing conversations about race, power, and difference forward.

### **4.3 Caroline: A Case Study**

#### **4.3.1 Identity and difference in Brazil**

Brazil's current racial and social landscape has been shaped by a historical legacy that includes the Portuguese colonization of lands that were occupied by indigenous people and the enslavement of African people. Brazil is a large country geographically, has a large population, and hosts a growing economy. Despite continuous economic growth since the 1990s, Brazil remains a place in which vast wealth differences separate the rich and the poor, and this divide along class lines often also intersects with a racial divide. Furthermore, Brazil's history around race and its formerly strong reputation as a

“racial democracy” positions the country as an interesting context in which to study how race and racialization operates.

The story of race and other categories of difference that are important in contemporary Brazil ultimately relate to colonization, enslavement, and the relationships among three groups (indigenous people, enslaved Africans, and Portuguese colonizers) in what became Brazil. When the Portuguese colonized the area that is now Brazil in 1500, indigenous groups had been living there for thousands of years (Johnson, 1987). As was the case for many tribal groups who encountered European colonizers, some indigenous peoples were assimilated into Portuguese culture while others died of diseases to which they had not developed immunity (Fausto, 1999; Johnson, 1987). In addition to the indigenous groups who already were in Brazil, the Portuguese also enslaved African people and brought them to Brazil to work on sugar plantations (Fausto, 1999; Schwartz, 1987). Following the Brazilian War of Independence, Portugal recognized Brazil’s independence in 1825; slavery in Brazil, which had gradually declined since independence, was officially abolished in 1888.

Throughout Brazil’s history as a nation, these three groups frequently intermarried creating a racially diverse society devoid of the hard boundaries around race that have dominated in the U.S. (Winant, 2001). In contrast to societies like the U.S., in which racial labels are typically imposed depending on the racial labels that have been applied to one’s parents, racial labels in Brazil are based more closely on skin color. For example, two full siblings whose skin color is different might receive different racial labels in Brazilian society (Twine, 2000). The most recent population numbers from Brazil reveal that the largest percentage of Brazilians identify themselves as either White



or Brown/multiracial, with fewer than seven percent of the Brazilian population identifying as Afro-Brazilian or Black.

Despite the apparent fluidity with which racial labels are applied and adopted in Brazil, the legacies of colonization and enslavement have nevertheless created a racial hierarchy in which those with the lightest skin (i.e., those who are primarily of European descent) overwhelmingly hold the power and wealth in Brazilian society.

Anthropologists and other scholars had, for many years lauded Brazil as a “racial democracy” (Twine, 2000; Winant, 2001). Twine (2000) argues that the 1933 book *Case Grande e Senzala* by Gilberto Freyre presented a sanitized account of Brazil’s histories around enslavement and colonization and is largely responsible for “the birth of the Brazilian democracy’s racial myth” (p. 6). Furthermore, she details the ways in which this myth, and the extent to which Afro-Brazilians and other Brazilians of color have adopted it, has had “devastating effects on antiracist organizing” (p. 6) in Brazil.

Since around the 1970s, however, scholars have been publishing work that revealed racial inequalities with which many dark-skinned were already familiar but were reluctant to name (Skidmore, 1974; Telles, 2004; Twine, 2000). This work demonstrated that wealth and education gaps in Brazil often broke down along color lines (or in Brazil, along the color spectrum) and also revealed racial projects aimed at ensuring that the elites in Brazil were White. In the mid-1990s, small movements of students began to protest in São Paulo, demanding that more Afro-Brazilians be admitted. As a result, university systems in Brazil began to enact policies to counteract these inequities (Twine, 2000). Slowly, over the past decade, Brazilian institutions of higher education have begun to introduce race-conscious admissions policies and quota systems to address race

and class gaps that are reflected in the quality of the Brazilian school system. The racial hierarchy is further reflected in the realities of higher education access, as students from predominantly White private institutions are those who most often have the scores needed to attend university.

Because many Brazilians had themselves identified strongly with the notion that they live in a racial democracy, the adjustment to race-conscious admissions policies has caused some public controversy (Bailey, 2009). Brazilians are currently engaging in discourses around how these policies are to be applied in a country that has been regarded globally as a racial democracy with almost countless racial categories. As Brazilians grapple with the contradictions between their self-concept and global reputation as a racial democracy, the gap between the wealthy and the poor in Brazil remains closely tied to skin color. Caroline's experiences and perspectives around race in Brazil are closely related to these hotly contested university admissions policies and to the continuing conversations and debates around the significance of race in Brazil.

#### **4.3.2 Caroline's experiences in and perceptions of Brazil**

Caroline was born and grew up in São Paulo, Brazil in a family that she described as "upper middle to upper class." Her father and mother are both doctors. Caroline has an older sister, and they grew up in what she referred to as "a really nice neighborhood." Despite liking the neighborhood where she grew up, Caroline spent much of her childhood distanced from her extended family in Rio de Janeiro. She described the experience of being separated from the broader family network as, "a big thing in Brazil." Though Caroline's parents divorced when she was about five years old, she did not feel that the divorce had a negative impact on her because she and her sister spent time

throughout the week at each parent's house. She explained, "They were both really present, so that's nothing that ever scarred us or impact us in any negative way."

Caroline grew up in São Paulo, but her family roots were in Rio de Janeiro (or "Rio"), so she and her family traveled there fairly often. Caroline had a cousin who lived in Rio, who remains her "best friend" today. She also had an aunt and uncle in São Paulo who were influential in her life; they did not have children, so they devoted ample attention and affection to Caroline and her sister. Caroline shared with me that her aunt often picked her up from school. Overall, Caroline feels that she had "a really healthy childhood," and she laughed as she explained to me that she, "played with dolls until – I dunno – twelve or eleven – things that young girls don't necessarily do nowadays."

Caroline's mother has been a strong female influence in her life, and she instilled a strong sense of self-worth and the value of independence in Caroline and her sister. She explained that a large part of the reason she decided to study in the United States was her mother's encouragement. Caroline shared her mother's determination that her daughters would challenge traditional gender roles or stereotypes by being self-sufficient:

My mom always wanted us to be independent and to have our own things, our own careers and not just create that fantasy of the perfect husband or person – be that fragile female. So my mom always empowered us to think that way, to be independent.

Caroline also told me that her mother encouraged her daughters to be open and familiar with their own emotions and thoughts through letter writing and journaling. Caroline said that, with her family, "Things were never awkward. Never a taboo. We were

always able to talk a lot. So my sense of identity really early on was perfect. I was really comfortable with myself.”

In the upper middle class to wealthy neighborhood where Caroline grew up, she and her family felt they belonged to the community. Living in that community brought Caroline into close, personal contact with people in working-class jobs. Her family employed maids who cleaned their house growing up, and Caroline was a flower girl in the wedding of one of the family’s maids. I noted that, despite coming from an upper class family, her observations of the domestic workers in her neighborhood brought Caroline into close contact with the realities of social class inequality in Brazil. Caroline says that, “Because the social difference in Brazil is so great that people do a lot of labors like that that you don’t find here [in the U.S.]”

Caroline described schooling experiences in Brazil that were quite close-knit and community-oriented. She explains the ways in which schooling is structured differently in Brazil, with students remaining with the same cohort and teachers rotating through the classrooms. Through the experience of attending the same private school from kindergarten through her completion of high school, Caroline explains that, “you really form strong bonds with those friends.” She still maintains relationships with her classmates, and when Caroline returns to Brazil, those friends are still like family to her. As she explains, “[it’s] like as we’ve never spent a day or two apart.”

Brazil is made up of five regions, and both of its major cities (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) are in the Central Eastern region of the country. Since Caroline’s family is from one city and she grew up in another, she told me that she has had a somewhat mixed accent. She has been gently teased by friends in São Paulo for having a Carioca (Rio)

accent and by friends in Rio for having a Paulista (São Paulo) accent. Growing up, Caroline shared that she “embraced that. I enjoyed being, having that different thing about me. The fact that my family was from a different place.” Caroline informed me that, Rio de Janeiro and its people are typically described as being fun and laid back while São Paulo and its residents are described as being driven and business-oriented. Though she identified with both cities as a child, Caroline said that she is beginning to identify more strongly with the culture of São Paulo because:

I kind of perceive them as more ambitious or career oriented than people from Rio. I feel that people from Rio tend – I’m just being totally biased or even prejudiced in saying that – but, I feel that people in São Paulo wanna achieve great things, and people in Rio just settle for average. And they tend to, maybe they spend their time a little better. They don’t focus on work so much, but I feel like I’m connected to the more career or work oriented folks, so I...I dunno. [laughs] I feel terrible saying that ‘cause it’s probably not right, but that’s just the image that I, that you end up perceiving, so.

Caroline described how Brazil is famously racially diverse. In Brazil, she explained, there are almost innumerable racial categories into which one might be classified:

In Brazil, we have a huge mixture of races and ethnicity, so that’s always something that...We didn’t have the segregation that was once experienced here. You know, classmates would always be from all different kinds of backgrounds and looks. From the Asian-looking kid to what we called “mulattos.” We

actually in Brazil, we have several names for the different mixtures of races. So it's not as simple as Black and White.

Caroline continued as she listed some of the many racial categories used in Brazil and discussing the ways in which having a mixture of heritages is celebrated and normalized in Brazil:

We have a name for the mixture between Black and White. We have a name for the Native American and White; Native American and Black. So all of those races also have names. So that's something that shows that this is a part of our culture, and that's, you know, accepted within our culture. So I would say the majority of Brazilians are somewhat of a mix either between ethnicities or between races. So my family, for example, we had a mixture of Italian, Portuguese, and Native Brazilian, so...that blend always could be pointed out in people's families and background. So it was also always so natural.

Though she is aware of, and in many ways celebrates, Brazil's global image as a racial democracy, I do not believe that Caroline is oblivious to the connections that exist between skin color and social class in Brazil. She explained how those inequalities came into play in her own experiences:

But like I told you, most people from the lower classes either tend to be the mulatto, the mixed race or African American, not American, African Brazilian? I don't know...I'll just say Black or negras...So, for example, the ladies...that used to clean my house - most of 'em were African American when I was little...But that sometimes tends to be the reality - the African Americans or the mixed racial ones tend to be still part of the lower classes.

Although she did not deny the racial inequalities in Brazil, when comparing the racial landscape in Brazil to that of the United States, Caroline believes that Brazil is still far ahead of the U.S. After sharing that many of the people in working class or “lower class” jobs are people of color, Caroline interrupted herself and explained:

But that is not necessarily true. We also have a lot of, um, negras that are really successful and really...So, I wouldn't say we impose a glass ceiling, or, I don't think we would ever make that big deal if we elected a president. Like Obama, like happened here. Like, people were in shock, 'Oh my God. We just elected our first African American president.' So I doubt that would be an issue in Brazil. As mentioned, in light of increasing scholarship and awareness around the ways in which Brazilian society is stratified by skin color (Telles, 2004; Twine, 1998), Brazilian universities have begun to enact policies intended to even out these inequalities. These new policies have impacted policies around higher education, and Caroline remarked that she takes exception to the nuances of the policy:

I know that we have quotas for getting into, into the public schools. 'Cause the public schools in Brazil, the universities, you actually don't pay at all. And they are the best ones, so people study and work really hard to get into those schools. And now they started...I don't know how long ago, but they have quotas. So, African Americans, if you're labeled that, you get a better chance of getting into school because they have a quota of X amount of students have to be accepted. Caroline explained that the reason why she is not convinced that this policy is helpful is related to the disparities in the quality of some of the public schools in Brazil:

Which I disagree with because I think it should be based on whether the kid went to public high school or not because that's where the difference lies. Because the public high schools are really bad. So I don't think it should be based on race. Because it doesn't necessarily mean that, just because you're Black you had a worse education. Or you have smaller, sligher chances to get into school.

Another central issue around contemporary discourses of race in Brazil is the method by which people are racially identified and labeled. In Brazil, race is a largely self-determined category, but such self-determination becomes more politicized in light of university admissions policies that are tied to racial identification. Caroline feels that this further complicates Brazil's racial landscape, and she fears that these policies will serve as a destructive force:

I think if there should be quotas, it should be based on whether or not you went to public school or to a private high school. 'Cause that's really common for people, you know, if you're from the middle class even if it's lower middle class, you want your kids in public [sic] high schools because the public school system in Brazil is terrible. Not until you get to the higher education that they become the best institutions to study at.

Regarding her own racial identity, Caroline identifies as White. I asked her to reflect on what, if any, meaning whiteness has had in her life. Overall, she has not felt that her whiteness has been a particularly important aspect of her identity or of how others perceive her. She said, "I don't think it was ever...I was never, like self-conscious that I was White or, you know, something else. I don't think that was a big label. I don't think that made a huge impact."



Despite feeling that her own race has not played a significant role in her life, Caroline did reflect on the potential meanings attached to having a certain hair type and the lengths to which she and other Brazilian women often go to straighten their hair:

No, but from early on, girls care about, you know, straightening their hair or things like that. So I think even the African Americans or the mulattas, the girls that are the mix, we tend to all like the straight hair. I don't know if that was an indication that race kind of played a role? That nobody wanted...because Brazilians tend to have wavy or curly hair. And, I, for example, I like straightening my hair. I have like wavy, really volumous, full hair, that I should embrace. It's really pretty, actually, but I got conditioned that, you know, 'we all wanna have straight hair.'

Caroline's experiences around race in Brazil are revealing in the ways in which economic privilege and whiteness have both operated in a way that, I would argue, make her less able to engage with an understanding of the systems of inequality and privilege that continue to operate in Brazil. Furthermore, despite the colorblind ideologies around race that she espoused, Caroline acknowledged a certain level of racial hierarchy in Brazilian society that privileges Whites and that sets up whiteness as the standard to which Brazilians aspire.

#### **4.3.3 Caroline's experiences in and perceptions of the United States**

When Caroline was a young girl, her aunt and uncle brought her to the U.S. for a vacation at Disney World. During this visit, she caught her first glimpse into the racial separations and hierarchies of the United States. At the pool of the hotel where her family was staying, Caroline was shocked to see the separation between the groups of

African American families and children and the White families and children at the pool. She recalled, “that was the first time I ever saw something like that.” She also shared with me that she noticed that neighborhoods and restaurants she and her family visited seemed to be racially segregated. Though she had learned about the Civil War, racial segregation, and the Civil Rights Movement from school, this was the first time that Caroline had witnessed segregation. The segregation that she witnessed in U.S. society stood out to her as it contrasted with her own experience; as she explains, “it was really weird because we never had something like that in Brazil.”

In addition to her brief experiences vacationing in the U.S. as a child, Caroline also developed notions of what life in the U.S. was like from “movies and media in general.” She also took courses in English outside of school that introduced her to “cultura inglesa.” In that course, she learned about both British and U.S. culture.

Caroline came to the U.S. for her undergraduate degree, and she chose the satellite campus of a larger university because she had a friend from Brazil who attended a nearby school as a tennis player. Upon completing her undergraduate degree, Caroline decided to stay in the U.S. to pursue a Master’s degree in mass communications. Several considerations motivated Caroline to leave Brazil and to study in the United States. She felt somewhat unsafe in São Paulo as it experienced problems with violence, and she felt that the United States would be a safer place to study. She was also encouraged by her mother to study in the United States to practice and perfect her English. Furthermore, Caroline’s mother hoped that studying in the U.S. would help Caroline to develop a future for herself where she could be independent and not need to rely on a relationship for self-sufficiency.

The university at which Caroline completed her undergraduate studies “served a lot of non-traditional students and a lot of first generation students.” Additionally, Caroline said that she, “noticed that the majority of the population [of her undergraduate institution] was African American.” Within that space, she felt “there was no, no distinction. I mean, I felt like everybody was pretty much included, and you know, in the big community.” Despite the traditionally conservative region where her undergraduate institution is located and despite the low number of international students in the area, Caroline experienced a warm welcome by the people in the surrounding area. In fact, during her time at her undergraduate institution, Caroline met a family she has come to consider a second family, and she still drives a few hours to visit them for holidays like Thanksgiving and other special occasions.

When she decided to remain in the United States for graduate study, Caroline decided to attend a program at a large university near the one she had attended as an undergraduate to remain close to her network of friends. As soon as she moved to the larger university, she noticed a difference in the racial environment at this university. She remembered that when she first arrived, “I kind of felt like the African American population was absolutely a minority here.” In particular, Caroline recalled noticing a lack of women of color among the dance team at a basketball game:

Even my first basketball game here....I went with a Brazilian friend. And I kind of looked down at the dancers, the [team mascot] dancers or whatever. Not the cheerleaders, but it was like the dance team. There was like a single, like out of 30, 20 girls, there was just one African American dancer! And I was like, ‘Wow,

that's...’ And my friend was like, ‘Yeah, I think that’s kind of, you know, normal here.’ So, I dunno.

Caroline was drawn to this larger university for graduate study because of the “huge international population,” and she had an assistantship working with the international student services office at the university. Her experiences working with the international student office have exposed Caroline to interesting exchanges between international students and the community in which the university is located. The office has a program designed to promote cultural exchange in which international students visit local middle and high schools and give presentations about their countries of origin, and Caroline has had a role in coordinating that program. Leading other international students through these experiences has given Caroline insight into some of the complex ways in which U.S. notions of identity intersect with those of her students’ home countries. Furthermore, these experiences have demonstrated that people in the U.S. often know very little about countries other than their own.

Overall, Caroline has had extremely positive experiences studying and living in the United States, but she has noted specific cultural differences between Brazil and the U.S., particularly as it relates to “selling yourself” to others. She told me:

What I see living in the United States for almost seven years now is that people here are really to themselves and really individualistic, and I think that’s a little different than back home. We’re taught to consider others a little more...there [Brazil], for example, speaking of your accomplishments or something like that might sound like you’re bragging. But here [the U.S.] you’re encouraged to be proud of what you accomplish and to market yourself...So, I think [in Brazil],

there's a little bit more of a sense of a collectivistic – you tend to consider others a little more.

When I asked Caroline for her definition of race, she focused on the categorization and labeling aspects and functions of race. She replied that:

Race is just a way for people to get others figured out. A label that helps them classify people. I think humans or people...as a psychology student, I think I'm saying that, but...people are kind of afraid of the unknown, so what they kind of try to do is figure people out and label people. So I think by determining that this exists and kind of classifying others, it helps them be a little less intimidated to handle different, to deal with different people. But I think race is what, the labels that you use to describe people from different ethnic and facial features and cultural differences that there are.

In addition to the language-related aspects of Brazilian identity and its uniqueness within South America, Caroline also embraces and takes pride in elements of Brazilian culture related to warmth and friendliness. Her ideas about what it means to be Brazilian have, in many ways, become stronger within the context of the U.S., where she has been able to draw contrasts between Brazilian ways of being and her understandings of the U.S. as a less expressive and embracing society. She shared an example of how Brazilian culture contrasts with U.S. culture:

I do have an image of what the Brazilian is as far as personality. And that's something that connects me to every Brazilian that I meet here in the U.S. When we meet each other, it's funny. 'Cause, my advisor from undergrad kind of adopted me into her family here, so she came to look for housing and things like

that when I moved here. And when I first got to [campus], I met one of the advisors there, and she is from Brazil...And I started talking to her in English, and then I realized she was Brazilian, we started talking to each other in Portuguese. By the end of the conversation, we were hugging and exchanging phone numbers. And my advisor was like, 'What's going on? Do you guys know each other? You've known each other?' [I said] 'No! We just met!'

Caroline embraces these kinds of expressions of Brazilian identity in the U.S. context:

But, it connects us so well as if we were some kind of extended family. So I met a lot of Brazilians all throughout the U.S., and that's always the reaction. They'll be open to you and act as if they've known you for a long time.

Caroline says that she has not felt racialized during her time in the U.S.

Occasionally, she has been exoticized and treated with great curiosity, but through these experiences she says that she has not ever felt, "prejudiced for being Brazilian or foreign." She recognizes the potential role that her whiteness and her (lack of) accent might play in her overwhelmingly positive experiences in the United States. She thought through the kinds of assumptions that people in the U.S. might project on someone who was less able to "blend in:"

But I do feel that, for example, if my accent was a little more to the Hispanic, really strong, you know accent from somewhere else. And it was more – because I have friends from all South America studying here – and they have really heavy accents that you can distinguish, 'Okay. This person is from South America.'

Caroline continued to speculate about how she might be treated differently if she had more of an accent, or if something about her evoked the image of “Mexicans” or “illegal immigrants”:

So maybe if I had that kind of accent, people would kind of fit me in, into the, you know - for example, because people think Mexicans- they think, you know, illegal immigrants and - So they tend to react to you in a certain way, I would think. So maybe if I had a really thicker...if I stood out more as an international student, or as a South American. I don't know how people would react, but maybe because I kind of blend in, like my accent's not so thick, or you know, I don't look extremely different or...maybe. I don't know.

Though Caroline racially identifies as White, her identification with whiteness is sometimes complicated by the broader sociopolitical context of race and ethnicity in the U.S. She said that, although she personally identifies as White, she feels a sense of pressure to identify herself as Latino if the option of selecting both categories is not offered. She explained the process of completing forms that include demographic information in the U.S.:

When I read the descriptions, I will go, 'I'm White.' But not necessarily. They want me to label myself as 'Hispanic.' But I don't consider myself Hispanic because Brazil wasn't colonized by Spain. So, I'm Latino maybe, but I'm not Hispanic. You know? And we don't speak Spanish, so we speak Portuguese, so that's a totally different category. I would say South American, yes. Latino, yes. But not Hispanic. Sometimes I feel the urge of going to the 'White,' but I either say “Other” or whatever, I will just mark 'Hispanic.' 'Cause that's what they

want. So that's confusing here. But in Brazil, it was never a big deal. You would say just 'White.' And that's it.

Informed by her perception that, in Brazil, race is neither a problematic category nor an overemphasized aspect of identity, Caroline advocated a de-emphasis on race as a social category. She explained, "People shouldn't try to make that big of a distinction. And I think Brazil doesn't as much as people do here. We're not that, you know, self-conscious about it." When speaking later about race in the U.S., although Caroline acknowledged and problematized the material inequalities between racial groups in the United States, she reiterated her perspective that focusing on race exacerbates, not alleviates, racial inequalities:

We definitely noticed that, that the Whites had all the say in most things. You know, so the places that – I don't, I kind of felt like the poor neighborhoods were the one in which you would find the African Americans. And the privileged neighborhoods...And to be honest, it's something that I sometimes still find here.

Through the international student program that she coordinates, Caroline has visited many schools and neighborhoods in the area surrounding the university. She has observed the racial inequalities that persist in schools and neighborhoods:

And, like, coordinating this program, I go into high schools and I go into elementary schools, middle schools, and we visit some of the schools that are a hundred percent, ninety-eight or ninety-nine percent all African Americans. And we wonder why. And then you see the area surrounding it, and it's a little less fortunate than another school that we visited and it was, like, again White folks.



Finally, Caroline concluded that race is “a cultural thing” in the U.S. and that the emphasis on race within U.S. culture is the reason for continued racial inequalities:

So, it’s still a problem, I would say. It’s still a big deal. And people make a big deal about it. And I think that’s the problem. If the culture wouldn’t make such a big deal and just let it be natural from now on. Not segregate as much and not, um, I dunno. I just think it’s a cultural thing, still.

#### **4.3.4 Interpreting Caroline’s Experiences**

I believe that Caroline’s perspectives around race in both the U.S. and Brazil have been heavily influenced by her whiteness and her class location. In particular, in the case of the U.S., I think that not only her whiteness, but also her almost undetectable non-U.S. accent have contributed to her sense of belonging and acceptance in the U.S. Because whiteness is privileged in Brazil and the U.S., Caroline has been able to move across the borders of both countries while maintaining her colorblind racial ideologies. I argue that Caroline’s lack of recognition of the ways in which whiteness has operated in her lived experience speaks to the work of scholars who claim that, because whiteness is tied to power and occupies a position of privilege, it often is invisible to Whites themselves (Hartigan 1999). Thus, although Caroline has witnessed the structural effects of racism through her interactions with segregated schools and communities in which the relationship between race and economic mobility were evident, she maintains that the best solution to these inequalities is, essentially, to deemphasize race and to remove it from our public discourse.

Furthermore, I believe that Caroline’s whiteness and her upper class social location impacts her perceptions of how race and class inequities operate in Brazil. Her

assertion that many Brazilians who are “part of the lower classes” are people of color stands in contradiction to her statement that race “just isn’t a big deal” in Brazil.

Caroline’s concerns about the extent to which new affirmative action policies at universities should take the quality of the Brazilian public school system into account may be well-founded. I assert, however, that her perspectives about the policies also reflect the broader discomfort that many Brazilians (White Brazilians in particular) are feeling about the disruption of the myth of Brazilian racial democracy.

## **4.4 Daniel: A Case Study**

### **4.4.1 Identity and difference in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, categories of difference intersect across regional, ethnic, and religious lines. All of these categories of difference have played a role in Daniel's life, as has the colonial legacy in Nigeria. As a singular nation, Nigeria is primarily an invention of British colonizers. Great Britain colonized the area and essentially created the borders of the Nigerian state to support its own economic interests. British colonial rule over Nigeria lasted from around 1885 until 1960.

Following many decades of colonial rule, Nigeria gained its independence from Great Britain in 1960 (Library of Congress, 2008). Without a naturally developed, coherent sense of national identity, however, the Nigerian people often found themselves ethnically, religiously, and regionally fractured. Nigerian writers such as Achebe (1959) and Soyinka (1975) have chronicled and dramatized both the initial and reverberating impacts of colonization on the Nigerian population.

An oft-stated fact about Nigeria is that approximately twenty percent of the Black people in the world live there. Within that population, however, is a great deal of ethnic and cultural variation. Although there are hundreds of ethnic groups in Nigeria, the three largest ethnic groups comprise the majority of the Nigerian population. They are the Hausa, the Igbo, and the Yoruba. The Hausa, which is mostly comprised of Muslims, primarily resides in the north of Nigeria (Library of Congress, 2008). Most members of the Igbo ethnic group are Christian, and live in the east of Nigeria. The Yoruba, the third major ethnic group, live primarily in the west of the country and are nearly evenly split between the Muslim and Christian religions (Library of Congress, 2008). Because each

of these groups and other ethnic groups in Nigeria (“minorities”) are tied to a particular region of the country, the intersections between ethnicity, region, and religion are strong and have led to fractious relationships between the groups.

However, as a result of the religious and ethnic factions within the country the predominantly Christian Igbo in the east of Nigeria moved in 1967 to break away from the Hausa Muslims who lived in the North, and they called their emergent nation Biafra (Falola & Heaton, 2008). In the brutal civil war, during which the Biafran people were cut off from all access to supplies and food, it has been estimated that as many as three million people were killed. Upon the reunification of the country in 1970, Nigeria was ruled by a series of military dictators. It began to emerge as a democracy in 1999 (Lewis, 2011). Yet, the Niger Delta region of the country, which produces oil, remains a contested area that still generates ethnic conflict among the three majority groups (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Lewis, 2011).

In the aftermath of the civil war and in response to lingering ethnic conflict, the Nigerian government has created policies to restore or establish a Nigerian national identity that transcends divisions along ethnic, regional, and religious lines. One such policy intended to promote national unity in Nigeria is the compulsory National Youth Service (NYS), which was created in 1973. There are vast inequalities among social classes in Nigeria. For example, a large percentage of Nigerians end their education after primary school. Therefore, the NYS aims to instill the value of service in young people who have been privileged to attend university. After completing university, students are sent to rural parts of Nigeria, often to areas with populations whose ethnic and religious backgrounds differ from their own. The program is explicit about its aims to promote

cross-ethnic understanding, as one of its objectives is “to remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups” (National Youth Service Corp, 2013).

Another policy that aims to prevent the domination of one ethnic group over others is the National Character Policy. In essence, the National Character Policy is an ethnic quota system intended to ensure that Nigerians from different ethnic groups are represented in the workplace and educational environments. The policies’ aims are to, “implement and enforce the federal character principles on equitable distribution of public posts, socio-economic amenities and infrastructural facilities among the federating units of the Nation” (Federal Character Commission, 2013). The system further conflates ethnicity with region, as individuals receive advantages based on the region in which they were born and educated rather than their actual ethnic background. Though the policy no doubt has positive intentions, it has been fraught with corruption and remains a source of debate and resentment among some in Nigeria (Agbigoa, 2012). These ethnic and regional conflicts, along with the colonial legacies around race and nation, have had an impact on Daniel’s experiences with categories of difference.

#### **4.4.2 Daniel’s experiences in and perceptions of Nigeria**

Daniel is a PhD student who is nearing the completion of his degree. He grew up in Nigeria and came to the United States for graduate school about four years ago. Both of Daniel’s parents are also Nigerian. I observed that Daniel projects himself as very assured and comfortable, and I learned he considers his confidence a natural extension of his upbringing in what he calls a “traditional Nigerian household.” Daniel’s first language is English. Daniel’s parents are both Benin people (also known as Edo), which

is a minority ethnic group in Nigeria. Though his parents shared a common tribal language, they spoke English in the home when he and his younger brother were growing up. Though Daniel grew up in Lagos, aware from the village and the state where his parents came from, he had close ties with his extended family and spent time with them when he was growing up, often visiting his paternal grandparents who lived in the “ethnic region” where Daniel and his family were from. He shared the experience of visiting Benin for a tribal ceremony and seeing his mother’s royal lineage in the tribe. He recalled:

I remember as a child I went to Benin for a tribal ceremony, and there was her lineage from, I guess like the 1600s or something, so even as a child, I was like ‘wow.’ So this is kind of like, it’s kind of like eye-opening knowing that, oh wow, these are people, your predecessors are people from who you descended from. Some of them were warriors, some of them were kings, were well-respected, things like that. So, it was very impressive for me as a child then. And, so yeah, I – it is something that I very much cherish, knowing that I’m from Benin. And I’m from that area.

Daniel described his upbringing as “upper class or maybe like upper middle class.” Expanding on his class background, he says, “growing up, we had the basic necessities, and I was fortunate enough that my parents could afford to splurge. We could go for vacations abroad and things like that.” Daniel also explained that he grew up in a “traditional Nigerian household, but we had also like a religious slant to it, so, I come from a Christian home.” In keeping with his Christian upbringing, Daniel and his

family were involved in church throughout his childhood, and he intimated that his family belonged to a “church community.”

Daniel’s description of what he understands as the traditionally Nigerian, Christian values that his parents emphasized included, “things like, education - you had to go to school. Diligence – you had to be hard working. You couldn’t just like, laze around – it was unacceptable.” Daniel regards his parents and their values as shaping him profoundly, and he has also had close relationships with his grandparents and his many aunts and uncles. He still maintains both relationships with and respect for these family members. As an adult, Daniel told me that he continues to actively cultivate a life that conforms to the values with which he was raised, and that his family and his religion are the most important contributors to his sense of identity.

Daniel’s maternal grandparents, who also lived in Lagos, were an important influence in his life. He and his brother often spent time at his grandparents’ house. He recalled his times with them as very special. He explained:

I probably might not be able to like, pick out, like one thing that I’d say they tried to impress upon my life. I feel like the time that I spent with them was kind of like made, or had, some contributions to who I am [me: Yeah]. Like, you know, I remember, like when my granddad would always call me, he had like special name for me, my grandmom too, the same kind of thing, so I’d say, yeah, just the way they lived, my close interaction with them as a child, in a way kind of contributed to who I am right now.

Daniel said that several forces in his life converged around the notion that he must always project confidence. For instance, Daniel spent most of his childhood in Lagos, which he describes as “the New York City of Nigeria.” In Lagos, Daniel feels that “if you don’t project an aura of confidence people can try and like step on you.” Despite the general toughness required by life in a big city, Daniel explained that his neighborhood was “an upper middle class neighborhood of Lagos. So, we could ride bikes. We could play on the street. We had neighbors, things like that.”

Upon entering high school, both Daniel and his brother started to attend a boarding school in Abuja in order to receive an elite secondary education. Daniel told me that although, “it might sound fancy,” he found that the experience of being on his own at boarding school forced him to be strong, confident, and mature. Daniel credited his boarding school experiences in Abuja with exposing him to a variety of children from a variety of tribal, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. He explained:

Growing up in boarding school with a whole bunch of other kids from various regions in Nigeria, I learned to, I guess see or understand - I guess better understand other tribal practices... Prior to me going to boarding school, I don’t think I – I had Muslim friend – but, not a whole lot. But, in boarding school, I mean you had Muslim friends that you pretty much lived with like 9 months out of a year. So, things like the Ramadan fast. The fact that you had to pray like 5 times a day. You know, those things were kind of like, not eye-opening but surprising because they were not things I was used to. They were not things I was probably even aware of.



His boarding school experiences with other boys from varying backgrounds impacted Daniel's interactions with other people throughout his life. In thinking about how those experiences shaped him, Daniel mused:

But, getting to like live with those guys made me aware of a couple of those things. And, you know, sometimes growing up you probably had some misconceptions about people from various regions, you know. But growing up within boarding school, I mean it gave you the opportunity to come up with your own impressions about various people rather than just gobbling up what anybody says you can actually come up with your own impressions about various people and not just give everybody like a label and assume.

Since Nigeria's population is almost completely Black (Library of Congress, 2008), Daniel does not view race as an important social divider. Rather, ethnicity plays a central role in Nigerian identity (Falola & Heaton, 2008). In addition to the importance of ethnicity in Nigeria, Daniel also said that religion is something that socially divides the population. Both the ethnicity and religion of Nigeria's population relate closely to the country's geographic regions. In Lagos, where Daniel spent much of his childhood, the most prominent ethnic group is the Yoruba, and in addition to English, the Yoruban language is spoken prominently in Lagos. Daniel explained:

So even in Nigeria, I'm considered a minority. Lagos is part of a majority tribe. So there's a predominant language spoken in Lagos, which is very different from the language of my own tribe, which is kind of like a minority tribe. And like I said, Nigeria is very ethnocentric, so even though I was born and I grew up there, I'm still considered and outsider. Yeah. I'm still considered an outsider. For

instance, I may not even be able to run for public office in that state. Because I'm not from that state technically, that's not the state I'm from.

I believe that Daniel's parents' minority status within the cities where they raised their family (i.e. Lagos and Abuja) might relate to their choice to speak English in the home; since they did not speak the Yoruban language predominantly spoken in Lagos, they may have chosen to speak English to better equip their sons with the language skills needed to be a part of life in the city.

The ethnic divides that are central in Nigerian social life are often reinforced by governmental policies that establish ethnic quotas, which I learned are called "Federal Character" policies. These Federal Character Policies manifested in Daniel's experience when he was seeking entrance into a particular secondary school. Daniel's preference was to attend the same school that his father had attended, but because of weighting systems put in place to equalize school entrance based on region, he was not able to go to his first-choice school. He described the rationale and functionality of the quota system as follows:

Cause when I was growing up we had this, you had, well not all parts of Nigeria are kind of like, developed I guess... We have some places, some parts, some regions in Nigeria that are like, highly educated. You have other regions that are not that highly educated. And so, growing up, like from elementary school to high school we had to take nationwide examinations. And the passing grade was dependent on the state you were from. Which is kind of like a function of your own ethnicity.

As Daniel continued, he explained how these quota systems had impacted his own life and schooling experiences:

And, I don't know – fortunately/unfortunately – I came from one of those educationally advantaged states. So, I came from one of the top five states in the nation. And so, the cutoff mark or the passing grade was way higher than for many of the states...And I remember they said I couldn't go to that school, not because I wasn't smart enough but because - the way my dad told me, and I remember distinctly, cause then I was probably like 9 or 10, but I just couldn't understand what that meant, but he told me that, you know, it's not because I wasn't smart enough but it was because my state kind of like produced too many smart people, and they couldn't take all the smart people.

As a child, Daniel found this policy confusing, as some of his classmates (whose performance was not as strong as his on the national examinations) were able to attend the school that he had hoped to attend, “because they came from what they call ‘educationally less developed’ states.” Daniel pondered whether this kind of differential treatment might run counter to the purpose of the policy, which is a quest for national unity:

While the government might sometimes wanna like project a general image or homogeneity as a nation. But, sometimes you still have some things or some policies that are in place that are always, suggest that, even though we are probably like homogeneous nationally, we are still kind of distinct or fractured tribally, you know.

Daniel's attitude toward the nationally mandated quota system that prevented him from attending his first-choice school and his pride in his own ethnic history reflects his conflicted attitude toward the role of ethnicity in his country. Although he views his own ethnicity as personally important to him, Daniel remains concerned that an overemphasis on ethnicity in policy will deepen existing ethnic divisions.

Following college, Daniel enrolled in Nigeria's compulsory National Youth Service program. The program exists as part of the efforts to build national unity among Nigeria's ethnic and religious groups. For Daniel, the program served its purpose well. He cared for patients in an OB/GYN hospital in the northern region of Nigeria. As Daniel explained, his participation in the program:

Contributed to my own – positively I would say – to like a national identity. You know. I'm a Christian going to a predominantly Muslim northern part of Nigeria. Sometimes you have like religious clashes in that part of the country, you know. So, it was nice. It was a great experience for me. And again, being there for a year kind of like changed some of my perceptions, particularly about Islam or things like that. 'Cause, unfortunately the impression most people have about Islam is, 'oh, it's kind of violent,' things like that, you know. But, for me...it was a pleasant experience.

I asked Daniel to discuss how his experiences in the National Youth Service contrasted or aligned with his experiences with Muslim students in boarding school. He shared that communication was sometimes difficult with the people he served in the hospital during his time in the NYS because they did not share a language and they were often people of very different economic and social backgrounds from Daniel. He noted that, with his

boarding school classmates, a shared language (i.e., English) and “social status” made the communication much easier.

Daniel’s experiences with both the leadership and the patients in the hospital where he worked challenged some of his previously negative experiences around ethnicity and ethnic fracturing. Though he was a Christian serving in a Muslim-dominated region of the country, Daniel said:

I was not treated differently because I was that [Christian]. I was not discriminated against because I was that...by the time the one year was up, I was offered a position in the hospital. Again, that kind of countered what I said my experience as a child because typically, there’s like a quota system, one. Another thing is, typically, most places are much more likely to recruit people who are indigenous to that region. You know, so, and this is me coming from like the other part of the country and getting the position and things like that, so. In a way, it kind of cuts both ways, so, it kind of like reinforced the notion of like a ‘one Nigeria.’

Daniel placed the importance of promoting “one Nigeria,” into historical context. He recalled a series of ads designed to promote Nigerian national unity during his childhood. He explained that these ads were pertinent at the time because:

Nigeria is like a young country. Nigeria gained her independence in 1960, so you had messages from the government that was like to, I guess speak to, try and build up and empower her citizens. Things like that. So, you had messages that always tried to tap into, I guess the inner strengths of Nigerians as a group.

The national values promoted by the Nigerian government through these ads were resilience, diligence, and hard work, which align very closely with what Daniel shared as the values that governed his family life. He also remarked that sports, in particular soccer, have become an important way for Nigeria to promote national unity.

Despite Daniel's assertion that race as it is understood in the U.S. context is not important in Nigeria as a way to classify people, he shared that his identity as a Black man is very important to him. When I asked him what it means to him to be Black, Daniel described the kinds of attributes that he associates with blackness in Nigeria.

Because you are Black, you are expected to be diligent, you are expected to rise above adversity... As a Black Nigerian, you're expected to be very, very - be able to persevere, you know, to understand that things are not going to be handed to you on a platter but that you have to go out and get and get it. You know. So, in a way, that's kind of like what I would say the impression or the identity that comes with being a Black Nigerian. Let me put it that way. You know, like you're not supposed to like make excuses for yourself.

Later, Daniel discussed whether his concept of blackness and its connection to notions of strength and resilience is rooted in the colonization of Nigeria by the British and by the methods that Nigerians used to obtain their freedom. He explained how these historical influences have impacted his views about being a Black man. Nigerians, said Daniel, had to fight for their independence from Great Britain:

Not necessarily by going to war with the British but by getting an education, coming back to argue for independence, coming back to make a case that we are the people, we feel we can lead or govern ourselves. Like, there are many

Nigerian historians that came to Britain and actually even came here to get some kind of an education and then go back to mobilize other Nigerians. And so, I think that's where that thing came out from, you know. In other words, if most Nigerians had like laid back and you know, yeah... 'we face adversity, and we're just gonna lie down', then the British are probably still going to be ruling Nigeria up until today. And so, I guess that's where that kind of came from. You know, even though you might have adverse conditions or adverse circumstances, but you know, you should always be ready to stand up.

When I asked Daniel to offer me his definition of race, in addition to describing "a group of people with the same phenotypical, same physical features," he quickly shifted into a discussion of racism. He noted, "outside of [my definition], again, I also think about, I guess race discrimination." Furthermore, Daniel's associations with racism tend to focus on large-scale, institutional systems that support racial inequality. Daniel speculated that his understanding of racism as overt, government-sanctioned race discrimination could be related to having grown up in Nigeria while the South African apartheid system was still in place. Daniel explained:

Mandela was in prison when I was in elementary school, and it was something that was talked about regularly. That fact that they were treated differently; Black South Africans were treated differently by White South Africans mainly because of the color of their skin. So that was, like, if somebody brought up the issue about race, I think of Mandela, I think of apartheid in South Africa, I think of the other activists, there were a couple others that were killed because of, just because they wanted equity or equality with the other, the White South Africans.

#### **4.4.3 Daniel's experiences in and perceptions of the United States**

Prior to arriving in the United States, Daniel had known for some time that he wanted to follow his father's example of pursuing graduate school in the U.S. A mix of his desire to further develop academically and to fulfill family expectations drove Daniel to study in the U.S. He explained his journey to his graduate program:

I guess, like last week, for me my dad was always somebody that I looked up to. And I know my dad did his, he got his bachelor's in Nigeria and came here to get his Master's degree. For me, that was one reason . And another reason was, I just figured that getting a degree from an international university or like an American university would be much more, would make me more competitive globally, you know. It's more, obviously it's much more respected than a Nigerian, than a degree from a Nigerian university. And so, primarily, I guess my primary reason here would be because I just wanted to develop academically.

In addition to academic and professional reasons for pursuing graduate study when and where he did, Daniel also shared some personal and practical reasons for his choices:

And another reason, or maybe like a more subconscious reason was, again, still trying to follow up my dad's footsteps. He came here for his Masters, or he came to Pittsburgh for his Masters, so. And so, I naturally wanted to come here too. I also wanted to go to Pittsburgh too, but it was expensive, so I couldn't go to Pittsburgh, so I had to come here. My aunt was, at the time, she was [nearby] with her husband. And so, I applied to a whole bunch of schools. I applied to this school here, obviously. I got admitted into some schools, but they were kind of expensive. This school was kind of like the cheapest. And, they offered like a



graduate assistantship. And since my aunt was [nearby], I figured why didn't I just come here?

I asked Daniel what kinds of perceptions he had of the U.S. in general and of race in the U.S. in particular. Broadly, Daniel's parents told him that the U.S. was a "melting pot," and both of his parents had positive experiences studying here for their own graduate studies. Daniel recalled:

I remember my mom telling me that any time they come, any time she or my dad or me or my brother came to the U.S., you'd always find different people, you know, different people from all over the world here. And she was like, and she would kind of always marvel at that. All kinds of people here. And so, before I came here, I knew that you could pretty much find every, almost every race or every tribe or every ethnic group in the world would probably be represented here in the U.S. So, I knew it was going to be very, very, very diverse. I mean, that was my impression of race in the U.S. One huge racially diverse country.

When I asked Daniel if he expected this notion of the racially, nationally diverse melting pot to apply to his graduate schooling experiences, he invoked the strength of the racial binary in the South:

Funny enough, I'd always think of it within the context of Black and White, you know. It was always Blacks and Whites. I guess the concept, the idea of melting pot did not, for me, did not actually apply to the South. I dunno.

Within that context, both Daniel and his family particularly noted that he would be a Black man studying in a place that continues to fight to maintain ties to the

Confederate flag. He explained that he recalls those events, which he heard about as a young boy in Nigeria:

I can remember reading, I can actually remember clearly reading the Time magazine because as kid in my house we used to read Time magazine a whole lot. And I remember the front page, the image on the front page was the Statehouse with the Confederate flag. And I think another time somebody took the state to court to have the flag removed. And so it was on the front page then.

As a result of knowing about the Confederate flag debate and having other historical knowledge about the South (i.e., slavery and the Civil Rights movement), Daniel said that he did have particular ideas about the South prior to coming here. He explained that:

My impression of the South was, yeah, more conservative, more...less cosmopolitan than in the North, more rooted in culture and, I guess tradition than the North. Obviously racial segregation was not still there, but I guess people were more aware of their races than other parts of the country.

Daniel introduced the notion that he thinks of himself differently across national contexts prior to me explicitly asking him about it. When we discussed the meaning of “being Nigerian,” he explained that when he is in Nigeria, he would “identify myself... I guess second as Nigerian, but primarily as a member of my tribal group.” Within the context of the United States, however, Daniel believes that the primary marker of his identity has become his Nigerian nationality. He went into some detail in explaining the differences between how he and his friends identify themselves and how they relate to each other across the varying contexts:

But here in the United States, I primarily identify myself as Nigerian. Even when I see most of my friends, we hardly talk about religious or ethnic differences. We primarily see ourselves as Nigerians. Maybe because we are all together in another country. But, yeah, I see myself as Nigerian. It's something I hold on to.

Daniel's explanation of the ways in which his notions of self shifted within the context of the United States naturally led him into a discussion of the tendency of people in the United States to flatten out national and other identities into "African." He felt that this tendency obscures his identity and strengthens his commitment to embracing a Nigerian identity in the United States. He explained:

As a matter of fact, it's kind of common here, people want to give you a blanket term and call you 'African.' But, yeah, I'm African, but I'm Nigerian. That's something I always try to get across. Because I feel, if you call me an African, I'm kind of like lost. Africa is made up of like a bunch of countries, yeah, like fifty-something countries, 53 or 54 countries, and so I'm not as distinct as if I were a Nigerian. So, yeah, I strongly identify as Nigerian here.

Growing up in a country that is primarily racially homogeneous, Daniel said that race is rarely talked about openly as a concept. He contrasted the lack of racial conversation in Nigeria with the United States, where, he noted that "the issues surrounding race here [in the United States]" are often part of broader discourses. Daniel provided examples such as health conditions or crime rates, and he pointed out that, here in the United States, "You have racial breakdowns of many things." Later, Daniel remarked that, in the United States, "when you're talking about race, race here is always spoken about with always, most of the time you're always looking at it in concepts of

trying to like, comparatively, so you're always comparing one race to another. ” In contrast, he pointed out, “You don't have those kinds of things back home in Nigeria. So, it's not like an up in your face kind of thing. It's something that, is hardly ever spoken about, 'cause again, everybody's kind of like the same.” Despite the racial homogeneity in Nigeria, Daniel told me “you always recognize that you are a Black man.”

Daniel felt that his graduate schooling experiences in the U.S. have been primarily positive. Despite sharing several incidents with me that might have been related to how he was racialized here in the U.S., Daniel often expressed a reluctance to name forces of race or racism in his own life. For instance, Daniel shared an example of being questioned and searched by two police officers one day as he walked back to his apartment from school:

...So I was walking home. And there was, I think like an Asian guy in front of me, and I think a White guy. 'Cause, when I am walking towards my apartment like a bunch of people in my apartment live in [the university] so we'll sometimes walk together. Not side by side, but there's a stream of people going to that apartment complex. And so, I crossed the road, and I saw two cops far away. And I think they were talking or something. And I just kept on walking and then, the two cops, apparently they must have seen me crossing the road, and they drove towards me in two separate squad cars, and they stopped me, and they asked for my ID. One of them ran my, I guess he ran my information or something. But, they didn't tell me why they stopped me.

Daniel continued explaining his interaction with these two police officers, and he described his compliance with their illegal requests. He also acknowledged his reluctance to name racism as playing a role in the event, invoking the race of the police officers themselves to negate the potentially racialized nature of his being stopped:

They even asked to actually search my bag. [pause] I kind of know that's illegal, 'cause I believe you, I guess, have to have a warrant to do that. But, I mean, I figured I didn't have anything in my bag, so I just allowed them to search my bag or like look into my bag. And they gave me back my ID and stuff like that. And they kind of told me like there were a whole bunch of break-ins in the area, so that was why they stopped me. But, I'm like, there were two other guys in front of me, you didn't stop them. I didn't tell them that, 'cause I wanted to just get home. But the funny thing is, you know, again, those cops, right? They were actually Black, they were not White. So, I mean, you know...you are aware of these kind of things, but at the same time, it's just, it sometimes it's hard to comprehend.

Daniel also shared an incident involving a police officer crossing across multiple lanes of traffic to follow him for several miles, even though he was driving at or below the speed limit. Again, although Daniel introduced the prospect that this incident may have occurred because of how he was racialized in that context, he quickly rejected his own proposition, suggesting that it might be “ignorant” to assume that his being followed was motivated by his race:

Why he did that, I really don't know. Like I said, I'm typically always very cautious about saying, 'Oh, okay. Maybe he decided to do that because I was Black.' You know. And the cop was White. But, again, it's completely

ignorant...well, I probably shouldn't say that. I can't say that I was treated differently because I'm of a different race or that he probably suspected me because I'm a different race. I wouldn't want to say that. You know.

Despite Daniel's racializing and invasive experiences with police, he maintained that his experiences in the U.S. around race have been overwhelmingly positive.

#### **4.4.4 Interpreting Daniel's experiences**

I believe that Daniel's experiences with race, ethnicity, language, and religion in Nigeria have been influenced by the country's ethnic diversity, its history of ethnic conflict and civil war, the colonial legacy of whiteness, and a broader understanding of racism as deriving from overtly racist structures such as colonization or policies such as apartheid. The continued ways in which he constructs an identity as a "strong Black male" also are influenced by Nigeria's history of intellectual resistance to colonial power. I also am particularly interested in better understanding the tension between Daniel's embrace of ethnic identity and his skeptical attitude about the divisive impacts of Nigeria's Federal Character Policy.

Though Daniel associates himself strongly with blackness in the context of Nigeria, I believe that he is reluctant to name his blackness as a cause of some of his negative experiences in the United States for several reasons. First, I would argue that if Daniel acknowledges the extent to which his experiences in the U.S. are influenced by how he has been racialized, he would also have to acknowledge that the U.S. is not the completely meritocratic, racial melting pot that his parents have taught him it is. Furthermore, because Daniel has experienced social class privilege his entire life, he also seems reluctant to fully acknowledge the systems that help to maintain privilege in the

U.S. Despite his identity as an ethnic minority in Nigeria, many of the systems of power in Nigeria have worked to the advantage of Daniel and his family. Occupying such positions may have made it more difficult for Daniel to fully comprehend the ways in which systems of oppression in general, operate and might provide insight into Daniel's hesitancy to name racism in his U.S. experiences.

#### **4.5 Ananda: A Case Study**

##### **4.5.1 Identity and difference in England**

England's complex relationship to categories of difference derives from a sociopolitical system deeply influenced by a colonial history full of racial projects, complex class relations, and a contested immigration landscape. As part of the formidable colonial power of Great Britain, England's history around race, nation, and class reveal much about the ways in which racial and class systems and hierarchies operate globally. Many of the categories of difference that continue to dominate global discourses around differences were established through British exertion of political and economic power. Furthermore, Great Britain's colonial legacy, its role in industrialization, and its history around immigration have all shaped the discourses around race, class, and belonging in England that influenced Ananda's narrative of his lived experiences growing up as part of a working-class community of immigrants there.

Though its global power has been somewhat diminished, the British Empire once stretched around the world to North America, the Indian subcontinent, and to large parts of Africa (Marshall, 1996). In addition to controlling these areas, the British Empire also essentially controlled the economies of countries like China throughout

much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Winant (2001) argues that the legacies of the project of European colonization, which included the enslavement of both the minds and bodies of millions of people of color by White colonizers, created the current global system of racial inequality that persists today. The processes involved in Europe's colonization of other parts of the world, he argues, "tended to formalize and institutionalize racial hierarchy and classification" (p. 39).

Historically, social class has been a strong and deeply engrained category of difference in England. As part of its broader capitalist, imperialist projects, Great Britain was a global leader in the Industrial Revolution (Hudson, 2011), which led to gaps in power and wages that created a lasting working-class consciousness in England (Thompson, 1966). Thompson explores the ways in which working-class consciousness - which he describes as "the way in which [class-based] experiences are handled in cultural terms; embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms" (p. 10) - developed among the English during the Industrial Revolution. His work examines the ways in which, between 1780 and 1832, "most English working class people came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers" (p. 11). As a result, "the working class presence was, in 1832, the most significant factor in British political life" (p. 12). Though the boundaries and complexities of social class have shifted, class has a continued salience across Great Britain, with large groups of British people identifying themselves as "working class" and associating strongly with working-class values and cultural practices (Savage et al., 2013; Surridge, 2007).

A related aspect of difference that has been and remains a significant source of social class identification in England is the accent with which one speaks English. In



England, accents are often a signifier of one's home region, but some accents are also signifiers of social class background. English people who are educated and socialized to be part of the middle and upper classes learn how to speak using "Received Pronunciation," which Abercrombie (2006) argues is "not the accent of a region of England, it is the accent of a social class" (p. 220). Recent work has demonstrated that even English academics are cautious about how they speak, fearing that their regional accents will prevent their advancement in the workplace (Addison & Mountford, 2013). Across multiple contexts in England, accents behave as a marker for social class and serves, therefore, as another category of difference through which people are grouped.

Another way in which difference has been established in English society is through immigrant status. Following World War II, a large number of immigrants from former British colonies like India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan and from the Caribbean began to immigrate to England in large numbers (Brown, 1995). At the time, the immigration of these groups was considered a temporary solution to fulfill the demand for labor to rebuild the damage done to the country by the war. Though many immigrants who came to the England during that period intended to return to their home countries, they often found it difficult to save the money to return home, or after raising children in England, they decided to remain there (Brown, 1995). As a result of that wave of immigration and the other immigrants who followed, almost three percent of the English population is currently Black, hailing from either the Caribbean or African nations, and about two percent of the English population is of Indian heritage (Office for National Statistics, 2011).

During the 1970s and 80, England experienced an increase in murders and riots based on racist and anti-immigrant sentiments, and the Nazi National Front in England began to win a small number of elections. Brown (1998) points out, however, that this renewed racism was met by “a large and vibrant anti-racist movement within the working class” (no pagination), and she contributes that movement to the strength of class consciousness in English society. Despite their history of contributing to the nation’s economic health, the role of immigrants, particularly immigrants of color, remains hotly contested within English society. The group “Migration Watch” (Green, 2005) seeks to slow or completely thwart the influx of immigrants into Great Britain, citing concerns that the society, “simply cannot integrate people at the present pace” (no pagination).

Although class has historically been strongly attended to in the English context (Thompson, 1966; Willis, 1977), racialization and racism have also played a role in establishing difference in England. Immigration from non-White countries into an English nation that has primarily constructed its identity as a White nation has been a prominent aspect of immigration discourses in England. As he considers the relevance of using critical race theory (CRT) in England, Warmington (2012), reminds us that, “in the UK, the term [Black] has a more complex history, and continues, depending on context, to denote *either* people of African and African-Caribbean descent. English (and more broadly, British) histories shaped Ananda’s narrative around race and other categories of difference in England and influenced how he understood categories of difference in the United States.

#### **4.5.2 Ananda's experiences in and perceptions of England**

The story of Ananda's family fits into the broader narrative of immigration to England from the Indian subcontinent during the 1950s and 60s. Like thousands of others, his Punjabi Indian parents immigrated to England to pursue employment opportunities following World War II (Singh & Tatla, 2006). Ananda grew up in Southall, a diverse London suburb that was heavily populated by South Asian immigrant communities. Importantly, Southall was the site of several racially charged demonstrations and clashes with police in 1979 (Barling, 2009). Ananda's parents were part of a large wave of Indian immigrants to the Great Britain following World War II and India's independence from the British.

Ananda's father immigrated to England from the Punjab region of Northern India in the early 1960s at the age of 10 or 11. In the tradition of their village, his parents were married when they were "10 and 11 years old." His mother did not come to England to live with his father, however, until several years later when she was 17 years old. For much of Ananda's childhood, his mother and father worked in EMI factories in London pressing vinyl records. He has three siblings, two older brothers and a younger sister. One of his brothers was often hospitalized with complications related to spina bifida as a child. Ananda described his father as being "kind of in and out of our lives" throughout the latter portion of his childhood. Nevertheless, he described himself as having a happy childhood, as he explained:

My childhood anyway, although my dad was violent and abusive and an alcoholic, so he left in 1988 and kind of was in and out of our lives between '88

and '95. But, as a child, I think I was...I had a good time....I was always getting up to mischief and trying to get away with things, and that's always exciting.

Ananda and his siblings grew up with an interest in popular culture, and they consumed cultural influences from both the West and from India. He and his siblings enjoyed football players from around the world, American boxers like Mike Tyson, international Western pop stars like Michael Jackson, and traditional folk musicians from India. Beyond sports and music, Ananda's family often watched films together. When Ananda was young, his father would get three films for the family each week: "a Punjabi film, a Hindi film, and an English language film." Though his parents both spoke Punjabi in the home, Ananda also learned the Hindi language by watching films and interacting with friends and other families in his community. Regarding learning English, he reflected, "I don't remember learning English, but it must have happened [laughs] in school, you know when I was four or something."

Ananda identified himself and his family as working class, and he described a childhood in which his family lived in government subsidized housing, or "council housing." He explained, "We were poor. Really. You know, I don't know if you want an indicator, it's all relative, but we were on dinner ticket in school, so for instance where you get free meals." Strong ethnic, linguistic, and national diversity were an integral part of his childhood and his community. In describing Southall, he said:

There was a lot of religious diversity in that town. You know, many people are Sikhs. And India has got tons of religious diversity. So, the Indian diaspora in England is equally diverse in terms of religious and language - religion and languages. So, I was always aware of - difference? Like someone being

Pakistani, or someone being Bangladeshi because when I'd go to their house, I wouldn't understand what their mom would be saying, but their mom would understand me if I spoke Punjabi.

Although his family's religious heritage is Sikh, Ananda described an upbringing marked by an emphasis on spirituality and multiple faith traditions. He described his father as an atheist, remarking that "he never used the term, he probably didn't know what it meant - but he was an atheist. Which is quite uncommon I guess for traditional Punjabis." Though Ananda felt that his father had an overall negative influence on his life, he noted that his father was only a constant in the household for the first seven years of his life. Beyond that, "he was in and out of our lives causing havoc."

In contrast, Ananda described his mother as "the most influential person in my life." He said that his mother's influence was integral "for exposing me to a variety of philosophical teachings and having an appreciation of the mystic traditions that a variety of cultures have produced." Although his mother came from a Sikh background, Ananda said that she, "never followed any institutional religion." He said:

But, my mom kind of exposed us to a variety of religious texts, and various mystic teachings of the East. And the Sikh book is in fact a collection of writings and verses and poems from people from a variety of faiths: Islamic, Hindu, um, non-affiliated. And so, the values - those were, I guess influential in terms of exposing us to ideas about spirituality at a young age.

Another person who Ananda described as important in his family's life was a health visitor from the National Health Service who came to their home in Southall regularly. The nurse, who Ananda described as "a devout Christian," had been a

missionary in India for 20 years and was fluent in Hindi. She conversed often with Ananda's mother. Consistent with Ananda's mother's inclusive attitude toward religion and spirituality, she allowed the health visitor to read "The Children's Bible" to him and his siblings.

As Ananda grew into his early teen years, other forces became influential in his life. When he was about 14, he began to play on a grassroots football team with a group of mostly adult men. Being around these men, some of whom had spent time in prison, made Ananda aware that because of the strong influence of his mother, "maybe I was a little bit softer in terms of the aggression needed to get 'stuck in' as it were." Though he said he had always gotten into fights growing up, his interactions with these men made him more assertive and more apt to speak up for himself.

As he discussed the particularities of growing up in Southall, I believe that Ananda demonstrated a keen insight into the ways in which his upbringing in Southall differed from other places in England. Noting that England overall is 92% White but Southall is approximately 40% White, he remarked that, "it's not really a microcosm for, or representative of what the country itself is like. So, we were growing up in the place, which isn't anything like the rest of the country." As people of color and as an immigrant family, Ananda recalled that he and his family had a sense of belonging in the community where he grew up, visiting often with other families and spending unsupervised play time with other children in the park or playing in the streets. Ananda's upbringing in the ethnically and nationally diverse working-class community of Southall, along with the cultural and spiritual influences introduced and nurtured by his parents (to varying

degrees), greatly influenced his later experiences with and insights around race, ethnicity, nationality, and social class.

Although Ananda remembered growing up in a community in which he and his family felt a sense of belonging, his upbringing in England was not devoid of racialized experience. In his own community, he experienced White people calling himself and other South Asian people, “Paki,” which he described to me as offensive in “the same way the n-word is a derogatory term for Black folks or people of color here.” Beyond its use as a racial slur, Ananda explained that the term “Paki” was used to flatten the identities of people from a number of different countries including Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, grouping them under one label. This sense of having his identity disregarded or negated continued throughout Ananda’s childhood. When I asked Ananda whether he felt racially labeled growing up, he responded:

Yes. Yeah, I certainly felt labeled. As, one, a non-White, but secondly because of the suspicion associated with being an ‘Other.’ That was a label in itself. You know – just ‘something else’ – not really knowing what it is. But, then, as I said, like people who were brown were just generally labeled in racist language as ‘Pakis’ or and in non-racist language just Indians or Asians or, you know, again not really being aware of the differences between Indians and other Indians.

The notion that he was racially othered grew tremendously for Ananda when he left Southall to live in other English towns that were less ethnically diverse. He explained that his feelings of being racialized were less prevalent in Southall and Middlesex County than they were when he arrived in Essex “for university.” He explained that, in Southall:

Those White people have Black friends, have Asian friends, have grown up, have gone to similar schools. So, they don't, they know about that, whereas maybe White people who are from other parts of the country who don't like immigrants or don't like those people, who still use that language quite readily, or maybe in their homes or something. But, it was certainly more common in Essex than it was in Southall.

When he lived in places that were less ethnically diverse than London, such as his university in Essex, Ananda felt that his racial difference was accentuated. He explained:

Yes, definitely I felt, yeah – ‘you're exotic. You're different.’ So, it's not necessarily always a negative reaction that you receive from people. Sometimes it's even a curiosity. Sometimes it's more of a desire to get to know you because of your difference. So, it wasn't, you know, maybe 8 times out of 10 it makes it difficult to be part of the native community. Regardless of your cultural, you culturally being English, and you speaking English, and you essentially being from a similar class background, having gone to similar schools and things like that. You're still, you don't quite fit into that community, you know?

Ananda's self-identification as working class seems to have had a profound influence on his lived experiences in England. He views his working-class background as broadly influencing how he understands social hierarchies in general. In particular, Ananda's positioning as working class, the son of immigrants, and a person of color in a largely White English society strongly influenced how he understands the intersections between race and social class both in England and in the United States. First, he spoke about how race and social class intersected in his life as a child in a working-class



neighborhood. In the ethnically diverse neighborhood where he grew up, he was primarily exposed to working-class White people and working-class South Asian immigrants. On the topic of his interactions with White people growing up, Ananda remarked that:

When we were growing up, we had experienced, like working class, the only White people that we were exposed to, really - that we interacted with, were other working class people and families. And, I think sometimes, they were on the lowest economic strata, if you'd like...And so, our neighbors were like poor, like us...I hadn't really been exposed to White people who were successful economically or in career-wise, if you consider that success.

Because of these formative experiences with working-class White populations, Ananda did not grow up associating whiteness with privilege and wealth. In fact, he remarked that his “only experience of [White people] had been poor, unemployed, kind of thuggish.” The White people he interacted with throughout his childhood were, “all working class, and their parents didn’t have jobs. And it was the kind of society that we grew up in.” His understandings of the interplay between race and class in England shifted when he entered the White, middle-class space of the university he attended in Essex. He relayed the following about his experiences with White, middle-class students there:

Until I went to university when I was 18, and then I experienced like middle class White people, you know, who wouldn't even venture into those kinds of neighborhoods when I was growing up. Or send their kids to those kinds of schools. So, that was a completely eye-opening experience, you know? To

encounter these people who were different, but not in the way you had experienced other White people to be. You know?

In another interview, Ananda shared the ways in which he became more aware of the subtleties of social class hierarchy in England through interactions with middle and upper class students at his university in Essex:

And so it was only when I went to university that I experienced class in a different, in a completely different way. And those children were already aware of class, I think. They were already much more aware of it than I was. At least the language to describe it, and just the associations of certain groups. I think they were more aware of these kind of class distinctions.

#### **4.5.3 Ananda's experiences in and perceptions of the United States**

Ananda came to the United States because of an existing relationship with an advisor from his Master's program in Sheffield. When his advisor, an American, returned to the U.S. for a faculty position, she encouraged Ananda to come with her and pursue a PhD. Prior to coming for graduate study, Ananda spent several months in both Chicago and New York working as a camp counselor. These prior experiences in the U.S. allowed him to make comparisons between his experiences in these larger cities and his experiences in the Southeast.

When I asked whether he had preexisting perceptions about the U.S. Southeast prior to coming here, Ananda said that "with the prior knowledge of the history of the place, I think in many ways I was prepared to accept a more acute awareness of race and racial difference amongst people." Through his experiences in the U.S. in general and the South in particular, Ananda's initial expectations have been fulfilled. When I asked

him what kinds of messages he has received about his race during his time in the U.S., he reinforced the notion that, in the United States, race is treated primarily as a binary; he simply replied, “I perceived myself as - if there’s ‘people of color’ and ‘White people,’ I perceive myself as a person of color. *And those are the two fundamental categories.*”

At the university he currently attends in the U.S., Ananda often feels racialized or “othered” both on and off campus. When he is on his own, he feels as though many U.S. students are “afraid to interact with me because they’re not sure of where I’m from.” On campus, he finds that students often assume that he is among the university’s large population of Middle Eastern students. Therefore, he told me that he noticed that students often treat him very differently once they realize he is English and not Middle Eastern. Furthermore, he commented on the power of whiteness on the campus, telling me that he notices a stark difference between students’ interactions with him when he is alone and when he is with a “White American person.” He feels that, “it’s almost as if that’s my seal of approval. That almost ensures that I’m safe to talk to.” Ananda intimated that this difference in reaction is the most palpable when he interacts with female college students. He mentioned that, even after he has said he is from England, people continue to inquire about where he “is really from.” When I postulated that those kinds of inquiries into Ananda’s “true origins” meant that students equated Englishness with whiteness, Ananda replied:

Right, yeah. It's an issue. People are curious, whereas they wouldn't necessarily be if I spoke in an American accent, and I was blonde and you know, White.

They may be less curious. There would be no prior assumptions. And that's one of the, the biggest, I'd say...I'd call it a prejudice that I've experienced here on

campus. I think there's a, or this is my perception of how I feel. I think there's a tendency to make assumptions about you being a certain way because they've made assumptions about where you're from.

Ananda continued to share how he feels racialized on campus by thinking through the ways in which his physical features may signify to other students that he is “Muslim” or “Middle Eastern.” He explained:

So, for example, many people will think because there's a fairly large contingent of Iranian students here and some people from Saudi Arabia, more so than, you know, English students of Indian ethnicity. And, so I think there's an assumption that you're Muslim, and there's negative connotations associated with being Muslim, currently. Partly, probably fueled by the Islamophobic content of the media...So, I think experiencing in that sense can be quite negative in that people assume you're Middle Eastern, and therefore you're Muslim and therefore you have backward or conservative views on everything and you're [pause] oppressive towards women and all the other negative assumptions people make about being Muslim. And I think they superimpose them on you.

When our conversation returned to this topic, Ananda stated that the question, “Where are you from?” does not inherently indicate racist or racial assumptions. In fact, he said, “It’s a natural question to ask somebody where they’re from. So, that’s okay.” Ananda felt that, more importantly, “It's worse not asking the person where they're from, not talking to them because you think they're from a certain place and because your assumptions about that place are negative. They impose those on you.”

In addition to more subtly racist and xenophobic daily experiences, Ananda has experienced several overtly racist incidents during his time in the U.S. He shared a story from a football/soccer team that he joined not long after arriving here. Early on, he naturally assumed a leadership role, as he was the most experienced player in the group, and in his view, he had, “a better tactical understanding of the game” than the other team members. On the whole, most team members accepted Ananda’s leadership role, but he did notice some resistance, which he felt was related to his being a person of color. He reflected on their reactions to his leadership:

I felt that this was amongst these people, these men, it was - they had never experienced being told what to do by a person of color, and that made them...I dunno, it brought out a very strange reaction from them, which was one of, ‘I don't like you.’...And I thought it was really quite significant because I don't think it would have been the same if I was White.

Another overtly racialized incident happened during an initial visit that Ananda made when he was in the process of planning his move to begin his doctoral program. He shared that he was walking down a street near campus with a White female friend of his:

And there was an old lady, sixty plus, sixty-five plus, walking in the opposite direction towards us. And, she, as she approached me and my friend, she said - giving a stern look - she said ‘I don't know where you're from’ and this is like in [the local] accent, [now in fake Southern accent] ‘I don't know where you folks is from, but you'd better be careful walking around here.’ Which I interpreted as a threat. I didn't feel threatened by the, by the woman, but I felt that this was a

reminder of the attitudes that still persist today, that are prevalent here. And that was within the first week, or I came to visit this place before I decided to come here, and so that was during that first visit.

Although this interaction was unsettling for Ananda, he shared an even more disturbing incident that happened more recently. He had been in his office on campus grading papers very late into the night and began walking home on a street that runs from campus to the nightclub district frequented by many undergraduate students, when:

And this must have been around 3, 3:30, maybe 4 am. Somewhere around that time. And, so it's the kind of time that the bars are emptying and people are on their way back. So, seeing drunken people wasn't an unusual sight for someone who's nocturnal like me. And, as I approached these guys, one of them, the one furthest to the left said the word, 'Nigger' and as I approached them, another one repeated the term, and then as I passed them someone else repeated the term. I could only assume that the language was directed at me. And then, one of them, as they saw me, said, 'Hey man, we love you!' Kind of – I didn't really understand - contradicting the earlier messages. 'We love you, and your long hair.' Kind of taking the piss? And, I kind of just looked over and I said, 'Yeah? Alright.' Something like that. And then carried on walking. And then, as they cleared me, they walked a few steps down and then they, in unison, chanted the term, 'Nigger.' But, they were saying 'Ni-gger. Ni-gger. Ni-gger' like that. All the way until I got home. And so I could hear this.

Ananda reported the incident to campus authorities, "not necessarily out of a sense of injustice or feeling a desire to get vengeance on these people or track them down but

more so out of a need for the people on this campus to be aware of what is going on.” He reflected on the incident and made meaning of how the incident connected with broad acceptance of racist attitudes in the U.S.:

I mean, the most surprising and shocking element of this was that they were very comfortable using that language. In public. I didn't particularly feel like...for some reason I didn't really feel hurt by it as I might have been when I was younger. I just felt sorry for the state of affairs in this country, or in this part of the country where that kind of language is tolerated and is still...audible publicly.

In addition to his own experiences with race and racialization in the U.S., Ananda offered an analysis of the overarching racist structures and hierarchies that continue to be salient in the United States. He connected those with the kinds of inequalities he has observed both on and off campus in his daily experiences. He perceives a very strong racial segregation on campus, and he has found that this segregation is especially evident in the way that social hierarchy is represented through the faculty and staff on campus. He observed that “virtually all” of the cleaning staff, maintenance workers, and food service staff on campus are African American while the professors on campus do not represent the “racial diversity of the state.”

Ananda, whose experiences with social class are informed by his own experiences, spoke about the ways in which “social class” and “working class” are concepts that people identify with much more strongly in England than in the United States:

I'd still say social, like, class is very important [in the United States]. But maybe it's downplayed. Maybe the importance of it is downplayed, you know? It's too

Marxist, or its too liberal or whatever they want to name it to think about things in those terms.

Later, Ananda further explained his understandings of the differences between class-consciousness in the United States and in England:

[In England], it's not like working class in America where everyone kind of has this aspiration or thinks that they're middle class. In England, the connotations of being working class aren't as negative as they may be here in the U.S., so it's not like something you're embarrassed by. In fact, people are quite proud of their, of the cultural associations with whatever, wherever they're from. For example, The Beatles or pop rock or rock music, or football [i.e. "soccer"] was all kind of working-class activities and pastimes or cultural, I think, creations from that segment of society.

Finally, Ananda spoke at length about the different ways in which race and class intersect across the contexts of England and the United States, emphasizing the salience of race in U.S. society:

I've been to various English universities - Sheffield, Bristol, Essex - and in all three, I felt that race was a far less significant barrier and class was probably more of a significant barrier in those circumstances than, than race. So, and here it's more significant, I don't think necessarily than class, but more significant than in the UK. Here they have an additional, you know, relationship with...a problematic relationship with racial difference. Which isn't as acute in England, I would say. But both race and class are an issue in England. And they're both an issue. I guess the devil of the degrees may be different slightly, but, you know,



people here [in the U.S.] don't tend to...they view class as something which is transcendable.

Ananda's experiences growing up in a working-class neighborhood with a large immigrant population provided him with unique lenses through which to filter both his university experience in England and his graduate schooling experiences in the United States. Those experiences highlight the multiple, shifting ways in which race, class, and nationality can intersect in the lives of international students. In part because of his complex experiences around these notions of difference, Ananda completely rejected the notion of nationality:

...in terms of like national identity, I always knew - I didn't really particularly feel Indian - I don't feel Indian in terms of like a national - an identification with the Indian government. If that's anything, I have none. But, I neither have any identification with the British government or the English, I guess, system of government. You know? I think they're...equally...rubbish. But, in terms of...yeah, I tend not to affiliate with any notions of nationality. I think those are not - those are manmade. They're created. They change. They're not...they're transient.

Though he rejects nationality (i.e. allegiance to a government) as a concept, he described the extent to which both English and Indian cultural influences have been an important part of his lived experience:

But I think culturally, I'm so attached to that place [England] as you would be. So, for instance, through music, or the bands you like, or um, the football you watch and you know, things like that. Just, so culturally, I think I'm quite

English. More English than Indian. But there's certainly Indian influences I'm interested in. Eastern philosophy, I'm interested in. Indian cooking, I'm interested in. Indian philosophy.. Or yoga...I'm interested in, you know, certain Indian music from the past. Traditional music.

He further explained his aversion to embracing national labels as a response to what he sees as the negative consequences of nationalism:

I guess, you know strong feelings of nationalism that manifest themselves in all these horrible ways that they do? Usually warring. Yeah, so I think that because of that area...the diversity religion, culture, language, food, color, appearance...Those things, they gave me a real appreciation of a world, a world which was full of difference and being a child of "the world" rather than - you know, "Indian", or "British Indian" or whatever you want to say. Those are just labels.

Furthermore, Ananda connected his perspectives about nationalism and identity to both the community in which he grew up and to the values that his mother passed on to him:

I think, you know, my mom instilled in me that the most fundamental thing that we were before we were anything else, was human. So, I don't, even like here in the States, the idea of race. How do I think race...I think of a human race. I think race, I think of a human race. I don't...when I think of race, the only, I don't think of differences in people - I think racism. But, I don't really, you know, I prefer the term ethnicity. What ethnicity you are...I don't really view us as being

difference races. It almost makes us sound as though we're a difference species by saying, you know, asking me, "What's your race?" Same as yours. [laughs]

I argue that the experiences and perspectives that Ananda shared reveal that he is very perceptive of the ways in which race, class, immigration status, and other markers of social belonging have been used to marginalize groups of people, not only in England and the United States, but also globally. Perhaps because of his understandings of global systems of inequality, Ananda told me that he understands his identity through a humanistic lens rather than through any of the lenses through which society might see him (race, nationality, social class). He explained that he sees those labels as severely limiting:

In my own terms, as I said I tend to subject race as a limiting construct, as something that limits us, as 'we are humans first and foremost.' And that, I think is a fundamental value as human beings we should focus on. And so, that's my own terms of it.

Ultimately, Ananda recognized that the ways in which other people racialize him has impacted his life is context-dependent and also beyond his control. He explained, "how others see you [racially] - I still think that depends on the country you're in and the context of the situation."

#### **4.5.4 Interpreting Ananda's experiences**

I assert that Ananda's experiences with marginalization and with a variety of forms of difference growing up in England helped him to develop a critical consciousness around issues of power, privilege, and injustice in ways that are notably different from the other participants. As the child of immigrants and as a person who grew up in a

working-class neighborhood within a class-conscious society, Ananda is uniquely positioned to understand the functioning of race and other systems that produce difference. Consequently, he brought those critical lenses to bear in his observations about both England and the United States.

I believe that Ananda's experiences with social class growing up in Southall and at university in Essex have informed the ways in which he understands the intersections between race, class, and power in the United States. Ananda's understandings of class-consciousness in England align with decades of research around the strength of working class identity in England (SurrIDGE, 2007; Thompson, 1966; Willis, 1977), and his observations about the racial hierarchy evidenced through the employees on campus is reflective of broader discourses about the intersections between race and class in the U.S.

Finally, while I find Ananda's explicitly racist encounters disturbing, I believe that the more subtle racism that he encounters when interacting with other students is more insidious. Ananda's description of needing a White friend's "seal of approval" before other students will engage with him is indicative of the kind of racializing, exclusionary behavior that Hall (1997) calls "policing the boundaries." In the current U.S. moment, those who are racialized as Middle Eastern (and thus assumed to be Muslim) are regarded as suspicious and unworthy of inclusion. Although Ananda is not Middle Eastern, he is assumed to be, and through processes of racialization, he is sometimes marginalized and excluded in everyday interactions.

In this chapter, I presented the experiences of each of the five participants (Huihui, Sven, Caroline, Daniel, and Ananda) through individual case studies. Each case study opened with a brief introduction to the categories of difference of historical

importance in the participant's home country and concluded with my interpretations of the participant's experiences with race, racial identity, racialization, and other aspects of difference. These case studies demonstrate the complex ways in which a myriad of social categories (e.g., ethnicity, class, gender, and nationality) intersect to influence how participants experience race, racial identity, and racialization. In the following chapter, I respond to each of the three research questions that guided this study through a cross-case analysis of participants' experiences.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion**

Drawing on the results from my thematic analysis across cases, I address the study's research questions:

1. Within the context of their home country, how do the narratives of international students reflect their experiences with race, racial identity, and/or racialization?

What do their stories reveal about the ways in which they conceptualize those notions?

2. Within the context of the university in which they are currently enrolled (and its broader locale), how do the narratives of international students reflect their experiences with race, racial identity and/or racialization? What do their stories reveal about the ways in which they conceptualize those notions?

3. In sharing their experiences with race, racial identity, and/or racialization, to what other aspects of their identity do they attribute significance? What is the nature of the intersection of these identities in their home countries and university contexts?

## **5.1 Research Question 1**

**Within the context of their home country, how do the narratives of international students reflect their experiences with race, racial identity, and/or racialization?**

**What do their stories reveal about the ways in which they conceptualize those notions?**

In response to the first research question, I address whether participants considered race to be an important aspect of social life and of their own identities in their home countries, the role that broader historical and contextual factors played in how participants conceptualized race in their home countries, and their perspectives on race-based policies in their home countries (including institutionalized racism). I describe the varied racialized or non-racialized landscapes that participants experienced in their home countries. Those landscapes provide context for participants' racialized experiences and racial identities in their home countries, which flows into a discussion of the meanings they attributed to those racial identifications. Specifically, I explore participants' experiences around both "whiteness" and "blackness." The cross-case summary for the first research question also has informed how I address the second and third research questions, as I believe the lenses through which participants recalled their experiences with race in their home countries likely influences how they have experienced and perceived race in the U.S. Further, the extent to which participants' racialized experiences vary across contexts highlights the ways in which race functions as a "floating signifier" (Hall, 1997).

### **5.1.1 The Salience or Centrality of Race in Home Country**

One of the forces that strongly shaped the ways in which the international students in this study oriented toward race and racialization was the extent to which “race” as a physical marker mattered as a category of difference in their home countries. To understand the multiple ways in which race operates across the diverse national contexts represented by the international students in this study, I turn once again to Omi and Winant’s (1994) notion of racial formation as well as Hall’s (1997) notion of race as a “floating signifier.”

Omi and Winant (1994) point to the historically and politically situated role of race as they examine the ways in which racial groups are created and reified through processes of racialization. They describe this as “racial formation,” defined as “the socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p. 55). Though their work focuses on the U.S. context, their notions of racialization and racial formation are immensely helpful in understanding the ways in which participants experienced (or did not experience) racialization in their home countries.

Hall (1997) takes a discursive position toward the concept of race, describing race as a “floating signifier;” that is, rather than understanding race as a biological fact, he considers the ways in which race functions through the language and, more broadly, the discourses that a culture employs to describe groups of people. His conceptualization holds central the notion that, “there is nothing solid or permanent to the meaning of race. It changes all the time. It shifts and slides” (p. 2). This discursive position toward race examines the racial meanings that are created through metaphors and stories within a



culture and then applied to human bodies. While the notion of race as a “floating signifier” is a useful concept within the confines of national borders, it becomes even more crucial when looking across the national boundaries that international students transverse as they attempt to make sense of race and racialization. Furthermore, it is helpful in understanding the ways in which other “floating signifiers” become important in attaching power to arbitrary categories (e.g., social class, ethnic group, or religion) in contexts outside of the U.S.

In keeping with this notion, participants’ experiences with race varied widely within the context of their home countries. Accordingly, the extent to which race did or did not play a role in participants’ personal narratives of home depended on the broader salience of race within the national, regional, and local contexts in which they grew up. For Huihui, growing up in what some might describe as a racially monolithic China (Mullaney, 2011), race as it is understood within the context of the United States was not a concept with which she was familiar at all, as it had no relevance to her daily life. Therefore, she repeatedly made remarks such as “We don’t have race in China” or “I didn’t have any concept of race at the time. In China. Never.” For Sven, growing up mostly in rural Norway in the 1970s and 80s around people who would be classified as racially similar to him, race was a concept that he was vaguely familiar with but that seemed not to function strongly or with any real resonance. As Sven observed, in Norway, “you have, pretty much a congruent set of people there.” He further explained that, in his experience, racial difference was discussed more in terms of general differences of culture or language rather than an explicit focus on skin color. His parents’ assertion about his African classmate – “He’s from a different background, he’s from a

different family, he's from a different culture" – acknowledged difference but did not invoke the term "race" to describe how Sven's classmate was different.

Growing up in Nigeria, Daniel did not feel that race or an identification with a particular racial identity were particularly important aspects of society. Though Daniel's educational experiences brought him into contact with students from places like Lebanon, he remarked that, due to Nigeria's position as the most populous Black nation in the world, race "is hardly ever spoken about, 'cause again, everybody's kind of like the same." He also drew a contrast between his experiences with race in Nigeria and in the U.S., explaining that, in Nigeria, race is "not like an up in your face kind of thing."

Both Ananda and Caroline grew up in what I believe to be more racially diverse contexts of England and Brazil. Thus, I argue that racial difference was more central in their home countries than in the home countries of the other three participants. The plethora of literature examining race in both the English (Chakrabarty, Roberts & Preston, 2012; Cole & Maisuria, 2007; Gillborn, 2006; Warmington, 2012) and Brazilian (Bailey, 2009; Skidmore, 1993; Telles, 2004; Twine, 2000) contexts speak to the complexity of race in both countries.

For Ananda, race and racialization was a part of his childhood in a working class suburb of London heavily populated by South Asian immigrant families like his own as well as working class White families. He recalled being familiar with racial and cultural difference at an early age and even remembers hearing racial slurs leveled at himself and his friends throughout his childhood. Despite this upbringing, race and processes of racialization became even more significant for Ananda when he went to university in areas of England that were dominated by a White, middle class majority. Though

Caroline did not feel that race was a salient aspect of her own identity, her narrative supports the plethora of research surrounding race in Brazil and affirms that discourses around race and racial identification are currently thriving in Brazil. Despite her claim that “we don’t make a big deal about [race]” in Brazil, Caroline acknowledged that, “the African Americans or the mixed racial ones tend to be still part of the lower classes.”

### **5.1.2 Historical and Contextual Factors Contributing to Racial Experience**

Often, the ways in which the participants spoke about race and racialization related to the broader historical contexts of their home countries. In other words, their experiences were heavily dependent on the processes of racial formation at work in their home countries. For instance, I would argue Daniel’s narratives around race, including his pride in blackness and what I interpret as the rhetoric that he used around terms like “diligence” and “resilience in the face of adversity,” were greatly informed by the historical legacy of European colonization of much of the African continent and by the scholars, novelists, and activists who challenged it (Achebe, 1959; Cesaire, 1955/2004; Fanon, 1967). Sven’s narrative, which did not focus strongly on categorization, but rather on his generally open disposition toward embracing difference, was likely influenced by Norway’s culture of inclusiveness and equality, but also by the shifting terrain of Norwegian identity as open immigration policies impact both political and social life in the country (Eriksen, 1993). Sven told a story that exemplifies the ways in which race and processes of racial formation are coming to play a greater role in the construction of Norwegian identity as groups of immigrants and refugees from Africa and Asia begin to assimilate into Norwegian culture. He saw a program on Norwegian television in which a “very dark-skinned, curly haired man who spoke Norwegian better

than me” shared his story of coming to the country and learning the language and culture. Sven recalled that, “the Norwegians had, they’d struggled with that, in some part, but then they accepted him as a person.” I argue these challenges to traditional understandings of what it means to identify as Norwegian are based not only on immigrant status, but also on the immigrants’ skin color. Thus, Norway’s open immigration policies have impacted the previously unchallenged notion that to be Norwegian is to be “White.” Here, I turn again to Hall’s (1997) work, which emphasizes the ways in which systems of racial categorization serve to fix and harden boundaries around who belongs and who does not belong. As historical shifts in the Norwegian population have taken place, the boundaries of belonging have become blurry.

Ananda’s experiences with race and racialization in England were influenced by both his immediate, local context and by the broader historical context around race in England. For instance, Ananda grew up in a neighborhood that was the backdrop for notorious race riots involving White English nationalists in response to the presence of immigrant groups in the 1970s. For Ananda, though he experienced some overt racist name-calling during his childhood in England, as he entered his late teens, he recalled that there was “a much higher degree of awareness of racism and how wrong it was and a push for political correctness” in England. As a result, “being racist became far more taboo.” Despite the taboo associated with being overtly racist, Ananda quickly pointed out that data around employment and health disparities revealed that “subtle forms of racism” are still thriving in England.

### **5.1.3 Racializing Policies and Practices**

In discussing their experiences with race and racialization in their home countries, participants' experiences with various national, institutional policies and practices that reify identities in their home countries also emerged. Participants interpreted the impacts of governmental policies around race (and other forms of difference) on national discourses and on the lives of individuals. The concept of filtering racial experience through institutions and policies is consistent with Omi and Winant's (1994) notion of "racial projects" that construct race not only through individual acts, but more prominently through institutions and systems. These policies, including affirmative action policies and immigration policies, structured participants' racialized experiences in their home countries.

For example, in the last 13 years, Brazilian universities have begun to enact affirmative action policies to promote racial equity in higher education (Lima, 2012). Caroline's narrative revealed that she sees two problems inherent in the affirmative action system that has been developed in Brazil. She felt that, rather than being based on racial identification, the system should be reconfigured to provide an advantage to students who attended Brazil's inadequate public school system. Caroline also regarded the system as problematic because of the complex and sometimes inconsistent ways in which Brazilians racially identify themselves. Caroline's concerns about these policies seem to focus, in part, on the reification of racial difference and the drawing of hard boundaries around race. Further, Caroline's objections to Brazilian affirmative action policies centered on her suspicions that the primary equity issue in Brazilian higher education is not race but rather whether a student attended a high quality private school or what she considers an inadequate Brazilian public school system. Since students of color are more

likely to attend Brazilian public schools (Reiter, 2009), however, I would argue that access to higher education in Brazil remains a racial equity issue.

Daniel shared perspectives similar to Caroline about the negative impacts of quotas. Huihui also briefly described situations in which she and her friends would jokingly wish that they were members of minority groups so that they would be able to receive an advantage on the stringent requirements for China's national examinations. Daniel's and Huihui's perspectives about affirmative action policies will be discussed in greater detail in response to Question 3 as they pertain more directly to ethnicity than to race.

#### **5.1.4 Whiteness and Blackness Outside of the United States**

Though in the U.S., the meanings associated with both whiteness and blackness might seem overly familiar to many, the meanings made of whiteness and blackness across national contexts varies. Participants' experiences with their own racial identities and their observations about the relationships of power between racial groups in their home countries reveals much about the significance of belonging to racialized groups within specific national contexts. Furthermore, the participants' experiences point to the ways in which global histories impact the ways in which race operates within national borders.

In a critique of the field of White Studies, Kaufmann (2006) argues that "'white' is the particular racial boundary marker that distinguishes dominant ethnic groups from subaltern ones in a small proportion of the world's nations. Whiteness informs, but does not constitute, dominant ethnicity (p. 231). As such, discussions of whiteness in contexts outside of the United States may not align directly with understandings of whiteness and

White privilege in the U.S., so close attention to context is important in discussing notions of whiteness.

While noting Kaufmann's cautions about whiteness, I also turn to the legacy of colonization and its impact on the global significance of whiteness to understand how whiteness operated in Caroline's and Sven's experiences. In keeping with claims that are often made about the invisibility of whiteness (Hartigan, 1999), Caroline and Sven each identified as White, yet did not regard their racial identity as an important aspect of their identities in their home countries. The racial particularities of their home countries, however, require special attention when interpreting their lack of consciousness about being White. Caroline comes from a racially diverse country in which many scholars have considered the role of whiteness and White privilege (Bailey, 2009; Hellwig, 1992; Skidmore, 1993; Telles, 2004; Twine, 2000). Thus, her assertion that, "I was never self-conscious that I was White, or you know, something else. I don't think that was a big label. I don't think that made a huge impact," might be related to her social location as part of the dominant upper middle class White culture in Brazil. With a population that is far from racially homogenous, whiteness plays a role in a Brazilian racial system that privileges those with lighter skin.

Considering Kaufmann's (2006) warning about whiteness not always constituting dominance in every context, I must exercise caution when making assertions about how whiteness operated during Sven's upbringing in Norway. Although Sven did discuss White privilege and the obligations that he feels as a result of it in the U.S., he did not consider his White racial identity to be an important construct during his upbringing in Norway. Rather, in describing the racial characteristics of the Norwegian population, he

focused on the nation's population as descending from "Germanic groups [who] migrated north into Sweden, Norway, and Denmark" or on his father's partially Irish background. In further elaborating on "the core of what most Norwegians kind of view the original Norwegian people to be," however, Sven invoked White phenotypic characteristics, saying that, "[Norwegians] are typically light-skinned, blond hair, blue eyes, tall people." In describing his recognition of his whiteness upon arriving in the U.S. Sven described what he saw as the homogeneity of the Norway in which he grew up:

I didn't realize that [all of the ways that my Norwegian identity was formed] until I came to America. Until I realized that, kind of the opposite of what I was. You know, if you wake up and all you see is beaches, and you think that's kind of normal. And then you go to the mountains, and you're like, 'Wow! This is different.' So you have something to compare it to. Until you have something to compare it to, I don't really think you, a person really understands who they are. You don't know what black is until you see white. You don't know what light is until you see darkness. Because you have nothing to compare it to. So.

In contrast, Daniel stated that, although race was not an important marker of difference in Nigeria, his blackness was an important aspect of his internalized sense of identity. He spoke at length about the meanings that he attaches to blackness and the roots of those attachments. Interestingly, Daniel pointed to his Black racial identity as being important to him even though he did not believe race to be particularly important generally within the context of Nigeria. Here, I note the contrast between Sven's experience as a White person growing up in a largely White Norwegian society who scarcely identifies with his whiteness and Daniel's experience in a largely racially



homogeneous Nigeria who identifies strongly with blackness and assigns particular attributes to blackness.

### **5.1.5 Racial Landscape of Community**

Numerous scholars have discussed the ways in which individuals are shaped and structured by the contexts or places in which they are situated (Rodman, 1992). Ananda, Caroline, and Sven all shared observations that spoke to the role that race played, or did not play, in the communities in which they grew up. For instance, Ananda grew up in a very racially, ethnically, and nationally diverse neighborhood which included people from many different countries and backgrounds. As a result of the tremendous diversity in his community, Ananda said, “you didn’t realize you were a minority.” For Ananda, growing up in that kind of environment *normalized* the notion of difference, as it was common for him to visit friends whose parents were from Pakistan or Bangladesh and spoke languages other than the languages spoken in Ananda’s home.

The racial landscape of the community in which Caroline grew up reveals much about the material realities of race in Brazil despite popular claims that race does not occupy a prominent space in Brazilian social life. Though she did have classmates and friends who were not White, Caroline noted that people in service positions in her upper middle to upper class neighborhood, “tend to be the mulatto, the mixed race, or... African Brazilian.” Sven’s observations reveal the lack of racial diversity in Brummundal, as he shared the excitement and intrigue he felt when a classmate from Nigeria arrived. As he recalled, although his community had some divisions based on occupation or small differences in Norwegian dialect, “they’re all pretty much the same. You can’t tell them

apart really.” The same applied to Huihui, whose community was both racially and ethnically homogeneous.

I posit that experiences with various forms of diversity early in life influenced the lenses that participants bring to their experiences in the United States. For Ananda, coming from a racially and nationally diverse community, he was well-equipped to understand the various forms of discrimination and prejudice he might experience in the U.S. His perspectives were further informed by his experiences moving from the racially diverse, working class community in which he grew up to the White, middle class university he attended in Essex. Because Huihui had less experience dealing with racial or ethnic diversity in the community in which she grew up, I speculate that she has a more difficult time making sense of and articulating the racial hierarchy in the U.S. because of a general de-emphasis on identity in China as well as the lack of both racial and ethnic diversity in her upbringing. As she recalled having almost no concept of race prior to coming to the U.S., I suggest she may have difficulty finding the language to communicate the kinds of racial differences she sees. Indeed, she remembered that, when she was in Boston, she did not notice “some unfair things happening for different ethnicities.” During the longer time period that she has spent in her doctoral program, however, she has noticed more “because this is the place I’ve stayed the longest.” In other words, it may take time and experience to recognize the ways in which race and other forms of difference influence one’s experience in a new national context.

## **5.2 Research Question 2**

**Within the context of the university in which they are currently enrolled (and its broader locale), how do the narratives of international students reflect their**

**experiences with race, racial identity and/or racialization? What do their stories reveal about the ways in which they conceptualize those notions?**

In this section, I address the second research question, which focuses on participants' experiences with and perceptions of race within the context of the U.S. In addressing this question, I discuss participants' impressions of and experiences in the U.S. prior to coming here on a permanent (or semi-permanent) basis with a specific focus on how they conceptualized race in the U.S. and how they would fit into the U.S. racial paradigm. I also hone in on the ways in which participants view race as central to U.S. society and salient to nearly every aspect of life in the U.S., with attention to their views about how U.S. history and the particularities of life in the U.S. South relate to race, racism, and racialization for themselves and for others around them. Next, I describe instances in which participants either personally invoke or name race-based language that fits in with the Black/White racial binary - instances in which participants claim that they have little to no racialized experience in the context of the U.S., observations and experiences with blackness in the U.S. context, and a discussion of the role of whiteness in the racialized experiences that participants shared or did not share. I then discuss participants' views about meritocracy and how those views influence how they make meaning of race. Then, I move to a discussion of participants' experiences with feeling racialized, feeling othered, and having racial categories or labels imposed on them. I close my discussion of the second research question with an analysis of participants' experiences with the racial atmosphere of the university, including a discussion of the racial segregation that participants noted on the university campus.

**5.2.1 Impressions of the United States prior to living here**

For those participants who felt they had well-developed concepts of the U.S. prior coming here for graduate study, race and racism were most certainly one aspect of their impressions of U.S. life and society. In addition to being informed by popular culture and media, some participants' impressions of the U.S. were also informed by their schooling experiences in their home countries, their study of history, and their travels to the U.S. The impressions they shared evoked multiple, conflicting notions, including the U.S.'s uniqueness regarding race and racial discourse (Kaufmann, 2006), the U.S. reputation for meritocracy and opportunity (McNamee & Miller, 2009).

Ananda, Caroline, and Daniel all expressed awareness of the U.S.'s particular racial history, including the slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, and to some extent, that knowledge influenced their expectations about life in the U.S. In particular, Daniel described having impressions of the U.S. based on reading about South Carolina's Confederate flag debate in *Time* magazine. In contrast, his perceptions of the U.S. were also influenced by his parents' narratives around meritocracy and equality of opportunity in the U.S.

Caroline had traveled to the U.S. for a vacation as a little girl and noticed the social segregation at a young age. Huihui, influenced largely by anti-U.S. propaganda in Chinese schools, saw the U.S. as a place where "every day is dark. No sunshine." Ananda recalled that, prior to coming to the U.S. for graduate study, he was informed by notions of the U.S. derived from popular culture, but he also had a skeptical view of U.S. social systems because of his knowledge of the country's history around slavery, segregation, and its continued imperial stance toward the rest of the world. His perceptions also were informed by his own previous brief trips here, through which he

had experienced people as “warm,” “welcoming,” and “friendly,” but which also reinforced his perception that people in the U.S. were not particularly aware of global events. Because Sven was so young when he first came to the U.S., he remembered few of his perceptions of the U.S. prior to moving here. His few memories of his perceptions included childlike notions of “cowboys and Indians,” which he attributed to popular children’s magazines in Norway. I speculate that, given Sven’s formative age when he came here, his notions around race and difference were likely formed partially in Norway and also within the context of the U.S. South.

### **5.2.2 Salience/Centrality of Race in U.S. Life and Society**

In many ways, participants’ varied experiences with race in their home countries, including some participants’ claims that race did not matter at all, but that other aspects of identity mattered greatly (further discussed in Question 3), point to the ways in which many academic and political discourses centered on race and racial inequality around the globe are grounded deeply in the U.S. context. Drawing once again from Hall’s notion<sup>5</sup> of race as a floating signifier, I would argue that participants indicated that race is a stronger, more concretized signifier in the context of the United States than in many other national settings. Though other aspects of difference are most closely tied to material realities in some participants’ home countries, in the U.S., race is arguably constructed and historically constituted as the most important signifier of difference. One of the most obvious and recurring findings throughout the participants’ narratives was that each of the participants felt strongly that race was more salient and central to life in the United

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<sup>5</sup> I recognize the dissonance between my assertion that academic discourses are centered in the U.S. and my use of the work of Stuart Hall, a British cultural theorist, to contextualize that claim. In part, the ways in which Hall’s perspectives maintain relevance for this work speaks to what Warmington (2012) has called the “perennial slippage in racial terminology” (p. 14) between the U.S. and Great Britain.

States than in their home countries<sup>6</sup>. This presupposition, that race is more significant in the U.S. than in other contexts, is so embedded in many racial theories that it is not even discussed but rather assumed. Critical race theory (CRT), for example, which has been employed by U.S. scholars to study contexts outside of the U.S., was developed specifically in response to the institutional racism of the U.S. legal system (Bell, 1992). Yet, I note that when scholars take up CRT in non-U.S. contexts, they sometimes neglect to acknowledge the particularities of how race operates in the U.S. (Kaufmann, 2006).

This understanding of the salience of race in the U.S. is often unraveled over the course of many years of observing and participating in U.S. culture. Often, participants remarked that during their time here in the United States, they are gradually coming to an understanding around the meanings and material realities attached to race here in the U.S. For Huihui in particular, race and racial difference were concepts with which she was still coming to terms, although she I believe that she possesses sharp lenses around the element of “show” as opposed to “action” involved in faculty members’ level of concern with students of color. Ananda clearly laid out his views about the strength of race in U.S. society and discourse, and he clearly articulated the ways in which the U.S., both historically and contemporarily, generates narratives around racial equality that contradict the material realities of racial inequality. He reflected:

This kind of idea that ‘We're so - 'we' as in the American people - are so, are all about justice for all and equality for all.’ I never, ever bought into that. I always knew it was a - it was the full story isn't told, isn't advertised... And in a way, this is what people do. The re-writing of history to suit your own agenda is not

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<sup>6</sup> I acknowledge that, to some extent, participants’ knowledge of the topic of the study and the kinds of questions that I asked may have shaped the strength of their assertions about the salience of race in the United States.

uncommon. And this is just the exact same way I perceive the dominant paradigm of the dominant historical interpretation of this country.

In particular, I would highlight Ananda's commentary on the deeply rooted and continued nature of racism in the U.S., as he believes that many people in the U.S. are oblivious to the continued salience of race. He reflected:

It's deeply prejudiced, deeply racist. And, you know, has a lot of blood on its hands. Which isn't really talked about, I think. I don't think that people are aware of it as much as they ought to be, or I don't think it's...it should be...it should be raised to far more than it is so that people don't have this idea of the Americans going around the world crusading, saving people, you know?

### **5.2.3 Historical/Contextual Factors: The U.S. and the U.S. South**

As discussed regarding their understandings of race prior to coming to the U.S., participants expressed an awareness of the multiple ways in which the broader historical and political contexts and discourses in the U.S. have impacted their experiences with race and racialization both within and outside of the university. Ananda, Caroline, Daniel, and Sven each explicated ways in which broader racial formation projects in the U.S. generally, and in particular in the U.S. South, had structured their expectations and experiences around race.

To make sense of the ways in which a place like the South is understood and experienced, I draw on theories that seek to understand the role of place. Rodman (1992), for example, argues that, "Places are not inert containers. They are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions" (p. 641). Furthermore, I am in agreement with scholars who assert that the South is uniquely

positioned with regard to race and that the South's racial history requires special attention in research (Morris & Monroe, 2009). Evoking the "race-place nexus" (Morris & Monroe, 2009), Ananda, Caroline, Daniel, and Sven expressed awareness that the South has a unique history as it relates to race in the United States. Ananda explained that he was quite familiar with the racial history of the U.S. and the South, and he also was aware of "the continued existence of racial tension and prejudice in the South." Explaining further, Ananda said that, "my awareness of the unique history of racism in, in Jim Crow South, so- that influenced the way I perceived what to expect." Here, Ananda invoked the notion of place and the uniquely situated role of the U.S. South in structuring racialized experience.

#### **5.2.4 Racial binary**

Closely related to the salience of race in U.S. society, the Black/White binary that gives shape to the racial landscape discussed in the study's conceptual framework was reiterated by participants both explicitly and implicitly. Primarily, participants discussed this notion as it related not to their own experience but rather to their broader observations about how race operates in the U.S. The strength of this binary view of race is evident in Caroline's claim that, "here, people tend to wanna categorize- I mean, you don't have a choice, here is more like Black and – no shade of grey, Black and White." For Huihui, the racial binary was central to her very definition of the term race, as she explained that, "race is like those conflicts and issues between White and Black." For Daniel, this notion of people fitting strongly into one category or the other is much stronger in the South than in other parts of the country. Participants' observations about how race and discourses around race are often reduced to Black and White reinforce



Hall's (1997) notion that when individuals do not fit into the expected norms of a given system of racial classification, we "police the boundaries, you know the hard and fixed boundaries between what belongs and what doesn't" (p. 3).

Furthermore, participants' experiences are consistent with claims made by Omi and Winant (1992) about the strength of the racial dichotomy in the U.S. They argue that "racial dichotomizing – focusing analysis and discussion of race solely on black-white relationships – is endemic in the U.S." (p. 153). Even when binary ways of thinking about race are not reduced to simple Black/White distinctions, they are almost always reduced to White and Non-White.

### **5.2.5 Perceived lack of racialized experience**

Though the explicit topic of our conversations was race, Caroline, Daniel, and Huihui either did not feel that race had played a role in their lives at all or had a tendency to quickly negate experiences they shared that might have been related to race. I believe in many ways, these instances in which participants ignored or denied racialization are indicative of participants' level of investment in myths of equality of opportunity in the United States. Daniel, for example, explained that:

You know, I guess, I don't want to have to always play the race card. You know, "I was treated this way or I got this result or this happened because..." You know. Again, that's kind of like, it goes against everything that I was taught or everything that, that I was probably told. Like coming to this country, for instance, I took the same exams as every other person in the, every other person in my program. And I took it in Nigeria based off an educational system in Nigeria. And I was fortunate enough to pass. You know, and get accepted into this school.

As Daniel continued, I believe that his assertion of reluctance to acknowledge the role of race reflects a belief that naming race or racism would indicate that he is not willing to work hard. He explained:

So, in a way, it's...I guess it's not just enough to say that you didn't get something because of racial prejudice. 'Cause I know sometimes it's easy for some people – and I'm not saying that some people are necessarily using that as an excuse - but sometimes it's easy for some people to actually say that when that might not be the case, you know. I was always brought up to, you know, always give your best shot. You know, 'hard work always works.' You know, if you put in your best effort, things will work out. You know? And so, you know, so maybe that's, that's what makes me kind of reluctant to always place everything at the feet of prejudice or something.

In Daniel's case, his reluctance to name race and racism in his experiences may be related to his belief in U.S. myths of meritocracy (McNamee & Miller, 2009) and his fear of being seen as playing the "race card." I posit that, as a Black man, Daniel might also be reluctant to fully participate in the U.S. racial system by claiming instances of racism because he does not wish to be categorized as belonging to blackness and all of the meanings attached to it in the U.S. context.

For Caroline, her assertions that she "never had an experience in which I was prejudiced for being Brazilian or foreign" or that she does see race "as shaping how I see myself or how I interact with the world" might, again, intersect with her whiteness and with other aspects of her identity. In addition to being White, I detected little to no

accent in her speech, and, as she herself articulated, she does not fit the image that many in the U.S. have of a Latina.

### **5.2.6 Blackness/African American Culture/African Diaspora**

Participants had varying experiences and perspectives surrounding Blackness in the U.S. As a self-identified Black Nigerian, Daniel often finds himself racialized as “Black or even African American.” He reiterated his self-identification as Black and his reluctance to “check the box” on a demographics form when the list says “African American” rather than “Black.” Daniel shared with me that he finds his general sense of identity as African strengthened by the experience of being an international student. He finds commonality with friends from other African countries and even with others who are part of the African diaspora, such as the Caribbean.

Though Daniel was the only participant who explicitly identified himself as Black, other participants made observations or shared incidents that point to their broader perceptions or attitudes about race and in particular, about African Americans. In fact, within the context of our interview, Huihui told me about some blatantly prejudicial information about African Americans that had been shared in one of the courses that she took in China. She said that, in her TOEFL and GRE prep courses:

They will tell you, like, for example. ‘When you go along the street, don’t go close to the car parking there, ‘cause somebody can just open the door and grab you in the car.’ Like...or...mmm, “When you accidentally step on an African American’s foot, don’t say ‘sorry’, ‘cause if you say sorry, they will beat you.’

By contrast, in her experience at her predominantly African American undergraduate institution, Caroline had many positive interactions with African Americans and African

American culture. She explained that, “African American people, I find them really friendly...they’re always smiling.” When she began her graduate degree at a larger university, she missed a strong African American presence on campus.

### **5.2.7 Role of Whiteness**

Ananda, Caroline, Huihui, and Sven all spoke at least briefly about the role that whiteness plays in U.S. society generally or in their own lives. Sven and Ananda both spoke at length on the subject of whiteness in the U.S. Sven shared how he came to acknowledge his White privilege, and Ananda made observations about the role that whiteness plays in U.S. society in general and explained how that has manifested in his own experience.

Sven’s narrative reveals the complex and conflicted nature of his relationship to whiteness but also points to the ways in which being race-conscious is a choice for White people whereas people of color are forced to be conscious of race. In part, Sven wished to disassociate himself from whiteness, as he reflected, “I have to separate myself from who I am visually as a person. When a person looks at me, many people automatically assume I am a certain person.” Though Sven has become more aware of the impact of whiteness over time, he remained uncomfortable with discussing the notion of White privilege. He recognized that being White, “gives me privilege,” but he admitted, “it scares me to death just to say that.”

Sven shared experiences he had, particularly in his graduate coursework, in which he realized that his affinity for what he regards as “open dialogue” might be understood differently because his social position as a White male. Because he recognized the legacy of White male dominance in the U.S., he came to acknowledge a need to tone

down his classroom rhetoric. I also postulate that whiteness might have played a role in Sven's high school experiences of questioning others' prejudicial language or attitudes. In this case, Sven may have been using his whiteness as a "way in" to challenge his classmates' racial assumptions. Sven's ability to *choose* to engage in challenging racist language and attitudes without threat of social isolation might not have been possible for a person of color. Ananda also spoke to the power of whiteness in U.S. society when he explained that, as a person of color on a U.S. university campus, having a White friend with him often serves as a "seal of approval that almost ensures I'm safe to talk to."

### **5.2.8 Meritocracy**

In sharing their narratives around race in the U.S., several participants expressed views that positioned the U.S. as a meritocratic society, in which "if you work hard enough and are talented enough, you can overcome any obstacle and achieve success. No matter where you start out in life, the sky is the limit. You can go as far as your talent and abilities can take you" (McNamee & Miller, 2009, p. 1). I believe that these views about the meritocratic nature of U.S. society strongly influenced how participants oriented critically (or uncritically) to race.

As detailed above, Daniel expressed views that indicated that meritocracy is central to the way he approaches his life and is also something that he expects within the context of the U.S. He employed the notion that the U.S. is a meritocratic space to discredit instances in which he feels he might be a victim of racial discrimination. For example, he said the following of the U.S.:

I also knew it was, it was a country that, at least to a large extent, awarded merit. You know, if you came here, if you were smart, if you worked real hard, you

would succeed. You know, I guess that's probably like the strongest impression I had of the United States, you know? One where you, you could definitely come here, work hard, and succeed. You know? I mean, that's pretty much it.

Though Huihui was more aware of and willing to name her feelings around being othered or marginalized in the U.S. context, she also reinforced the notion that the U.S. is a place where, "You still can, you still can work toward, even if you don't come from a wealthy family, you can still work towards you're goal to get that." She contrasted this sharply with her impressions of opportunity in China where, "if you've grown up in a [wealthy and powerful] family, you don't need to study. You don't need to be in a good school although you're always put in a good school." Since Huihui herself noted that she has become increasingly aware of U.S. systems of difference and exclusion during her time here, I would argue that, as those lenses evolve, she may eventually become cognizant of the ways in which similar principles of inequality apply in the U.S. context.

Although Sven himself had experienced little in the way of exclusion in the U.S. context, he remarked on his impressions of the U.S. surrounding notions related to meritocracy. As a child, Sven's parents promoted the notion that, "America is the land of opportunity." Sven's critical readings and personal explorations of the social world around him have revealed that, "It's not true! It's a fallacy!" He now understands that particular systems of race and social class operate in the U.S. to privilege some groups over others and that in fact, everyone does not experience equal opportunities. Overall, I noted that Daniel, who continued to express a belief in the U.S. "myth of meritocracy" even after having spent time in the U.S., was more reluctant to name racism as a structural or even an individual problem in his experiences in the U.S.

### **5.2.9 Imposition of Categories/Labeling + Racialization**

Hall (1997) noted that, “classification is a very generative thing; once you are classified, a whole range of other things fall into place as a result of it” (p. 2). One of the primary concerns of this study was the ways in which racial categories and assumptions about behavior or group belonging based on physical features (i.e. racialization) happens for international students. Ananda, Caroline, and Daniel all spoke about having specific labels placed on them that force them into U.S.-based racial categories. They found the inflexibility of the racial categories in the U.S. to be striking, and they each spoke of their resistance to being racially categorized. These observations often revolved around filling out forms and not knowing which category to choose in the “race” section. Although Caroline identifies as White, she felt that South Americans are often all perceived as being “Hispanic,” and thus she feels pressure to adhere to those labels at times. For Ananda, because he is both English/British and has brown skin, he found that he rarely meets the expectations that people have for someone who is English/British, which is often associated with whiteness. In contrast to Ananda, who was accustomed to being part of a racial minority, even in his home country, Daniel talked about going from being part of a very clear racial majority to being considered a minority within the context of the U.S. He even remarked that he might be viewed as a “minority within a minority” in the U.S. and reflected on what this new status as “minority” has meant for him:

I have to grapple with the fact that while I may come from the most populous Black nation on Earth, in this country, I’m a minority. And I might even be like a minority within a minority. You know, because I’m African within – an African minority within an African American group. Because, again, the truth is, like I

was saying, most people of other races, they don't consider me any different from an African American. So in a way, I'm kind of like a minority within another minority group. And so it's something that I have to, I have to meander.

As Daniel continued, he revealed his concerns about and resistance to being classified as a "minority" within the U.S. context after having been a member of the (racial) majority in Nigeria:

Because it's kind of difficult sometimes having the label "minority" attached to you. Or different characterizations, like a "person of color" things like that. You know. While on the surface it's not a real issue, does not preclude me from moving forward or advancing. But sometimes when I think about it, it's kind of, it's kind of strange. Coming from Nigeria where – I mean statistics have it that 1 in every 4 Black people is a Nigerian. So, you come from a country that's the most populous Black nation on Earth. You're never made to feel...you're always like a majority, you know. But then you come here and you are considered a minority. It's, it takes some adjusting. It takes some getting used to. I'm here for a while and still, it's something I'm still getting used to.

Each of the participants in this study expressed some frustration with the limitations of the U.S. system of racial classification. They acknowledged and understood, to some extent, the ways in which they had been racialized and thus, had various attributes assigned to them. As they came into collision with the strict categories imposed by this system, they each expressed the desire to determine for themselves how they identify racially.

#### **5.2.10 Feeling "Othered"**



Both Ananda and Huihui shared extensively about being made to feel that they are “Other” within the context of the U.S. For example, Ananda’s experiences with feeling othered were apparent in his description of students’ discomfort in his presence unless he is accompanied by a White friend. Ananda also felt othered when he sensed that his soccer team resented his skillful playing rather than celebrating it. Furthermore, Huihui’s description of how she is made to feel when her ID is the only one checked when she purchases groceries demonstrates her experiences with being “othered.” For Huihui, she felt that she has been othered as simply a “foreigner,” whereas I might read her experiences as tied to both race and “foreign-ness.” Nevertheless, on multiple occasions, she has been made to feel unwelcome and as though she does not belong here. Scholars from many fields have talked about the ways in which people are marginalized through processes of othering. To an extent, this notion of othering and otherness is closely linked to the ways in which race is constructed as dichotomous and in the way that Hall describes Douglas’s notion of “matter out of place.” When someone does not fit the categories engrained in the U.S. context, they are treated as “matter out of place” and boundary lines are often drawn around their very existence in that space. Furthermore, the experiences participants shared around othering points to racist nativism (Pérez Huber, 2010; Pérez Huber, Lopez, Malagon, Velez, & Solorzano, 2008), which examines the historical racialization and subsequent exclusion and marginalization of immigrants of color.

#### **5.2.11 Racial Landscape/Atmosphere of the University**

Though universities are often looked to as racial utopias in which the categories of difference that function to stratify in the broader society supposedly cease to function,

scholars have shown that race operates on campuses as it does in other spaces (Bryan, Wilson, Lewis & Wills, 2012; Worthington, Navarro, Loewy & Hart, 2008). In a racially constituted space such as the South, those differences manifest both on and off campus. I noted that the kinds of experiences that participants shared around their campus experiences seemed linked to how they were racialized within the U.S. context and their general attitudes about the strength of race across contexts.

Ananda noted that the university is a microcosm of the society around it, describing the visible racial hierarchies on the university campus, which employs many African Americans in low-wage service jobs while many of the higher-paying jobs are performed by White people. Ananda and Caroline each remarked on the noticeable social segregation of the student body. Caroline specifically observed the underrepresentation of people of color in spaces like the university's dance team or cheerleading squad and contrasted this with her undergraduate institution (which has more students of color) in the same state. Huihui observed that, in her own program, White students receive the most intensive and explicit mentoring from faculty, while "international students are ignored."

In addition to their observations about the overarching ways in which race operates on campus, participants also shared their own narratives of how race, racialization and a general sense of being othered has operated on campus and in their classes. These experiences shed further light on the ways in which whiteness has come to operate as a marker of belonging in the United States. For example, while Caroline and Sven expressed that the context of the university had been an inclusive environment for them, Ananda, Huihui, and Daniel each had experiences that point to the ways in which

they have been racialized on campus. The incident that Ananda shared about having racially derogatory terms yelled at him by a group of students, for instance, sheds light on more overt forms of racist and violent language employed on campus, and Huihui's feelings of being neglected by faculty in her program speak to the more subtle forms of othering that occur in the university context. Though Daniel did not explicitly name the racial atmosphere on campus, the incident that he shared about being searched by the police while walking in a group of students indicates that the university campus is not one of inclusion or one where students are free from the racialization processes that govern U.S. society.

### **5.3 Research Question 3**

**In sharing their experiences with race, racial identity, and/or racialization, to what other aspects of their identity do they attribute significance? What is the nature of the intersection of these identities in their home countries and university contexts?**

The discussion related to the first and second questions reveals much about the third research question, which focuses on other aspects of identity that participants identified as significant in their lives in both their home countries and in their U.S. university contexts. In discussing this final research question, I address the aspects of identity to which participants attributed significance in their lived experiences. I also describe some of the aspects of participants' notions of self that intersected most strongly with race. Here, my discussion covers ethnicity, regionalized notions of self, social class, gender, religion/spirituality, language/accent, and national identity. I also delve into the ways in which race and racial identity intersects with notions of national identity and with

social class both in participants' home countries and in the U.S. Finally, I discuss participants' reflections on the ways in which their identity shifts and becomes fluid depending on context, and I also discuss participants' invoking of cosmopolitan notions (Appiah, 2006; Appiah, 2008; Nussbaum, 1997) in order to reject the concept of race as a way of labeling people and organizing society.

In describing the floating significance of race, Hall (1997) remarks that, "Classification is a very generative thing. Once you are classified a whole range of other things fall into place as a result of it" (p. 2). The narratives shared by the participants in this study, informed by the national contexts from which they came, further reinforce this notion of the generative nature of classification, whether that classification system is labeled as "race" or as something else. In many cases, however, the system used to attach meaning to different groups in their home countries was not race but another category of classification. In some cases, these meanings were quite obviously imposed through policies, practices, and discourses within their countries of origin. Other aspects of identity to which participants attributed significance derived from within their families and upbringings in particular traditions. Below, I explore some of the categories of difference that were significant for participants in their home countries and how those intersected with their experiences in the U.S.

### **5.3.1 National Identity**

National identity played varying roles in the lives and identities of participants. Anderson (1983) has famously described nations as "imagined communities" in which members hold an affinity for a socially constructed image of "the nation." As participants shared their thinking about race in their home countries and in the U.S., the

extent to which they each embraced the socially constructed image of their home countries emerged. Caroline's pride in being Brazilian was revealed in her narratives around her interactions with other Brazilians here in the United States, as well as the kinds of positive character and personality traits, such as "warm," "friendly," and "outgoing," that she attributes to Brazilians in general. Though Huihui shared many stories about the ways in which she believes the Chinese government attempts to control the minds of its citizens, she still expressed a strong sense of identification with China, saying that she maintains pride in China's Olympic teams and that there is no other country with which she could like to be associated. Though Daniel seems to have always strongly identified with being Nigerian, his time in the National Youth Service and now his time away from his home country appears to have strengthened his sense of allegiance and closeness with Nigeria. Sven often finds himself educating his colleagues in the United States about Norway in order to promote what he still considers to be his home country.

Ananda's views about national identity and/or nationalism contrast sharply with the ways in which Caroline, Daniel, Huihui, and Sven think of and embrace those notions. Similar to how he thought about race, Ananda outright rejected the concept, saying that allegiance to one's country of origin inhibits the overall advancement of humanity. He discussed his aversion to nationalism and what he views as the inherent dangers in embracing such labels:

I still don't have any, like, strong feelings about my country or, I even think the idea of 'my country's' quite absurd. [Pause] - I'm quite okay with immigration. I think there's plenty of space for everyone in every country. I don't think, I don't

believe in the idea of illegal immigrants. Only [pause] just the, yeah...so...I'm quite anarchistic when it comes to government and religion and nationality.

Yeah. I don't really tolerate [laughs] you know, nationalism? I guess, you know strong feelings of nationalism that manifest themselves in all these horrible ways that they do? Usually warring.

The diverse ways in which participants thought about and identified with their home countries paradoxically reveal both the strength of the cultural associations tied to national identity and the flaws that are evident in socially constructed nations. That is, the project of using the concept of “the nation” to create an imagined community resonated with Caroline, Daniel, and Huihui, and Sven. Ananda, conversely, feels an affinity with some of the *cultural* associations he makes with England, but he rejects that overall notion of nationalism as problematic and even destructive.

### **5.3.2 Ethnicity**

One category of difference that most clearly illustrates the ways in which different signifiers “float” across contexts is ethnicity. That is, while ethnicity may be of secondary importance in a race-dominated society like the U.S., ethnic identity is used to define groups and create power relations in other contexts. Ethnicity was a concept that resonated most strongly for Daniel, as ethnicity is a strong form of social organization in Nigeria. Though Huihui herself does not feel a strong sense of ethnic identity as a member of the ethnic majority Han group, her narrative reveals that ethnicity plays a notable role in China. Both Caroline and Sven briefly mentioned their various ethnic and/or national backgrounds, but these did not seem to figure strongly into their narratives.

As a member of the minority Benin (Edo) tribe in Nigeria, Daniel feels a close bond with his family members in his native tribal land. Expressing a sense of pride in his ethnic background, Daniel asserted, “I am so very proud of who I am from. Even though I’ve like lived in various parts of Nigeria, I still recognize that I’m from, that I’m Nigerian and I’m from that tribe.” For Daniel, his ethnicity or tribal group is what he identified with most strongly. He stated, “back home in Nigeria, right, primarily I’d identify myself...I guess second as Nigerian, but primarily as a member of my tribal group.” Despite his strong embrace of that background, he was quick to point out that, “ethnic identity is not something that...as much as I like it...but it’s not something I’d throw up or trump or throw in the face of anybody.” This is especially relevant because of the ways in which the institutionalized ethnic policies in Nigeria have personally impacted Daniel. Because Nigeria’s ethnic quota policies treat region of residence as synonymous with ethnicity, Daniel’s being born in Lagos meant that he was required to score much higher on national exams to get into his preferred schools, and in one instance, he believes that the policy prevented him from attending his school of choice.

Huihui also discussed the role of ethnicity in her home country. Though, as a part of the Han majority, ethnicity did not seem to be central to how she perceives her own identity, the subject of “minority” ethnic groups in China emerged in our conversations about race. Huihui feels that groups who are considered ethnic minorities in China are treated very well, and she remarked that they receive advantages in areas like college admission. Though she did not express any animosity about these policies, she mentioned that she and her friends often joked about wishing they were members of a minority group so that they would have an easier time getting into the schools of their

choice. In particular, Huihui's stories around ethnic identity in China highlight the ways in which dominant ethnicity might be comparable to whiteness in how it operates in the experiences of the majority group. As a member of the dominant Han ethnic group, Huihui did not name ethnicity as being central to how she thinks about herself, thinking of herself instead as simply "Chinese" in the same way that whites in the U.S. might say they are "just American."

The difference between the strength of association with ethnic identity between Daniel, who is a member of the minority Benin ethnic group in Nigeria and Huihui, who is a member of the Han majority in China highlight the ways in which groups that occupy a position of dominance in a society define what is normalized and invisible in a society. Moreover, Daniel's experiences with ethnic quota systems in Nigeria and his concern that those systems provoke ethnic animosity raise important questions about the tension between acknowledging and correcting for difference and producing conflict.

### **5.3.3 Regional Identities**

Like ethnicity, regional identity can often serve as a signifier of difference in some national contexts. The two are often intertwined. Ethnic identities and ties to a particular region are often closely related, given that, in some national contexts, particular regions are often heavily populated by a single ethnic group. Regional ties were an important aspect of identity for both Huihui and Daniel. The link between ethnicity and regional identities are apparent in Daniel's narrative. In reflecting on his experiences with ethnic identity, he repeatedly linked ethnicity and region, reiterating that although he did not grow up in his ancestral home, he still thinks of himself as being "from that place." Huihui, did not associate her regional identity with ethnicity, but she has strong



associations with not only her province but also with being from “The North” of China. Her narrative suggested that, because of the power relationships between the North and South of China, she has developed a sort of oppositional stance about people from the South as being “clever.” I would speculate that her perceptions of people from the South of China might have grown out of a resistance to representations of Northerners like herself as “stupid” or as people who “tend to be taken advantage of.”

Ananda, Caroline, and Sven each touched on notions of regional identity in their respective countries, although they did not delve deeply into the meanings attached to those regions either broadly or in their own experiences. For instance, Caroline discussed the party culture of Rio de Janeiro versus the more business-like culture of São Paulo. Perhaps because of the dominance of these two metropolitan areas of the country, Caroline did not discuss associations with other areas of Brazil. Sven spoke briefly about the divisions between Norwegians and Swedes, although these did not seem to impact him personally. Ananda discussed the ways in which various regions of England are marked by particular accents and the values and meanings placed on regional accents.

#### **5.3.4 Language/Accent**

Language and dialect are intimately tied to national and regional identities (Brown, 2008). In some contexts, dialect and accent are virtually inextricable from social class. Languages, dialects, and accents played a fairly significant role in shaping the identity of all five participants. Caroline considers speaking Portuguese an important aspect of her identity because it sets Brazil apart from the rest of South America. When Caroline speaks English, I could only faintly detect a non-native accent. Ananda’s family spoke Punjabi in the home, and he picked up English and Hindi through his community

and schooling experiences. Because of the diverse linguistic backgrounds represented in his neighborhood, Ananda grew up hearing Bengali and Urdu spoken as well.

Importantly, when Ananda did learn English, he initially spoke with an accent that revealed his working class background to the middle class students in his university.

Huihui is fluent in Mandarin Chinese, English, and the Taiyuan dialect. Although Huihui did not directly link her identity to the dialect, she prefers speaking her dialect to speaking Mandarin, the language sanctioned by the Chinese government. Although language is closely tied to regional, ethnic, and tribal identities in Nigeria, Daniel's parents' choice to speak English in the home despite a shared ethnic identity might speak to the strength of discourses around English as the official language and as the language of schooling in Nigeria. Huihui's resistance to the encroachment of Mandarin into the homes of people in Taiyuan and Daniel's parents' use of English in the home coheres with Brown's (2008) findings about the contested ways in which language constructs national and regional identities.

### **5.3.5 Social Class**

Social class is another "floating signifier" that is assigned varying levels of importance in different national contexts. In English society, for example, social class (signified by accent, schools attended, and a number of other factors), is a major signifier to which power is attached. Whether explicitly named as an influence or not, social class seemed to touch each participant's experiences in different ways. Before delving into a discussion of social class as it relates to international students' experiences, I must note that students who travel to the United States for school are often portrayed in the public and popular media as wealthy. As a result, organizations that promote international

education have felt the need to caution universities against their aggressive pursuit of international students as “revenue generators” (McMurtrie, 2011). Both Daniel and Caroline reported coming from upper middle class to upper class backgrounds, and those backgrounds are somewhat reflected in their narratives, as they each discussed attending private schools and traveling to the United States for vacation as children. Huihui, Ananda, and Sven each discussed their own social class backgrounds as reflecting varying degrees of financial difficulty. Of the participants, only Ananda explicitly named himself as “working class,” having grown up in publicly-funded housing in class-conscious England. Ananda noted that, because of his working-class background, he grew up with governmental intervention and inspection as part of his life. As he said:

You've reminded me of The Clash song called - well I'll remember the title in a minute, but one of the lines is – ‘You have the right to food, money, just as long as you don't mind a little investigation, a little humiliation.’

Both Ananda and Huihui’s nearness to systems of oppression via their social class backgrounds in their home countries seem to have made them more sensitive to the ways in which systems of oppression operate in the U.S. context. Perhaps due to his experiences as a working class person, Ananda was more apt to comment on the role that social class plays here in the U.S. as well. He remarked that, although class does not seem to be heavily or openly discussed here in the U.S., it remains a major aspect of people’s life outcomes. He also postulated that the aversion in the U.S. to discussing social class may be related to an overall distaste for any ideologies that do not extol the virtues of capitalism:

Yeah...I'd still say social, like, class is very important here [in the United States]. But maybe it's downplayed. Maybe the importance of it is downplayed, you know? It's too Marxist, or it's too liberal or whatever they want to name it to think about things in those terms. 'You're a failure because of your own inability to work hard.' Rather than any external factors which may influence or determine your social economic status. So...I mean, it's of course, it's just as significant here, I think. Equally.

Huihui's experiences in school with students who were both more economically privileged and more connected with people in power are most illustrative of her social class background. For Sven, his father's ministry and the ways in which the family often moved because of the ministry seemed to influence their financial status. The diversity in participants' social class backgrounds provides a more nuanced understanding of international students' social class backgrounds. Moreover, their social class backgrounds and the class-consciousness of the society from which they came also seemed to play a role in how they both experienced and interpreted class-based experience.

### **5.3.6 Gender**

Though gender did not seem to be a particularly strong force in the narratives of Ananda, Caroline, Daniel, and Sven, they each at least mentioned the role that gender has played in their identities. For Daniel, he discussed what being a man and the older sibling meant for his position and responsibilities within the family. He explained:

I probably wouldn't say we have like gender roles or stereotypes, but if you're a male, you are expected to be hard-working, to be like...I guess eventually when

you become a man to be like a breadwinner. So, there are specific roles you need to [me: as a man], yeah, you need to like follow.

Caroline's mother raised her daughter in a way that promoted the strength of women, as she was adamant about raising Caroline to be self-sufficient and not reliant on a man for an income. Ananda's reflections on important influences in his life involved men who coached him in soccer and schooled him in aggression. He explained that, "Those men kind of had an influence on me in that they were - violence was something that they were very used to." Sven also spoke to associations with masculinity when he spoke about his assertiveness as a student in the space of the classroom and linked it with male privilege.

Gender played a stronger role in Huihui's life than that of the other participants. Throughout her life, she has felt that her family does not value her because she is a girl. She says that her family gave little thought to putting effort into her education or personal development because, as a girl, she was not considered to be worth the effort. Huihui seems to have developed a sense of defiance around her family's attitudes about girls, and to an extent, she attributes much of her drive and determination to excel to a need to prove her family wrong. She explained:

But I'm just showing them, like, until now I'm the first in my generation to go to university. You know? To study abroad. To do all my degrees and higher area. To do everything independently. None of the boys in my family can do anything like this.

The statement above is just one of many times that Huihui made similar statements throughout our interviews. She repeatedly recounted her family's poor treatment of her,

and she sees her achievements in the U.S. as a direct refutation of her family's expectation of girls.

### **5.3.7 Intersections**

Race and racial identity, of course, often intersects in multiple ways with other aspects of identity. The link between notions of race and nation has been well-documented by a number of theorists (Goldberg, 2002; Jacobson, 1998; Lake & Reynolds, 2008). To some extent, the ways in which racial identity intersects with national identity reveals much about the kind of image a nation constructs around itself. Goldberg (2002) decries the lack of theorizing around the connection between race and national identity, and he asserts that “the theoretical literature on race and racism, given the culturalist turn of the past two decades, until very recently has largely avoided in any comprehensive fashion the implication of the state in racial formation and racist exclusion” (p. 2). I noted that the defining of a particular national identity in racial terms was evident in both Daniel's and Sven's narratives. Although Daniel spoke about attending school with students who would likely not be racially identified as Black (e.g., Lebanon), he seems to equate “being Nigerian” with “being Black,” through statements such as, “back home in Nigeria, [we don't talk about race] much because everybody's the same thing.” Sven's narratives revealed that while he may personally embrace Norway's increasing racial difference, other Norwegians may be struggling or resisting a redefinition of Norwegian identity as existing outside of whiteness.

Ananda, Caroline, Daniel, and Sven also discussed the ways in which race intersects with social class both in the context of their home countries and in the U.S. For Ananda in particular, these kinds of intersections played a role in how and when he

developed particular notions about race. Growing up in racially diverse but poor Southall, Ananda did not associate whiteness with being middle class in England, although that does represent a broader reality in English society. Caroline's observations about the inequalities in Brazil's school system also generate understanding around the ways in which race and class intersect in the Brazilian context. Ananda, Daniel, and Caroline all noted the obvious and ubiquitous links between race and social class in the United States, particularly as it related to the poverty that they recognized in many African American communities and the inequality in employment and schooling.

In this chapter, I drew on the results of the thematic analysis across cases to address the study's research questions. Next, I considered participants' experiences with race, racialization, and racial identity in their home countries, attending to historical and institutional influences on their experiences. Then, I addressed participants' experiences with race in the United States, focusing on notions of the racial binary, the imposition of racial categories, the role of whiteness, and the university's climate around race. Finally, I attended to several aspects of identity that emerged as salient in participants' narratives, including nationality, ethnicity, language, social class, and gender, and I discussed several of the ways in which these identities intersect with race. In the next chapter, I discuss the implications of this study and offer possibilities for future research.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Implications and Conclusion**

This dissertation study illuminated the complexities of race and racialized experience, and the particular ways in which those experiences manifest themselves in the lives of five international graduate students. The diversity of experiences reflected in the participants' narratives reinforces the importance of examining the particularities of how lived experience in one context intersects with, is informed by, and builds upon one's prior experiences. Further, the participants' experiences clearly embody the dynamic relationship between the histories and policies of their home countries, the personal circumstances in which they grew up, and the complex ways they are positioned within dominant U.S. racial, ethnic, and immigration paradigms.

#### **6.1 Implications for theories of race, racial identity, and racialization**

While I continue to argue that race is the signifier to which power is most attached in U.S. society, other forms of difference served as "floating signifiers" attached to power in the stories that participants shared about their experiences in their home countries. In particular, social class (for Ananda and Huihui), gender (for Huihui), ethnicity (for Daniel), and language/accent (for Ananda and Huihui) were among the categories to which value and power were arbitrarily assigned. Indeed, even when signifiers such as social class were not pointed out explicitly, as in the cases of Daniel and Caroline, the privileges they experienced based on those signifiers were evident in the stories they shared.



To a large extent, participants' observations about the broader significance of race in the United States aligned with both my expectations and with the literature. In particular, participants uniformly discussed the heightened significance of race in the United States as compared with their home countries. Furthermore, I am reminded of the dominance of U.S. ways of "thinking racially" in the landscape of racial theory. Racial theorists in the U.S. context often operate from the premise that, when it comes to race, the U.S. is special in light of its particularly complex and oppressive racial history. However, because of the dominant position that the U.S. occupies in global power relations, those assumptions of uniqueness are rarely stated explicitly. In many ways, I see the U.S. acting on the world stage much as whiteness operates within the U.S. That is, because of U.S. cultural and economic dominance on a global scale, I have noticed that the ways in which race is done in the U.S. are often normalized and treated as taken for granted when in fact, race does not operate in the same way in every context. Warmington has argued that race scholars in Great Britain should be careful when drawing upon racial theories based in the U.S. because of the, "perennial slippage in racial terminology that exists between the UK and the USA" (2012, p. 14). U.S. perspectives on race are so deeply engrained that theorists and scholars in the West rarely feel the need to explain that their theories are based in the U.S. context.

Based on his critique of the U.S.-centered nature of whiteness studies, Kaufmann (2006) would likely argue that this dominance of U.S. ways of thinking about race is precisely why studies like this one are needed. Perhaps in order to avoid making assumptions that whiteness operates elsewhere as it does here, scholars who study race would benefit from shifting their focus outside of the U.S. context more often. Although

scholars of race in the U.S. often invoke the “socially constructed” nature of race, their work often reinforces the fixed ways that we socially constructed race in the United States. Thus, racial work should continue to move outside of the United States context in order to more fully understand the extent of the socially constructed nature of race.

From the outset, this study sought to interrogate notions of racial identity as something that is fixed and measurable. Because the methodologies of this study contrast with traditional approaches to exploring racial identity around a binary paradigm (Helms, 1993), the findings are decidedly complex. Participants in this study experienced race and racialization in varied ways across contexts. The complexity of the racialized experiences of the participants in this study challenge the idea that people fit neatly into hierarchies of racial identity development, particularly when the development of those models have been concentrated around fixed notions of blackness and whiteness. Although Sven, Caroline, Daniel, and Ananda all described their resistance to the dominance of the fixed racial ideologies and boundaries prevalent in the U.S., each acquiesced to the fixed categories found on official forms and records in order to expedite bureaucratic processes for themselves. In addition to explaining their resistance to me, they each explained the ways in which they hoped their interactions with others in the U.S. might inherently be a challenge to the dominant racial framework. Several of the participants believed that the best way to resist existing racial boundaries might be to reject the notion of race altogether. In many ways, their experiences point to the continued significance of race in the U.S. despite prevalent claims that we have entered a colorblind or “post-racial” era. Because I am concerned with the negative impact of colorblindness, I continue to grapple with the implications of Ananda’s, Caroline’s, and

Sven's desires to be "beyond race" because they believe the hard, fixed boundaries placed around race are damaging. Although I believe that their rejection of or suspicion about overtly focusing on race is motivated by a desire to promote social justice and racial equality, I am concerned that the notion of abolishing race as a concept is tied to damaging colorblind ideologies that suggest ignoring racial difference (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Boutte et al., 2011).

Although I do argue here for embracing the complexities of race and racialization, I continue to acknowledge the binary or dichotomous ways of thinking that dominate our racial thinking. The strength of binary ways of thinking about race was reflected in participants' narratives around the broader context of race in the United States. Of the participants who were familiar with the U.S.'s racial history, they typically framed race in the U.S. as "issues between Blacks and Whites" or the "the history of racial segregation." In other words, invoking the term "race" seems to immediately conjure images of a deeply engrained and historicized racial binary in which Blacks and Whites are in conflict. In particular, the images evoked by participants when I asked for their definitions of race and their experiences with race in the U.S. often included depictions of the South, of Southern history, and of experiences either they or their friends had had around race in the South.

This study illuminates the dominance of whiteness and the ways in which whiteness continues to be a signifier of belonging and citizenship in the U.S. (Hartigan, 1999; Jacobson, 1998; Omi & Winant, 1994). Goldberg (2002) contends that the U.S. is a racial state whose identity is inextricably linked with whiteness; he defines racial states (the U.S. among them) as "states that historically become engaged in the constitution,

maintenance, and management of whiteness, whether in the form of European domination, colonialism, segregation, white supremacy....or ultimately colorblindness or racelessness” (p. 195). The connection between whiteness and a sense of belonging in the U.S. is reflected in the experiences of Caroline and Sven, the two participants who self-identified as White. Though both Caroline and Sven have grappled with the new meanings attached to their whiteness in the U.S. context, neither shared experiences in which they felt othered or racially labeled because of their race. Meanwhile, Ananda, Daniel, and Huihui, who did not identify as White, each shared stories of feeling othered and of increased surveillance and suspicion in the United States.

Though race and skin color seem to be important signifiers, it is nearly impossible to separate how people construct their identities around race from other aspects of their experience and identity. The extent to which both the national and local particularities of participants’ experiences “back home” impacted their narrations of their experiences with race in the United States highlight the dialectic relationship between the global and the local (Arnove, 2007). The intersections that seemed most important in influencing the racialized experiences of participants were the intersections between social class/social location, their grasp of and exposure to the English language (both written and spoken), and skin color/phenotype.

The kinds of racial ideologies and discourses prevalent in participants’ home countries strongly influenced the kinds of observations they made about race in the U.S. For example, coming from Brazil, which has long touted its racial democracy, informs Caroline’s assertion that people make a “big deal” about race in the U.S. and if they did not, racial inequalities would improve. Consequently, participants from countries where

they believed that race was rarely, if ever, discussed, seemed to have a difficult time making sense of race and racialization within the U.S. contexts. Huihui, for example, may have had less to say about race in the United States, including her own racialized experiences because of the ways in which the Chinese government attempts to mold all of its citizens into an identical mold.

The complex interactions between race and place also have been highlighted by this study, as participants particularized many of their observations about life in the U.S. to the U.S. South. The complex relationship between race and Southern (U.S.) identity seems particularly relevant in Sven's narrative, as he shared that he sometimes thinks of himself as a Southern White man, but he struggles with the historical meanings attached to being a White man in the South. As a White man who claims social justice and equality as central values, Sven is in the company of other Whites hoping to reconcile those commitments with the racist meanings historically attached to White Southern identity (Cobb, 2005).

I argue that this study points to a need to incorporate the experiences of international students into work that looks at "nativism" (Gallindo & Vigil, 2006) and "racist nativism" (Pérez Huber, 2010). Pérez Huber (2010) and other scholars (Pérez Huber, Lopez, Malagon, Velez, & Solorzano, 2008) have developed a framework they call "racist nativism." Drawing from critical race theory (CRT) and Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit), racist nativism investigates the ways in which race and belonging are tied to notions of immigration and ownership. Pérez Huber (2010) explains that racist nativism is "a conceptual frame that helps researchers to understand how the historical racialization of Immigrants of Color has shaped the contemporary experiences of

Latina/o undocumented immigrants” (p. 79). Similarly, Kingsolver (2010) has argued that immigration policies in places such as California and South Carolina have produced discourses around the racialized immigrant “other” while never attending to “immigrant groups currently racialized as ‘white’” (p. 30). Since the focus of the racist nativism is on, “beliefs in white superiority and historical amnesia” (Pérez Huber, 2010, p. 81), I would argue that this definition might be expanded to analyze the experiences of all immigrants of color, including international students of color.

Like the work of Jacobson (1998), the theory of racist nativism highlights the ways in which perceptions of whiteness and belonging can shift over time. Similarly, Goldberg (2002) argues that, “the apparatuses and technologies employed by modern states have served variously to fashion, modify, and reify the terms of racial expression, as well as racist exclusions and subjugation” (p. 4). Furthermore, he reminds us that, in modern history, nations have “ordered themselves not as heterogeneous spaces but in particular as racially and culturally homogeneous ones” (p. 14). Although people in the U.S. often embrace the image of the “melting pot,” the experiences of the international students in this study remind us that the U.S. is very much involved in modern processes that define nations as racially homogeneous. Through those processes, the U.S. has racially defined itself as White, and Whites like Caroline and Sven may therefore be adopted as “natives” to U.S. society while non-Whites like Ananda, Daniel, and Huihui are regarded as suspicious and as “other.”

As the U.S. Congress moves toward comprehensive immigration reform, racializing and nativist discourses are often invoked. Groups such as Numbers USA and other anti-immigration groups have suggested that these new policies enforce tighter

regulations to reduce the number of international student visas and H1B visas granted by the U.S. government. In their arguments for why these regulations are needed, they invoke racial nativist discourses about growing the highly educated population from within U.S. borders. Although discourse around immigration reform often invokes the image of the undocumented worker, international students are very much a part of the conversation around immigration and immigration legislation. For example, one complaint that groups opposed to student visas make is that international students often remain in the United States and get jobs after finishing school, depriving those who are understood as “true Americans” of employment. In other words, the same kind of language that is often used to exclude undocumented immigrants from citizenship is now also being employed in an attempt to exclude international students from paths to citizenship and/or belonging.

## **6.2 Implications for universities educating international students**

This study has several implications for those responsible for helping international students navigate their experiences within university/college settings in the U.S. and, in particular, for those who advise and educate international students in the graduate context. Graduate study can be an alienating experience, and the ability to successfully complete graduate school is often laden with a reliance on hidden knowledge (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011; Gair & Mullins, 2001). Numerous scholars have written of the barriers encountered by graduate students of color (Gildersleeve, Croom & Vasques, 2011) and first-generation graduate students (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Huihui’s experiences of isolation both in the classroom and in her graduate program evoke the work of scholars who have written of international students’ struggles through unfamiliar processes and

skills in their graduate programs (Malarcher, 2004; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998; Wang, 2004). Huihui's experiences also speak to literature that addresses the ways in which the dominance of whiteness is reproduced in the college classroom through the exclusion of students of color in general and Asian international students in particular (DiAngelo, 2006). Following that work, this study contributes to literature that acknowledges that higher education spaces are not inherently equitable for students who are not part of the dominant university culture, and it further reinforces that international students are often excluded from that dominant culture. Thus, I would argue that, as universities continue to increase their international student enrollments, they should enact policies requiring training for faculty members who are responsible for the advisement, mentorship, and education of international students. Huihui's feelings that faculty are apathetic about her progress unless her successes contribute to their own may point to a deeper problem within the academic culture, which does not reward faculty for engaging in intensive mentoring relationships and which assumes that all faculty are inherently capable of advising students (Bellas & Toutkoushian, 1999; Griffin, 2012).

Furthermore, the racialized campus experiences and incidents shared by Ananda, Daniel, and Huihui suggest that those who offer services to international students, including their professors and advisers, should be trained to understand the multiple ways in which aspects of students' identities' (including their social class background, and their oral and written mastery of English) intersect with their social location to produce graduate school experiences the racialize and other them. In the same way that scholars have argued that colorblind approaches contribute to, rather than combat racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) and have offered alternatives to colorblind approaches to teaching and



learning (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011), this study points to a need to reject colorblindness and culture-blindness within graduate education. Rather than employing supposedly neutral approaches to graduate teaching and mentoring, the narratives shared here suggest that faculty and staff pay particular attention to students' social locations and prior experiences regarding race, social class, immigrant status, language use, and the norms of graduate learning. One suggestion for faculty who wish to be better educators of international students is that they begin to engage with the student through expressing curiosity about the student's experiences and listening attentively when and if the student shares her/his perspectives. Based on the experiences shared by the participants in this study and on casual conversations I have had with international students, some faculty have a tendency to label students in broad continental and/or racial terms (e.g., "Asian" or "African"). Students find this alienating and frustrating, and faculty miss important cultural details if they do not learn specific information about students' home countries, so I recommend that faculty learn the home countries of the international students they teach or mentor. Faculty should also make an effort to get to know the international students they teach on a personal level, asking questions about what brought them to the U.S., their schooling experiences in their home countries, the languages they speak, and generally listening to what life was like for them in their home countries. Faculty must then take initiative to educate themselves about the history and culture of the student's home country and attempt to think through what that might mean for best serving that student's educational needs.

University-wide offices and institutions that offer services to international offices can facilitate this process by compiling information and offering consultations to faculty

wishing to learn more about teaching, learning, and daily life in various countries. In particular, trainings and informational packets might focus on helping faculty understand which groups are dominant and oppressed within particular countries so that faculty might have deeper insights into experiences their students may have had in their home countries. Furthermore, offices offering services to international students might help international students understand the myths versus the realities of life in the U.S., including the myth of meritocracy. This would help students who come to the U.S. expecting a “land of opportunity” to contextualize experiences they might have with marginalization, discrimination, and structural inequalities. A deeper understanding of the racist structures that operate within the U.S. and how racial inequalities have been historically produced would also help international students to understand their own experiences as well as interactions they might have with individuals in the U.S. who express racist beliefs.

I also suggest that we may benefit from problematizing monolithic assumptions about the backgrounds of international students that prevent universities from enacting such training policies. International students are often assumed to come from economically and educationally privileged backgrounds, and though Caroline and Daniel both fit that characterization, Ananda, Huihui, and Sven described themselves as coming from “poor,” “working class,” or “struggling” homes. International students may be harmed by assumptions that they possess the cultural capital and support needed to successfully navigate their graduate school experiences. Furthermore, assumptions regarding the meritocratic nature of U.S. society held by both faculty and students may

also prevent students from asking for the kinds of explicit, culturally responsive mentoring they might need and might prevent faculty from offering such help.

### **6.3 Implications for future research**

This dissertation study provided a venue through which to explore the narratives of five international graduate students, focusing on the ways in which each experienced race, racial identity, and racialization in their home countries and in the U.S. Due to the narrative focus of this work and the diverse backgrounds of the participants, I was not able to attend as deeply to the particularities of participants' home contexts as I would have preferred. Because the study's findings provide insights about the intersections of race with multiple social categories and with home context, I hope to engage in future work that delves more deeply into the particularities of constructing ideas about race, citizenship, and belonging across national contexts. That might mean choosing to focus on the experiences of multiple students who share a home country in order to closely examine the historical, social, and political influences on racially constructing the nation. Relatedly, I would like to explore more deeply the colonial aspects of race and racialization and how those intersect with international students' experiences. As I delved into the histories of participants' home countries, I found that, in cases where racial or ethnic complexity was generated from within the country (Brazil, England, and Nigeria in particular), those contemporary categories of differences and the significance attached to them might be traced back to the impacts of colonization and enslavement.

The particular ways in which institutional policies and practices influenced participants' narratives around race and ethnicity also provides an interesting avenue for further research. I believe that research should examine the connections between

immigration policies and affirmative action policies in processes of racialization in the lives of international students. This kind of work could provide more context for Caroline's opposition to affirmative action policies in Brazilian higher education, Daniel's negative experiences with Nigerian ethnic quota systems, and the ways in which Sven and Ananda invoked their home countries' immigration policies as central to how race operates in those contexts.

Future research also might provide deeper insights into the complex ways in which both institutional policies and practices and the overall racial atmosphere at U.S. universities contribute to international graduate students' experiences with multiple forms of identity. Furthermore, future investigations of connections between notions of identity that emerge as salient in participants' home countries and the ways in which participants experience race in the United States might benefit from a more in-depth study focusing on students originating from one country so that various aspects of that nation's educational policies and practices, the ways in which identities are socially and politically constructed in those contexts, and participants' personal backgrounds within those categories of social importance might be compared more deeply with the social construction of identities in the United States.

#### **6.4 Research Agenda Reflections**

Moving forward with my research agenda, I intend to continue to pursue work that critically examines the ways in which multiple forms of identity intersect in the lives and experiences of international students as they transition from one national context to another. Furthermore, I am also interested in pursuing a more focused examination of the racial climate of the university as a whole. In light of the connections that participants in

this study made between racial segregation in the U.S. in general and the particular racial segregation and stratification within the university, I believe that the racial atmosphere of universities may be a theoretically fruitful and practically applicable area of study.

Finally, I find the notion of racist nativism to be more inclusive of multiple exclusionary practices and experiences that international students have shared with me on both a personal and academic level. That is, recent immigrants may not recognize that they are being explicitly mistreated or left out because of their skin color alone but rather because of a mixture of social locations that mark them as “other,” including their names, accents, grasp of vernacular English, and their immigration status. I find the notion of nativism in general and racist nativism in particular, to be informative and rich theoretical territory for better understanding the multiple social locations that intersect in the lives of international students to impact their experiences, and I would like to incorporate that notion more fully into future research.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Invitation to Participate and Consent Form**

Dear International Graduate Student,

My name is Ashlee Lewis, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Social Foundations of Education program in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina. In partial fulfillment of my degree requirements, I am conducting a dissertation study. The purpose of this study is to understand the racial experiences of international graduate students in the United States. In particular, I am aiming to examine how international students develop an understanding of the meaning of race in the United States in the context of graduate study. There are a large number of international graduate students coming to the United States for study, and understanding how students such as you experience particular aspects of American society, such as race, is a worthwhile endeavor. I believe that you, with your national background and cultural experiences, will bring a valuable perspective that can lead to a greater understanding of how race operates globally. Therefore, I am inviting you to participate in this study.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in 3-4 interviews and to share additional reflections on your experiences with me via email. The interviews will focus on how you experienced your identity growing up in your own country, how those experiences influenced your time here in the United States, and how you continue to develop and experience race while you are here in the United States. I will also ask you to provide me with any documents or materials that helped you to understand U.S. culture and race upon your initial arrival in the United States. You may be asked, at the end of the study, to participate in a focus group with other international graduate students who also have gone through the 3-4 interview series.

The individual interviews will take place at a time and place that you and I agree on as convenient. Each interview should last between 60 and 90 minutes. Each of the interviews will be audio recorded so that I can make certain to accurately represent what you have shared with me. I am the only person who will have access to, or listen to, the recordings.

During this study, you will not be required to answer any questions with which you are uncomfortable. Your participation is confidential. The data that I gather during the study will be kept in a secure location in my private office at the University of South Carolina. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will always remain concealed in all presentations of this work.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to participate. If you decide to participate in the study, you may quit at any time during the research process. Your choice to participate, not participate, or withdraw from this study will not affect your grades or your standing in the University in any way. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study.

Once again, I would like to say that I feel that you will bring important insights to the study of international student experiences. I hope you will consider participating in this study. Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me at the phone number or email address listed below.

Warm regards,

Ashlee Lewis  
Doctoral Candidate, Social Foundations of Education  
Wardlaw College of Education  
[lewisaa2@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:lewisaa2@mailbox.sc.edu)

*I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participant in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form for my records and future reference.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview 1 Protocol**

#### *Interview 1: Focused Life History Interview*

In this interview, I'll be asking you to think about your experiences growing up. Specifically, we will be talking about what notions of identity were important to you in your home country. This might include things like ethnicity, religion, language, social class, or gender. I'll ask you to speak generally about how you developed ideas about your own and others' identity during your childhood and adolescence. We will start with thinking through your childhood experiences.

#### **Part 1: Background and Childhood Experiences**

1. Let's start with just a brief overview of your family background. Tell me a little about your family.
  - a. What did your parents do for a living?
  - b. How would you describe life in your household?
  - c. What kinds of beliefs or values were important in your household?
  - d. Does your family have any importance for you in terms of how you think about yourself or how you think about others?
  - e. Were there others who were integral to your day-to-day life growing up that had a strong impact on how you thought of yourself and how you were taught to think about others?
  
2. Let's move a little broader now. Tell me a little more about the community or communities in which you grew up.
  - a. Was it rural/urban/suburban?
  - b. Had your family always been a part of that community (i.e., did they migrate there from somewhere else)? Did you and your family have a sense of belonging in that community?
  - c. What does it mean to you to be a part of that community?
  - d. Does membership in your community(ies) have any importance for you in terms of how you think about yourself or how you think about others?
  - e.

3. Moving broader still, if I asked you what region *within your country* you come from, does that have meaning for you? I know that, sometimes, the region that someone comes from, meaning North/South - East/West – or what province you are from might be important. If so, tell me more about the region you come from.
  - a. What does it mean to you to come from that region?
  - b. Do those regional identities have any importance for you in terms of how you think about yourself or how you think about others?
4. Now, I'd like for you to think about your country/national origin.
  - a. How do you identify yourself nationally?
  - b. What does your national identity mean to you?
  - c. Does that national identity have any importance for you in terms of how you think about yourself or how you think about others?

## **Part 2: Notions of Identity**

5. I'd like for you to think through the notions of identity that were important to you in your childhood. In what ways did your family, community, region, or nation teach you to think about yourself and your identity (for example: race, ethnicity, social class, language, religion, or gender)?
  - a. What notions or aspects of your identity were most important to you?
  - b. What institutions were important in teaching you how to think about yourself and these identities? (Examples might include: schools, governmental policies, religious institutions, etc.)
  - c. Tell me about some of the major events that taught you these things/reinforced these ideas.

## **Part 3: Notions of Race**

6. What do you think race is? How would you define 'race' as a concept?

**Appendix C**  
**Interview 2 Protocol**

*Interview 2:*  
*Understandings of Race at Home and Transition to the United States*

**Part 1: Notions of Race**

1. Last time, we talked about your experiences growing up. First, we focused on your personal history, including how you were shaped by your family, community(ies), the region you came from, and your country. Then, we discussed what sources of identity were important to you as you grew up and which institutions and events reinforced those notions of identity. Finally, we talked about how you understand race as a concept. {Review conceptual, shared definition of race discussed in previous interview.} Now, I'd like for us to shift our focus a bit to your understanding of the concept of race or racial identity in the context of your home country. *What, if anything, did "race" mean to you growing up?*
  - a. Did "race" seem to be an important concept that helped you to understand your identity as you grew up?
  - b. Was race an important concept in how you were identified/how you thought of yourself?
  - c. Was race an important concept in how you were taught to define and think about others?
  
2. What is your understanding/interpretation of what the concept of race means in your home country? (Example/Prompt: Here in the U.S., there's a sense of race as meaning black/white as based on physical appearance, and that has some real implications in our society.)
  - a. Which groups are important within your country?
  - b. Are those groups defined ethnically or nationally?
  - c. Are there groups that are defined racially?
  - d. What meanings or implications do those racial or ethnic groupings have?

## **Part 2: Transitioning to Adulthood**

3. Let's think a little about how all of the things that we have talked about up to this point regarding your childhood continued to manifest as you transitioned into adulthood and first left your parent's/family's home (for example, when you went to college). As you grew into an adult, did these notions of identity that we've discussed so far change? How did those notions change?
  - a. Were you exposed to different groups?
  - b. In what ways, if any, did those early adulthood experiences change the ideas that you had prior to college?
  - c. Did the same concepts of identity remain important to you as you grew into an adult and entered college?

## **Part 3: Decision to Come to the United States and Perceptions Prior to Arriving**

4. Now, I'd like to focus on your experiences coming to study in the United States as a graduate student. Let's talk about what brought you to the United States in general and to the University of South Carolina in particular.
  - a. How did you decide to come to the U.S. for graduate study?
  - b. What influenced you to choose the University of South Carolina?
5. Before you came to the United States, what kinds of general impressions did you have about the United States?
  - a. In general, when you thought about life in the United States, what did you think about?
  - b. Where did you get those perceptions?
6. More specifically, what was your perception of the meaning of "race" here in the US?
  - a. In general, when you thought about race in the United States, what did you think about?
  - b. Where did you get those perceptions?
7. Prior to coming here, did you have any knowledge or impressions of the kinds of racial categories/racial landscape in the United States? What kinds of understandings did you have about race here (the categories, relationships among and between groups, etc.)?
8. Did you think much about how you might fit into those racial categories prior to coming here?
  - a. Did you feel you were going to fit into those racial categories?
  - b. If so, in what ways did you think you would or would not fit into those racial categories?



9. To set us up for our next interview, I'd like to start to understand how you think about yourself today. Briefly, what notions are important to you *now* in how you think about and understand your own identity?

**Appendix D**  
**Interview 3 Protocol**

*Interview 3*  
*Race, Racial Identity, and Racialization in the United States*

During this interview, we will be discussing your experiences with race here in the United States, beginning with your experiences with race when you first arrived here, your experiences since then, and how you have come to understand how race operates in the United States. We will discuss how you feel others (specifically, Americans) perceive you racially, how you perceive yourself racially here in the United States, and what kinds of racialized experiences you have had in the United States.

1. Once you were here in the United States, what kinds of messages did you receive about your own race and racial identity?
  - a. How do you think people here in the United States see you racially?
  - b. In what ways did those messages contradict or support your prior understandings of yourself?
  - c. What kinds of experiences supported or contradicted those messages about you?
  
2. Once you were here in the United States, what kinds of messages did you receive about *others'* race and racial identity?
  - a. What messages did you receive about how *you should* think about *others* here in the United States racially?
  - b. In what ways did those messages contradict or support your prior understandings of others? In what ways did you accept and/or reject those lessons?
  - c. What kinds of experiences supported or contradicted those messages about others?
  
3. Tell me about how your understandings of your own identity in terms of race or racial classification have changed as a result of your time studying and living here in the United States.

4. Thinking through everything we have discussed in the last two interviews, how do you understand yourself within the U.S. context of race? How does that understanding relate to how you understand/understood yourself racially in \_\_\_\_\_?
5. What notions/concepts are important to you in how you think about and understand your identity?
  - a. In US Terms?
  - b. In *your own* terms?
  - c. In how others see you?
6. How do you think you have come to your current understandings of race? What experiences with race have informed those understandings?
7. Tell me something you think I should know that I haven't asked you about.

**Appendix E**  
**Coding System Chart by Research Question**

<b>Question 1: Race in Home Country</b>	<b>Question 2 : Race in the United States</b>	<b>Question 3: Other Salient Aspects of Identity</b>
<b>Sphere: Broad National/Regional Influences</b>	<b>Sphere: Broad National/Regional</b>	<b>Sphere: Broad National/Regional</b>
Policies around race/ Institutional racism	Policies around race/ Institutional racism	Ethnicity
Historical/Contextual Factors	Historical/Contextual Factors	Social Class
Salience/Centrality of Race	Salience/Centrality of Race	Gender
Racial Binary	Racial Binary	Religion/Spirituality
Blackness/African diaspora	Blackness/African diaspora/Afr.American culture	Immigration landscape
Role of Whiteness	Role of Whiteness	Language/Accent
	U.S. South	National identity
	Meritocracy	Regional divides/differences
	Impressions of U.S. Prior to arriving	Cultural imperialism + U.S. Isolationism
		Intersections (Race + _____ )
<b>Sphere: Personal Experience and Local Context</b>	<b>Sphere: Personal Experience and Local Context</b>	<b>Sphere: Personal Experience and Local Context</b>
Racial landscape of community	Racial landscape of university	Ethnicity
Othering/Feeling “Othered”	Othering/Feeling “Othered”	Social Class
Role of Whiteness	Role of Whiteness	Gender
Blackness/African Diaspora	Blackness/African Am	Religion/Spirituality
Racialization/Assumptions based on physical features	Racialization/Assumptions based on physical features	Immigrant status/background
Overt racism/Racist language & incidents	Overt racism/Racist language	Language/Accent
Imposition of categories/Labeling	Imposition of categories/Labeling	National Identity
Being privy to the racist attitudes of others	Being privy to the racist attitudes of others	Fluidity of identity dependent on context
Racial self-identification	Racial self-identification	Educational influences
Attitudes/Dispositions towards difference	Perceived lack of racialized experience	General family background
		Cosmopolitanism and Rejection of Race as a Concept
		Being an international student
		Intersections (Race + _____ )

## **Appendix F**

### **Descriptive Codebook**

#### **Question**

This refers to which of the research questions or other aspects of experience central to the study the section of the transcript addresses.

- **Question 1:** A section of the transcript addressing the meanings attached to race for the participant in their home country, including broad notions of race relevant in their national context, their own racial identity, or the ways in which they feel they have been racialized in their home country.
- **Question 2:** A section of the transcript addresses the meanings attached to race for the participant in the United States, including broad notions of race relevant in the United States their own racial identity within the context of the United States, or the ways in which they feel they have been racialized in the United States.
- **Question 3:** A section of the transcript addresses the various other aspects of identity that were salient in the narratives that participants shared around race, racial identity, and/or racialization and includes (but is not limited to) family experiences, ethnicity, national identity, social class, gender, religion, and language.

#### **Sphere of Influence**

- **Broad national/regional:** Participant is speaking broadly about the national or international context (home country/continent or U.S.) and not about an event s/he has personally experienced. This includes instances of generalizations such as “We do not have race in China” or “Nigeria is very ethnocentric” as well as instances in which participants are discussing historical or contemporary news events that have shaped their understandings around race or other aspects of identity.

- **Personal/Local:** Participant is speaking of their own lived experience or is describing their observations about the local context in which they have lived their lives (including at home or in the United States).

**Themes (arranged under Research Question and Sphere):**

**Race/Racism/Racialization**

- **Policies around race or Institutional Racism:** Instances in which participants link race and racism to governmental policies or institutions (educational systems, polices systems, employment) at home or in the U.S.
- **Historical/Contextual Factors:** Instances in which participants are describing the historical context in which race and other aspects of identity have been constructed (at home or in U.S.). Also includes instances in which the history of the country is being contrasted with the current state of affairs.
- **Salience/Centrality of Race:** Instances in which participants are describing, on a broad scale, how important and present race and racism are (or are not) in the discourses and social life of a particular national context (home or U.S.).
- **Racial Binary:** Instances in which the participant either explicitly or implicitly describes racial categorization in terms of “Black and White” or “Non-white and White.”
- **Blackness/African Diaspora/African Americans:** Participants’ descriptions of their own experiences with blackness (self-identified), their perceptions about blackness and the African Diaspora (i.e., how people of African descent relate to one another or share a common cultural heritage), or perceptions and observations about the discrimination against African Americans in the United States.
- **Role of Whiteness:** Instances in which participants describe the function of whiteness, white people, and white privilege in society and in their own lives. Includes experiences with whiteness (self-identified) and my interpretations of when whiteness or white privilege might be operating in the participant’s interpretations of her/his experiences. \
- **U.S. South:** Instances in which participants describe the U.S. South as a place in which race operates in a uniquely potent fashion and the role that living and

studying in the U.S. South might have played in their experiences in the United States.

- **Meritocracy:** Instances in which participants express views about the United States as a space in which everyone receives an equal opportunity to achieve success (variously defined) regardless of racial identification. This includes attitudes both supporting and debunking discourses of the U.S. as a meritocratic space.
- **Impressions of the United States prior to arriving:** Participants' descriptions of what they knew and understood of race and racial identity in the United States prior to moving here long-term. This includes instances of expressing having little to no knowledge of how they might be racialized in the U.S. context.
- **Racial landscape of community/university:** General experiences with and descriptions of the community in which one grew up or lived looked like in terms of race, racial diversity, and interactions between community members; Experiences with race, racial diversity, and interactions between students of different racial groups at participants' graduate institution.
- **Feeling "Othered":** Instances in which participants were made to feel that they did not belong or were outsiders in a given setting.
- **Racialization/Assumptions based on physical features:** Instances in which participants describe feeling that they are assumed to have particular traits or experiences based on how they look physically.
- **Overt racism/Racist language and incidents:** Participants' descriptions of instances in which race was specifically and explicitly invoked either toward them or toward someone else in their presence. This includes, but is not limited to, the use of racial slurs and language and incidents in which participants feel they were singled out for particular treatment because of their race.
- **Imposition of racial categories or labeling:** Participants' descriptions and complaints of needing to fit into a particular racial category or "box," even if the box does not fit their own racial identity.
- **Being privy to the racist attitudes of others:** Instances in which participants hear negative information about racial groups other than their own because they are presumed to not be part of that group.



- **Racial self-identification:** Portions of the racial narrative in which participants explain how, if at all, they would identify themselves racially.
- **Attitudes/Dispositions towards difference:** Participants' descriptions of generally positive attitudes toward those who are different from themselves without an explicit focus on race.
- **Perceived lack of racialized experience:** Instances in which participants express that they have had few or no experiences in their lives that they have linked to race, racism, or racialization. This includes participants' descriptions of incidents that may have been racially motivated that end with a negation of the role that race played in the incident.

#### **Other salient aspects of identity**

- **Ethnicity:** Participants' descriptions of their ethnic identity and the meanings and importance they attach to that identity, or descriptions of the broader categories of ethnicity in one's home country and their relevance within the context of the United States.
- **Social class:** Participants' descriptions of their own social class location growing up and its significance or relevance throughout the course of their lives. Participants may or may not explicitly name their description of their family's economic and social status as "social class." Also includes descriptions of the broad significance of social class in their own national context and in the United States.
- **Gender:** Participants' descriptions of the role that their gender and connections with masculinity or femininity play in participants' experiences and sense of their own identity. Might also include broader conceptualizations of gender and gender roles in society.
- **Religion/Spirituality:** Participants' descriptions of their religious and/or spiritual upbringings and the subsequent influence those beliefs and their current beliefs have on their experiences and perspectives. Also includes broad descriptions of the religious groups that are important in their home country and ties that those might have with region, ethnicity, and language.

- **Immigration landscape:** Broad descriptions of the immigrant groups that have come into one's home country and the role that has played in race and racialization.
- **Immigrant status/background:** The role that "being an immigrant" played in the participant's life. Also includes experiences and frustrations with the U.S. legal immigration system and the enforcements placed on international students in particular and immigrants in general.
- **Language/Accent:** General descriptions of languages spoken in participants' homes and communities, and the meanings attached to languages spoken. Also includes descriptions of the role the accents play in the construction of identity/social class in particular national contexts. The role of English in the participants' lives and educational experiences.
- **National identity:** The national identities or "nationalities" with which participants identify and the meanings they attached to coming from those countries. Also includes critiques of the concept of national identity.
- **Fluidity of identity:** Instances in which a participant discusses how different aspects of his or her identity become more or less prominent across various contexts (e.g., national identity becomes more important in the U.S. than ethnicity).
- **Educational influences:** Influences from primary, secondary, and tertiary educational experiences in the participants' home countries and in the United States that shaped their sense of identity.
- **General family background and influence:** Instances in which participants are describing their overall family background, including the kinds of values that were important in their households and the strength of their family's influence on their own beliefs and senses of identity.
- **Cosmopolitanism and rejection of race as a concept:** Instances in which participants expressed attitudes such as "we are all one" or "when I think of race, I think of the human race." This category also includes sections of the transcripts in which participants expressed a desire to eradicate all forms of oppression and discrimination to promote the universal well-being of humanity.

- **Being an international student:** Instances in which participants describe the intricacies and struggles specifically related to the experience of being an international student pursuing a graduate degree in a “foreign” context.
- **Cultural imperialism + U.S. Isolationism:** Instances in which participants describe their perceptions about a general level of ignorance or disinterest that people in the United States express toward the rest of the world. Also includes instances in which the cultural domination of “The West” has influenced participants’ sense of self.
- **Intersections (Race + \_\_\_):** Instances in which race intersects in meaningful, notable, and/or inseparable ways with other notions of identity in participants’ lives (most notably with social class and national identity).

## Appendix G

### Example Data Analysis Transcript Image

<p>39 going to put forward for being successful? Not necessarily like super wealthy, but being relatively</p> <p>40 successful, you know. So, yeah, I mean even sometimes when I talk to my friends they're like, as a</p> <p>41 young – I wanna use the word black [me: mm-hmm?], I'm thinking about like black within the</p> <p>42 context of Nigeria, not black as a generic term – but I guess like as a black Nigerian, you're expected</p> <p>43 to be very, very... be able to persevere, you know, to understand that things are not going to be</p> <p>44 handed to you on a platter but that you have to go out and get and get it. You know. So, in a way,</p> <p>45 that's kind of like what I would say the impression or the identity that comes with being a black</p> <p>46 Nigerian. Let me put it that way. You know, like you're not supposed to like make excuses for</p> <p>47 yourself. You're not supposed to... you're supposed to be responsible, you know, so in other words,</p> <p>48 it's not just about... like family is important, you have to take care of your family. And again, I guess</p> <p>49 that tums back to what I was saying last week, you know, family's really important. You can't, even</p> <p>50 though everybody comes from like a nuclear family, but there's a communal sense of responsibility</p> <p>51 [me: mmm]. You know, you have to like think beyond your immediate family. In other words, be</p> <p>52 responsible for your parents. 'Cause that's kind of how it's expected to be, you know, as your</p> <p>53 parents get older, you have to take care of them. You can't just leave them to their pensions or their</p> <p>54 retirement funds or things like that. You know, to your siblings, to your cousins, things like that.]</p> <p>55 Me: Yeah. So do you see that as like an inherent in what it means to be a black Nigerian.</p> <p>56 Daniel: Yes.</p> <p>57 Me: Okay.</p> <p>58 Daniel: And another thing is, like, for instance... like here for instance – I don't know if this is the</p> <p>59 correct thing, the politically correct thing to say here is like "African American" or things like that –</p> <p>60 but like in Nigeria, maybe because of the history right here [in the US], the term "black" is not, I</p> <p>61 dunno, some people might have a problem with that. But like, back home in Nigeria, "black" the</p> <p>62 word "black" is actually embraced, you know. Like, for instances if someone were to ask me – 'cause</p> <p>63 most forms to fill out my race – obviously, typically most forms will have "African American," a</p> <p>64 couple of forms probably have "Black" slash "African American", but I mean if there was "African</p> <p>65 American" and there was "Black," I'd check "Black" because, you know, that's kind of like what I</p> <p>66 was, [sighs] I dunno, that's the identity that I was brought up to embrace growing up, 'cause it was</p> <p>67 about being a Black man.]</p> <p>68 Me: So the concept of blackness was something that was [Daniel completes...].</p> <p>69 Daniel: Yeah. It was emphasized, you know. Again, being Black was associated with, like, strength.</p> <p>70 You know, and not just physical strength, but physical strength, mental strength, emotional strength,</p> <p>71 you know. Strength, being able to particulady if you were like a male, particulady if you were a first</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; background-color: #f9f9f9; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><b>Comment [AL4]:</b> Q1; Broad national/regional; Blackness</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; background-color: #f9f9f9; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><b>Comment [AL5]:</b> Q1; Personal/Local; Racial self-identification</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; background-color: #f9f9f9; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><b>Comment [AL6]:</b> Q3; Broad national/regional; Intersections with National Identity</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; background-color: #f9f9f9; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><b>Comment [AL7]:</b> Q2; Personal/Local; Racial self-identification</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; background-color: #f9f9f9; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Comment [AL8]:</b> Q1; Personal/Local; Racial self-identification</p> </div>
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Daniel, Interview 2, Page 2

## Appendix H

### Example Data Analysis Spreadsheet Screenshot

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet titled "AnalysisDocs\_AllCodedPartsTogether - Microsoft Excel". The spreadsheet is organized into columns: A (Participant), B (Source), C (Interview), D (Text Chunk), E (Research Question), F (Sphere of Influence), and G (Theme). The data rows are numbered 148 through 179. Row 155 is highlighted in yellow, corresponding to a text chunk that is also highlighted in yellow in the spreadsheet's main view above the table.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	
1	Participant	Source	Interview	Text Chunk	Research Question	Sphere of Influence	Theme
148	Ananda	Interview 3	What were the...I mean, the most surprising and shock Q2		Broad national/regional	U.S. South	
149	Ananda	Interview 3	And then, very recently another incident - probably mo Q2		Personal/Local	Racial Landscape and Atmosphere of the University	
150	Ananda	Interview 3	And then, very recently another incident - probably mo Q2		Personal/Local	Overt racism/racist language & incidents	
151	Ananda	Interview 3	And just generally, as I said, in my interactions with pe Q2		Personal/Local	Imposition of categories/labeling	
152	Ananda	Interview 3	Those incidents in particular, my experience on campu Q2		Personal/Local	Racial Landscape and Atmosphere of the University	
153	Ananda	Interview 3	And just generally, as I said, in my interactions with pe Q2		Personal/Local	Othering/Feeling "Othered"	
154	Ananda	Interview 3	So, I guess in terms of how I perceive myself, it change Q2		Personal/Local	Racial Self-Identification	
155	Ananda	Interview 3	I know, for instance, I have a feeling or a sense that, as Q2		Broad national/regional	Historical/Contextual Factors	
156	Ananda	Interview 3	I know, for instance, I have a feeling or a sense that, as Q2		Broad national/regional	U.S. South	
157	Ananda	Interview 3	I know, for instance, I have a feeling or a sense that, as Q2		Personal/Local	Role of Whiteness	
158	Ananda	Interview 3	In fact, it wouldn't make any difference. But as I said, it Q2		Personal/Local	Role of Whiteness	
159	Ananda	Interview 3	Yeah...I'd still say social, like, class is very important h Q2		Broad national/regional	Salience/centrality of race	
160	Ananda	Interview 3	Yeah...I'd still say social, like, class is very important h Q3		Broad national/regional	Social class	
161	Ananda	Interview 3	Yeah...I'd still say social, like, class is very important h Q2		Broad national/regional	Mentocracy	
162	Ananda	Interview 3	Which isn't as acute in England, I would say. But both Q3		Broad national/regional	Social class	
163	Ananda	Interview 3	both an issue. I guess the devil of the degrees may be Q3		Broad national/regional	Social class	
164	Ananda	Interview 3	I think I felt like maybe because like this is [pause] bec Q2		Broad national/regional	Salience/centrality of race	
165	Ananda	Interview 3	I think I felt like maybe because like this is [pause] bec Q3		Broad national/regional	Intersections (Race + Social Class)	
166	Ananda	Interview 3	I think I felt like maybe because like this is [pause] bec Q1		Broad national/regional	Salience/centrality of race	
167	Ananda	Interview 3	One of the things I guess that's shifted, or as I said, I've Q2		Personal/Local	Othering/Feeling "Othered"	
168	Ananda	Interview 3	One of the things I guess that's shifted, or as I said, I've Q2		Personal/Local	Role of Whiteness	
169	Ananda	Interview 3	If I was white and English, I think that would have been Q2		Personal/Local	Othering/Feeling "Othered"	
170	Ananda	Interview 3	I don't think they had ever experienced a person of colo Q2		Personal/Local	Overt racism/racist language & incidents	
171	Ananda	Interview 3	I don't think they had ever experienced a person of colo Q2		Broad national/regional	Salience/centrality of race	
172	Ananda	Interview 3	In American terms, I really, you know, I think those 4 c Q3		Personal/Local	Cosmopolitanism and Rejection of Race	
173	Caroline	Interview 1	Um, I'm from Sao Paulo, Brazil, which is a really big c Q3		Personal/Local	General family background and influence	
174	Caroline	Interview 1	Um, I'm from Sao Paulo, Brazil, which is a really big c Q3		Personal/Local	Social class	
175	Caroline	Interview 1	Daily life...um, we went to...I went to a neighborhood f Q3		Personal/Local	Educational influences	
176	Caroline	Interview 1	And then, my aunt and uncle were also...we had this, c Q3		Personal/Local	General family background and influence	
177	Caroline	Interview 1	Yeah. Absolutely. Like I told you, in Brazil we really, a Q3		Personal/Local	National identity	
178	Caroline	Interview 1	Family. But also, a sense of community, of friendship. Q3		Personal/Local	General Community	
179	Caroline	Interview 1	Like as we've never spent a day or two apart. Other tha Q3		Broad national/regional	Religion/Spirituality	