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A Pedagogy for Change:
Gayatri Spivak and bell hooks

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Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Theories of Pedagogy	
1.1. Freire on “the Banking Model of Education”.....	9
1.2. Power/Knowledge: Foucault on Education.....	11
1.3. Pedagogy and Politics: Global Educational Values.....	16
1.4. Conclusion.....	19
Chapter 2: Education and the Roots of Western Philosophical Thought: Spivak	
2.1. The Feminist-deconstruction Nexus: Poovey, Duyfhuizen, and Spivak.....	21
2.2. The Construction of the Other.....	24
2.3. Conclusion.....	31
Chapter 3: Feminism and Feminist Pedagogy	
3.1. Feminist Pedagogy: Education as Practice of Freedom	33
3.1.1. Beyond Sexist Roles: Men in Feminist Pedagogy.....	38
3.2. “Feminist Knowledge is for Everybody”: bell hooks.....	43
3.2.1. Misreading Feminism: The Media	49
3.2.2. Language: The Importance of Words.....	54
3.2.3. Turning Away from the Rhetoric of the Victim.....	56
3.3 Conclusion.....	60
Conclusion.....	63
Works Cited.....	66

Abstract

This thesis interrogates the traditional idea of teaching which assumes that, in the classroom, teachers should treat students as “containers” to be filled. Relying on the thought of Freire and Foucault, the thesis argues for a new purpose of education: educating students to be critical thinkers. Moreover, the discussion highlights the contribution of feminist thought to this new pedagogy. After outlining the contribution of Freire and Foucault in the introductory chapter, chapter 2 is devoted to postcolonial theory and Spivak, who offers brilliant insights on the controversies of the modern postcolonial world from a feminist-deconstructivist viewpoint. She uses deconstruction to reread Western tradition’s major books and reveal its capitalistic and patriarchal roots. Thus, deconstruction becomes the tool to go beyond the words read in the classroom and the instructions given by teachers; in other words, the tool to develop critical thinking. The third chapter echoes bell hook’s research on teaching, urging students to become critical thinkers, make responsible choices, and put an end to systems of oppression. Revealing the political implications of knowledge, the thesis shows that concepts such as knowledge, power, and authority acquire different meanings when comparing traditional and feminist pedagogy. Indeed, my work can be seen as a “militant” thesis that attempts to present a line of alternative pedagogy that tries to equip students with the instruments to develop critical thinking as well as offers an overview of the traditional model of education.

*All of us in the academy and in the culture as a whole
are called to renew our minds if we are to transform
educational institutions—and society—so that the way we live, teach,
and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice,
and our love of freedom.*

(hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 34)

Introduction

The American feminist activist bell hooks states that “teachers are often among that group most reluctant to acknowledge the extent to which white-supremacist thinking informs every aspect of our culture including the way we learn, the content of what we learn, and the manner in which we are taught” (*Teaching Community* 25). The purpose of my study is to present a genealogy of alternative pedagogy whose key concepts are acknowledgment, deconstruction, and critical thinking. To this aim, the first chapter provides an overview of the pedagogical theories of Freire and Foucault, shedding a light on the problems that traditional approaches to teaching present. According to Freire, traditionally, teachers have the authority to establish the classroom dynamic, while students are not supposed to question what teachers say. This approach may prevent students from developing their own points of view. For him, the main problem with traditional pedagogy becomes the lack of critical thinking: students are considered like “containers” (71) to be filled with information considered worth knowing. This prevents them from acquiring the tools to “invent and reinvent” such knowledge; thus, they never become able to develop the knowledge needed to change the world (72). Moreover, Freire asserts that a school system privileging only teachers’ points of view mirrors society’s system of oppression (72), causing the classroom to become the first place where people learn to submit to authority. Since power and authority, according to Freire’s theory, traditionally belong to teachers, they get never enriched by students’ knowledge and are never involved in the process of growth (73). Eventually, Freire proposes a method of teaching that emphasizes critical thinking and education “as the practice of freedom”: the problem-posing education, where the teacher can teach as well as learn from students. His theory has been recalled by the American feminist activist bell hooks, who dedicated her research to teaching and identified feminist pedagogy as the “practice of freedom”.

Additionally, I include Foucault’s research in my discussion to show that notions of authority, power, and knowledge acquire different meanings when comparing traditional and feminist pedagogy. According to Foucault in a traditional education context, “you are asked to learn certain things and to ignore others” since “official knowledge has always represented political power” (*Revolutionary Action* 219-220). However, what becomes necessary is to reverse the common perception that “power is always exercised at the expense of the people” (*Intellectuals and Power* 211). In other words, teachers can choose how to exercise their power: Foucault suggests a teaching approach that makes the cultural unconscious apparent (Simon 198). From this point of view, education could become a tool for political and social change.

However, the work of Rizvi, Lingard, and Spring about the globalization of education underlines that educational policies deal more with political and economic agendas than social

transformation (Lingard and Rizvi 86). The last section of the first chapter explores how globalization is transforming the concept of educational values; Rizvi and Lingard reveal to us that global policies of education are shaped by specific economic and political agendas that benefit rich nations at the expense of the poor. As a consequence of imperialism and colonialism, developing countries in the third world tend to assimilate Western worldviews, values, and knowledge and Western forms of schooling dominate the world scene. Since the Second World War, the world educational system is based on the human capital model, which assumes that education is an economic investment designed to produce better workers. Nevertheless, Rizvi and Lingard acknowledge also that since the 1950s education has been seen as a basic human right to guarantee social justice and eradicate social oppression. During the 1960s, this new concept of education found favor among feminist, civil rights, and other social movements (83). bell hooks also agrees that the primary goals of institutions are “to sell education and produce a professional managerial class schooled in the art of obedience to authority and accepting of dominator-based hierarchy” (*Teaching Community* 19) but she goes as far as to claim that “when contemporary progressive educators all around the nation challenged the way institutionalized systems of domination (race, sex, nationalist imperialism) have, since the origin of public education, used schooling to reinforce dominator values, a pedagogical revolution began in college classrooms” (1).

In the 1980s, postcolonial theory emerged in the US and UK academies as part of new fields of humanistic inquiry, such as feminism and critical race theory. Committed to explaining the reality of global modernity, postcolonial theory analyzes the consequences of colonialism and imperial power. Generally, postcolonial analysis includes issues of race, culture, class, and gender in postcolonial settings, the effects of neo-colonial domination, slavery, and migration. I include postcolonialism in my discussion since it helps to understand the connection between power/politics and knowledge. Moreover, in my opinion, postcolonial theory gives a great contribution to improving studies on teaching. Approaching colonialism from a feminist-deconstructivist point of view, I dedicate the second chapter to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who has used deconstruction to reread the works that constitute the roots of Western philosophical tradition. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines deconstruction as “a philosophical or critical method which asserts that meanings, metaphysical constructs, and hierarchical oppositions (as between key terms in a philosophical or literary work) are always rendered unstable by their dependence on ultimately arbitrary signifiers”, explaining that “*deconstruction* doesn't actually mean “demolition”; instead it means “breaking down” or analyzing something (especially the words in a work of fiction or nonfiction) to discover its true significance, which is supposedly almost never exactly what the author intended. A feminist may *deconstruct* an old novel to show how even an innocent-

seeming story somehow depends on the oppression of women. A new western may deconstruct the myths of the old West and show lawmen as vicious and criminals as flawed but decent” (“deconstruction”). Thus, I consider deconstruction a valuable tool to reveal the “implicit” mentioned by Foucault and to challenge the idea of “students as containers” understood by Freire. In other words, deconstruction can become the tool that helps scholars to develop critical thinking: it reveals that there can be more meanings beyond texts since the implicit may be discovered and deconstructed. Indeed, students can develop critical thinking by deconstructing the theories which have shaped Western societies. In particular, Spivak deconstructs Freud and Marx, two great figures of western traditional thought, whose theories have also been largely criticized for their encouragement of the patriarchal and capitalistic system. Spivak condemns both Freud and Marx for avoiding the idea of the womb as a place of production, asserting that the legacy left by these thinkers has determined the Western masculine culture. With the introduction of feminist pedagogy, students could recognize the shortcomings of Marxist sociology and Freudian psychoanalysis; they can think critically about these texts, acknowledging the lack of attention on the female figure or even the lack of material written by women. Deconstruction, as introduced by Spivak, can be a useful tool to enable students to recognize the limits of western systems of thought. Consequently, I dedicate a section to consider an important postcolonial issue: the construction of the Other via the idea of white western people. This discussion highlights that education implies gaining as well as losing a certain kind of knowledge; indeed, Spivak claims that privilege can also be a kind of loss since it cuts off from a certain kind of “other” knowledge and encourages people to unlearn their privilege and learn to learn from below (from the subaltern). In particular, the section is a close reading of the essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* which significantly influenced postcolonial studies and the development of the notion of the subaltern.

The final chapter focuses on feminism and feminist pedagogy. I first clarify what hooks means when she labels the pedagogy as “practice of freedom”, drawing out the sense in which hooks gets inspired and differs from the Freire-Foucault tradition. In the second section, I focus on feminism and her understanding of the word, alongside her analysis of feminist thought as well as the analysis of the contradictions which characterizes the movement. The title of the second section, *Feminist Knowledge is for Everybody*, is taken from bell hook’s book and is also a provocation. Actually, feminist knowledge can be for everybody, but it will never be if it remains inaccessible. Indeed, most feminist writings cannot be understood by everyone since most of them belong to the academic field and require skills most people do not possess. To let feminism be for everybody, borrowing hook’s words, we need to make it available for everybody. As a matter of fact, I

privilege hooks' definition of feminism since she uses simple words, understandable for everyone. The reason why I dedicate a whole section to clarify what feminism means is that its meaning is still controversial. Indeed, in recent years feminism has been largely misunderstood. First of all, many believe that it exclusively represents and protects women's interests and this misunderstanding has distanced men, whose involvement is instead crucial to the feminist cause. Moreover, it has been pointed out that women do not constitute a homogenous group with analogous interests, as gender is not the only determinant of women's identity. Indeed, contemporary feminist criticism has been focusing more on intersections between gender and other social factors, such as race and class. For a very long time, feminist activists throughout the western world have spoken about women's conditions, referring to western, white, middle-class, heterosexual women. The first part of the section introduces also hooks' analysis of mass media, as she considers them as the manifestation of the U.S. patriarchal and masculine culture, as well as the only source where most people can learn about feminism. According to her, through media, people understand feminism as a movement focused on hating men, and the word "feminist" gets reduced to a synonym of men-hater, lesbian, and abortion-advocate. I chose to dedicate enough space to talk about media because by dealing with this topic, it is possible to touch on other important aspects of U.S. society which feminism struggles to change. Moreover, researches on media and culture are vital to understanding the way society can shape identity and influence people. In the following passage, bell hooks summarizes the problem with media and the consequences on black children or children of color, connecting the issue with pedagogy:

Mass media assaults the self-esteem of black children. And it is everywhere. Looking at the impact of mass media on the self-esteem of black children/children of color is important because they encounter a pedagogy of race and racism long before they enter any classroom settings. Usually schools, unenlightened teachers, and textbooks full of white-supremacist thinking merely reinforce the notion that black children are inferior, unworthy. (*Teaching Community* 95)

According to her, the white-supremacist thinking dominates pedagogy when children are taught that Columbus discovered America, as though the continent was formerly uninhabited, conveying the message that Native American people was unworthy or inferior. Likewise, when teachers teach that black presence in America begins with slavery began and not with African explorers and traders or free black Europeans who came in search of treasures before slavery, black children assume that black people are always and only subordinate to white people (95). Thus, for her, the messages given by the traditional pedagogy make black children internalize the belief that they are inferior (96). This concerns recalls the concept of "official knowledge" conceived by Foucault, underlining the difference between official and silenced history. According to hooks, "educators have to work to

find ways to teach and share knowledge in a manner that does not reinforce existing structures of domination (those of race, gender, class, and religious hierarchies)" (45); they have to "repudiate educational practices that reinforce dominant ideology" (71) so that learning can "educate students for the practice of freedom rather than the maintenance of existing structures of domination" (46). Teachers have to encourage students to open their minds and think critically, since "education as the practice of freedom affirms healthy self-esteem in students as it promotes their capacity to be aware and live consciously" (71-72). She recognizes open-mindedness as the key, affirming that "the will to keep an open mind is the safeguard against any form of doctrinaire thinking" (110). According to her, "the more they expanded their critical consciousness the less likely they were to support ideologies of domination". She defines "conventional dominator classroom" as the place where students are simply given information "to learn by rote and regurgitate", and "progressive classroom" as the place where students can learn how to think critically and open their minds (8). I think that the most impressive discussion is that "progressive professors did not need to indoctrinate students and teach them that they should oppose domination", since "students came to these positions via their own capacity to think critically". Discussing issues of "imperialism, race, gender, class, and sexuality", they raise students' awareness of the importance of these themes. It resides in such awareness the condition for concrete change. (8)

Understanding the problem with the mass media and the way patriarchal propaganda works can help people, including women, to understand the extent to which they internalize patriarchal values and allow them to survive, even without being aware of it. Part of the problem can be attributed to language and the kind of words we have been exposed to and continue to use. Indeed, words deserve much more attention since they can shape our identities and influence our behaviors. In other words, language can become a masculine tool used by the patriarchal society and, in the same way, we can use it "as weapon and tool, and then labor to renew history, society, and culture." (Stimpson, *Feminism and Feminist Criticism* 273). For instance, hooks urges people to turn away from the rhetoric of victimhood. She acknowledges that subordinated groups often seek to form community with those who experience their same oppression, recognizing that "one of the powers of subordinate groups is the power to demonize those who are in dominant positions" (*Teaching Community* 74). However, such attitude turns against them, since bonding as victim "on the basis of shared negative beliefs and understanding about oppressors" just reinforces the power of those who dominate (73). hooks condemns minority groups for acting like victims, since they just reinforce the notion that "dominator culture is an absolute system" that cannot be changed; thus, demonizing them or seeing them as enemies, they become part of the problem and not part of the solution (74). For her, by assuming that they can only be victims, subordinated groups "lose sight not only of their

strength to resist but of the possibility that they can intervene and change the perspective of those in power” (73).

The discussions about the social background and contradictions concerning society as a whole as well as the feminism as movement highlight that there is need for a revolution of values. I discuss about social dynamics to clarify to which extent feminist education could be helpful. However, since feminism itself is difficult to define, I rely on hooks’ research about teaching to investigate and try to define feminist pedagogy. She admits that she was inspired by Paulo Reglus Neves Freire and his theories. Freire’s critique of the traditional method of teaching inspires the idea of developing a different approach to teaching which offers the possibility to students of stimulating their thinking and encouraging their creativity. Indeed, feminist pedagogy can give the opportunity to create knowledge in a more ethical way, turning the classroom into a place where everybody can come to voice, and where both teachers and students can learn from each other. Embracing the feminist approach, the classroom is not seen as a safe place where everybody is supposed to be equal, but a place where difference starts to be valuable. hooks uses the term “engaged pedagogy” to talk about an approach to teaching which sees everybody involved.

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (*Teaching to Transgress* 207)

I find noteworthy defining the classroom as a “location of possibilities”: it is inspiring since it involves the idea of more possible alternatives, which can be promising and potential. For me, the idea of classroom as “location of possibilities” gives indeed hope for future success. Following hook’s theory, the success becomes approaching pedagogy as “the practice of freedom”. Through his analysis, Freire talks about education as the practice of oppression and education as the practice of freedom, and, despite considering it difficult to define feminist pedagogy, I would identify it, as hooks did, as a practice of freedom. Indeed, feminist pedagogy conceives education as the means for liberation. The feminist scholar and English professor Catharine Stimpson asserts that “all sexual differences are the consequence of social conditions, and social conditioning, which we might alter” (*Feminism and Feminist Criticism* 273), so my proposal is that we may alter the social conditions and conditionings thanks to feminist education, which can teach us that difference is not something to hide, but something to discuss: differences in the classroom can enrich the lesson and help students to recognize privileges and oppressions. I think that feminist pedagogy can help all people

who want to express their personalities without worrying about social expectations and I argue that the introduction of feminist pedagogy in public schools could help children to live their life free from the strict gender roles imposed on them. In my opinion, feminist pedagogy can create knowledge in a more ethical way because students can acquire knowledge through the experience of others, so they can understand the way other people perceive discrimination. Sometimes, people act wrongly without being really aware of their bad behavior because they consider such behavior as “normal”, without realizing the huge impact their words and actions have on other people. Feminist pedagogy can teach students to act more responsibly and to recognize the behaviors that hurt other people’s sensibility. According to hooks, living by a love ethic means “embracing a global vision wherein we see our lives and our fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet” (*All About Love* 88).

Since feminist pedagogy attempts to consider all the social and cultural aspects of students, it could be helpful to teach people the diversity and complexity of our reality, reducing the prejudices linked to the belief that exists a single right viewpoint. Indeed, the aim of this thesis is not to reject the traditional school system or consider it inappropriate, nor, does it want to deny the importance of preparing students for their working future. It is not about establishing which kind of pedagogy is better as this cannot be determined in absolute terms. I argue that feminist pedagogy can be helpful in public school systems because it can reveal the limits of traditional pedagogy and attempts to take all the complexities of life into consideration. Thus, it becomes necessary to adapt the teacher’s agenda to the kind of class they deal with. For instance, hooks talks about the importance of excitement in the classroom, underlining the importance of flexible teaching practices. Indeed she claims that “excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices”. She demands for flexible agendas, so that there can be “spontaneous shifts in direction”, according to the needs of students. Most important, students must be seen “in their particularity as individuals” (*Teaching to transgress* 7). It was indeed her own experience “as a student in unexciting classrooms” which lead her critical reflection on the importance of excitement in the process of learning. She firmly believes that “excitement could co-exist with and even stimulate serious intellectual and /or academic engagement” (7).

To conclude, hooks also demonstrates that the focus on difference has the potential to revolutionize the classroom as well as the practices of learning and teaching. She advocates for schools as places where students can reinvent themselves. It is worth working on changing from primary and secondary school, so that, as Stimpson reminds us, “college may be more than remedial aid” (*Where the Meanings Are* 50). Therefore, it could be helpful to familiarize everyone with

feminist thought, using suitable language to reach all kinds of audiences. Indeed, a section of the last chapter is devoted to children and the importance of education in their lives, within and beyond the schools. I propose a kind of pedagogy which can give students more awareness about their thoughts and actions. Since feminism is particularly tied to social dynamics, I believe that feminist pedagogy can give people the possibility of understanding to which extent some behaviors are related to the society and culture they belong to. According to me, society highly influences people. However, this does not make them less responsible. Feminist pedagogy could finally clarify that we remain the only reason why sexism and other kinds of oppression continue to persist. In other words, we are always responsible for our actions; and I think that feminist pedagogy could make people more aware and responsible.

1.

Theories of Pedagogy

1.1. Freire on “the Banking Model of Education”

Through a connection with major theories of pedagogy, including those of Paulo Freire and Michel Foucault, this chapter shows that traditional pedagogy seems to work to preserve social conformity. The chapter demonstrates that traditional pedagogy tends to privilege exclusively the teacher’s point of view, and proposes to adopt different pedagogical approaches to improve and enrich the teaching practice. Eventually, relying on the American feminist educator bell hook’s research, I introduce feminist pedagogy, which tries to revolutionize teaching, rejecting the conventional classroom dynamic which views teachers giving lessons to students who are supposed to trust what they say and store the information given. Indeed, in the end, the analysis proves that the main problem with traditional models of education is that students are not given the tools to develop critical thinking, which is instead at the core of feminist pedagogy. The traditional pedagogical methodology has been analyzed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Reglus Neves Freire, who used the term “banking model of education”. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire criticized the system which turns students into “containers” to be filled by the teacher:

The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to "fill" the students with the contents of his narration— contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.
(71)

Freire condemns education for “suffering from narration sickness” claiming that the contents discussed by teachers tend to become “lifeless and petrified in the process of being narrated” (71). Thus, he calls for contents which are connected to students’ reality, so that they can feel more attachment and significance with what teachers say. He continues condemning the traditional relationship between teachers and students, which prevents students from developing critical thinking. According to him, students do not learn to ponder more points of view and never consider that beyond what teachers say there can be their opinions or biases. According to Freire, the lack of critical thinking and the attack to students’ creative power which characterize the school banking system would necessarily reinforce oppression: “the capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed” (73). In other

words, the banking method does not take into consideration the diversity of people, their different points of view, and the different social dynamics such as class, race, and religion which make people different from one another. Eventually, the lack of capacity to think about social dynamics critically prevents students to understand the extent to which such dynamics create oppression and inequalities between different groups of people. Without coming to consciousness, students can neglect issues such as discrimination and inclusiveness, ignoring the possibility of social change. Attacking the kind of education which reduces students to “containers”, Freire claims that education becomes “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor”. In other words the teacher “makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat”. This is at the core of his critique: according to the “banking concept of education”, “the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits”. Following this system, Freire assumes that students just have the opportunity to become “collectors” or “cataloguers” of the contents that they store (72). In addition, reducing students to containers also means that they will never be able to elaborate, produce or be empowered by knowledge. According to Freire, knowledge can never emerge without invention or reinvention, “through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (72). It is remarkable that Freire conceives the role of knowledge in relation to the traditional model of education as “a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing”. According to him, “projecting an absolute ignorance onto others” the teacher “negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry”. In this way, teachers present themselves as their students’ “necessary opposite” and “by considering their ignorance absolute”, they justify their own existence (72). Following Freire’s thinking, knowledge exercised in the banking system of education does not become a mean for liberation, but a tool for oppressive ideology. For him, a school system that considers students ignorant and privileges only teachers’ knowledge is a system which mirrors the society’s system of oppression. In his opinion, the lack of critical thinking, creativity, curiosity, and the act of enquiring can prevent knowledge to be developed and employed to change the world (73). In addition, Freire criticized the idea of knowledge as a “filling” only for students: if knowledge only belongs to teachers, they would never be enriched by students’ knowledge and they never get involved in the process of growth. At the same time, students “never discover that they educate the teacher” (72). According to him, this is only one of the contradictions that characterizes the “banking system” of education. He makes a list of its inconsistencies, asserting that “education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction”:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;

- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (73)

To conclude, according to Freire, schools represent the first place where people learn to submit to authority: “the more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them” (73). The feminist activist bell hooks devoted her whole life to teaching and doing research in the teaching field. She echoes Freire’s theory asserting that conventional pedagogy creates a context where the student serves the will of the teacher, making the classroom a place where knowledge reinforces dominator culture (*Teaching Community* 91). Relying on hook’s research, I propose that feminist pedagogy could contribute to changing teaching practices, making teachers and students leave their biases, question their opinions and come in contact with the diversities which characterize people and situations. Feminist pedagogy seems to work to open people to considering more opinions and the validity of other arguments as well as to question their own beliefs. In other words, feminist pedagogy would always deal with critical thinking.

1.2.Power/Knowledge: Foucault on Education

I include the French philosopher Michel Foucault in this conversation, since Foucault, even though he does not mention Freire, develops a notion of power as a microstructure of relations of power with schools at the center. This section will shed a light on the connection between power and knowledge; in the end, it will reveal that, while comparing traditional and feminist pedagogy, notions of authority, power and knowledge acquire different meanings. Foucault describes the kind of relationship that inevitably exists between knowledge and power and that prevents students from gaining a certain kind of knowledge: according to him, students are allowed to acquire what he calls

“official knowledge”, a kind of knowledge which is in accordance with social conformity. In his perspective, education can be seen as the means whereby power establishes itself, and schools become the places where people learn to behave in socially accepted ways. Foucault’s work offers many insights into the social institutions, such as prisons, mental hospitals, army, and schools, seen as systems prone to controlling populations. He identifies such institutions with the concept of “disciplinary space”, asserting that its purpose is to “establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits”. Thus, for him, the disciplinary place becomes a “procedure”, “aimed at knowing, mastering and using” (*Discipline and Punish* 143). From this point of view, Foucault’s idea of schools as places where training citizens is similar to Freire’s idea of schools associated with oppressive control and indoctrination. According to Foucault, “discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (170) and considers “individuals as correlative elements of power and knowledge” (194).

The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called 'discipline'. We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (194)

However, while Freire acknowledges power only to the figure of the teacher, Foucault’s notion of power embraces every person involved in the educational institution. As suggested by Roger Deacon while overviewing Foucault’s work in the field of education, “power relations are seldom one-sided, even at their most extreme, but in most instances reciprocal”, recognizing that “those who exercise power in the school are caught up in and subjected by its functions just as much as those over whom power is exercised”, since “in many everyday educational situations, it is the teacher, performing under the critical gaze of others, over whom power is exercised” (184). bell hooks recalls Foucault’s thought, acknowledging that even teachers are expected to obey authority and follow given rules. Indeed, she claims that teachers can fear they will not receive promotions or that in worst-case scenarios they will lose their jobs (*Teaching Community* 22). Thus, it appears difficult even for the teacher to possess the freedom to decide what happens in the classroom. However, bell hooks reveals the secret of her success: “a constant reminder of the reality that there are no closed systems, that every system has a gap and that in that space is a place of possibility” (23). I do not intend to confirm and condemn teachers’ conformity and lack of criticism by accusing

the relationship between knowledge and power which depicts education in the western world, but I argue that recognizing the possible existence of this relationship can definitely encourage them to approach differently in the classroom. The real challenge is to recognize the implicit, what is suggested but never directly expressed, and to give the students the tools to do the same. To “make the cultural unconscious apparent” is what Foucault longs for. He claims that what he would like to grasp is the “system of limits and exclusion” which people practice without knowing it and where find themselves prisoners (Simon 198).

According to Freire’s theory, the traditional model of teaching assumes that teachers fill students with information that they consider true knowledge, while students are not equipped to think critically and to question the information given; in other words, teachers control the knowledge that students are supposed to acquire at school. From his point of view, the kind of knowledge acquired at school is limited to someone’s choice. Including Foucault in this conversation permits us to think about knowledge not just in relation to the power that teachers possess in the classroom: for him, the school system does not reflect only the will of single teachers but defends the interests of society. In *Teaching Community*, bell hooks also recognizes the limitations that teachers of public schools have to face, feeling “extremely confined by classroom size and set lesson plans where they have little choice about the content of the material they are required to teach”. She recognizes that it appears to be very challenging for public school teachers to bring creative ideas in the classroom. hooks sadly reminds that most time public school teachers are just required “to relay information as though the work they do is akin to that of any worker on an assembly line”. (16)

Foucault gives noteworthy insights into teaching practices and methodologies, comparing lectures and seminars, and analyzing the resources of both of them:

In France, the lecture system has been strongly criticized: the professor comes in, stays behind his desk for an hour, says what he has to say, there's no possibility for student discussion. The reformists preferred the seminar system because their freedom is respected: the professor no longer imposes his ideas and the student has the right to speak. Of course, but don't you think that a professor who takes charge of students at the beginning of the year, makes them work in small groups, invites them to enter his own work shares with them his own problems and methods - don't you think that students coming out of this seminar will be even more twisted than if they had simply attended a series of lectures? Will they not tend to consider as acquired, natural, evident and absolutely true what is after all only the system, the code and the grid of the professor? Isn't there the risk that the professor feeds them with ideas much more insidiously? I don't wish to defend the lecture at all costs but I wonder whether it does not indeed have a kind of crude honesty, provided it states what it is: not the proclamation of a truth, but the tentative result of

some work which has its hypotheses, methods and which therefore can appeal for criticism and objections: the student is free to uncover its blunders. Of course, seminars and work groups are necessary, but more so, I believe, for training in methods than the exercise of freedom. (Simon 199-200)

While lectures have been largely criticized by the reformists because believed to prevent students to intervene in the discussion, Foucault identifies them as the means necessary to give students the tools to intervene appropriately. According to him, lectures train in methods, and, thanks to them, professors provide students with the instruments to start thinking critically. He concludes by asserting that he believes more in lectures than seminaries, where students can exercise more freedom. I find this reflection very impressive because it clarifies that, despite the methodology they use, what is really important is how professors decide to exercise their power. I think that what really matters is that professors recognize the importance of their work since they could shape thoughts and identities. They have the power to give students the tools for reflecting on the knowledge they receive. In the end, students who deal with critical thinking can learn to question their knowledge and reflect on important issues, including the kind of knowledge that is allowed or denied to them. Foucault describes his work by claiming:

When I lecture somewhat dogmatically, I tell myself: I am paid to bring to the students a certain form and content of knowledge; I must fashion my lecture or my course a little as one might make a shoe, no more and no less. I design an object, I try to make it as well as possible. I make a lot of trouble for myself (not always, perhaps, but often), I bring this object to the desk, I show it and then I leave it up to the audience to do with it what they want. I consider myself more like an artisan doing a certain piece of work and offering it for consumption than a master making his slaves work. (200)

Foucault recalls Freire's encouragement to invent and reinvent the knowledge acquired: he recognizes that his work is providing students with a certain kind of knowledge, but when he asserts that he offers it "for consumption", he wants students to use it in a critical way. When he argues "I leave it up to the audience to do with it what they want", I imagine that he intends to teach without risking influencing his students' thoughts. In the same way, hooks thinks that teachers should not limit themselves to sharing information that students have to memorize and store, but give them the instruments to question and use that information. Relying on Freire's theory, in *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks proposes feminist pedagogy as highly beneficial since it can prevent the banking system from serving the interests of the oppressors which trains students to conform to a society dominated by oppression and biases. Indeed, Freire recognizes "education as the exercise of domination" which "stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not

perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression” (78). He uses the term indoctrination which has more to do with influence and persuasion rather than thinking and understanding. If education follows the rules of indoctrination and prevents students from thinking, it has nothing to do with freedom. Likewise, Foucault underlines the lack of freedom by criticizing the life of students on campus, where the students discipline themselves to conformity. According to him, students are “excluded while being transmitted a knowledge traditional in nature, obsolete, “academic” and not directly tied to the needs and problems of today” (Simon 193). According to him, this exclusion is emphasized by “the organization around the student, of social mechanisms which are fictitious, artificial and quasi-theatrical” (193):

[...] young people from 18 to 25 are thus as it were, neutralized by and for society, rendered safe ineffective, socially and politically castrated. There is the first function of the university: to put students out of circulation. Its second function, however, is one of integration. Once a student has spent six or seven years of his life within this artificial society, he becomes "absorbable": society can consume him. Insidiously, he will have received the values of this society. He will have been given socially desirable models of behavior, types of ambition, outlines of political behavior, so that this ritual of exclusions will finally take on the value of inclusion and recuperation or reabsorption. (Simon 194)

Thus, Foucault describes the college as an “artificial society” and the academic life as a “ritual” where the students are firstly excluded and then reabsorbed by a society which can finally “consume” them. This idea of education has nothing to do with the idea that education deals with moral purposes and helps people to discover themselves and their potential. From this perspective, the school is just a social institution that works to improve society itself, instead of improving students. Recalling Foucault’s idea of college as an artificial place, bell hooks condemns this conventional assumption that the university setting is not the “real world”. She urges for a vision of education where learning is never confined solely to an institutionalized classroom, and envisions schools as part of our real world (*Teaching Community* 41). She denounces the idea that education has relevance only within classrooms and not in the world outside or in students’ new lives as workers (42). Following this idea, many students stop learning once graduated since they think that it is no relevant to their lives (42). She affirms that “to bring a spirit of study to learning that takes place both in and beyond classroom settings, learning must be understood as an experience that enriches life in its entirety” (42), concluding with her colleague Parker J. Palmer’s understanding of education: “education at its best—this profound human transaction called teaching and learning—is not just about getting information or getting a job. Education is about healing

and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life. It is about finding and claiming ourselves and our place in the world” (43). She adds that people “must be constantly learning to be fully present in the now” since their place in the world is constantly changing (43). Thus, hooks does not limit herself to describe or condemn the conventional assumptions about teaching and learning. Once again, she tries to give her solution. She recalls Freire and Foucault, relying on their theories with the aim to create a pedagogy which could lead to a social change and a concrete change into social institutions.

In contrast to the “banking system”, Freire defines the method of teaching that emphasizes critical thinking and education as the practice of freedom: the “problem-posing education”, where the teacher is not merely the one who teaches, but one who can learn from students. Giving lessons, the teacher can teach and be taught at the same time. According to Freire, following the rules of problem-posing education, education becomes a process where everybody (including students) is responsible for the lesson, and everybody (including teachers) can grow: when teachers present the materials, at the end of the lesson, they can reconsider their reflections after a speech with students; teachers do not think for their students, nor do they impose their thought on them. The classroom becomes the place where everybody can learn and grow. The problem-posing education finally permits teachers and students to become Subjects of the educational process, empowering them to overcome their false perception of reality (Freire 86). Thanks to education as the practice of freedom people can come to a new awareness and develop new visions, beginning to look critically at society and at other people’s diversities. Such awareness can finally make people take the initiative in acting to transform the society that they consider oppressive. In Freire’s view, education as the practice of freedom is opposed to education as the practice of domination, where it is believed to assume the oppressors’ expectations. Even though he does not mention Freire, this new concept of pedagogy is the same praised by Foucault when recognizes the school as one of “the implicit systems” in which people find themselves “prisoners” and, as a professor, he intends to grasp such systems, revealing “the cultural unconscious apparent” (Simon 198). In the same fashion, bell hooks’ research on teaching is based on Freire’s work. Relying on his theory, she presents feminist pedagogy as practice of freedom. Her work will be analyzed in depth in chapter 3.

1.3. Pedagogy and Politics: Global Educational Values

Examining the work of Lingard, Rizvi, and Spring, this section will show how education has been globally theorized as a tool for economic and social growth as well as a tool for political and social change. In particular, contemporary social movements emphasize the role of education to construct new politics of differences around issues of class, gender,

race, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion, since injustices are now linked to the demands for recognition of difference (Lingard and Rizvi 159). Indeed, according to me, contemporary social movements privilege the kind of knowledge which is “tied to the needs and problems of today” (Simon 193). However, investigating Rizvi and Lingard’s work clarifies that the globalization of education is part of an effort to impose particular economic and political agenda benefiting some individuals and communities over poor and socially disadvantaged others (185). As a consequence, developing countries in the third world tend to assimilate Western worldviews, values, and knowledge. Presenting a view where politics shape pedagogy and education reflects biases, Lingard and Rizvi quote the French sociologist Émile Durkheim who agrees that an educational system is a construct built by society, which seeks to reproduce its beliefs and norms through its institutions: “society constructs its educational system to promote and reproduce its ideal of how human beings should live and relate to each other in meeting societal needs” (74). In *Globalizing Education Policy*, Rizvi and Lingard explore the social, political and economic contexts which contribute to shaping global educational policies. They claim that education achieves to the formation of “sustainable community” as well as the development of individuals’ knowledge. According to them, the term education suggests that there is something worth knowing, which can benefit both individuals and their communities. Thus, thinking about education involves “considerations of values” (71). Indeed, they assert that discussions on education have always involved considerations of which values should prevail and why they should be favored. Many philosophers have discussed the topic and while some have developed educational values in terms of what they believe to be the nature of human beings, including thinking, feeling, and acting, others have viewed education as a mere element of social and economic systems. As Durkheim has suggested that educational values express ‘societal needs’ at a given time and place (74), so Rizvi and Lingard recognize a global shift towards neoliberal values. As a result, for them, educational policies are driven more by the values of the market and system efficiency, which seek to prepare students for new kinds of work. According to Rizvi and Lingard, the neoliberal notion of learning assumes education as a “private good”: as a “commodity that can provide an individual advantage over others” as well as “something that can be used to differentiate people in terms of their economic value” (85-86). Following this point of view, educational systems are linked to the concerns of social efficiency (92). The view of education as a private good involves that “educational systems that do not meet explicit functional economic goals are dismissed as inefficient and ineffective” (86).

The idea of education as a private good, which provides advantages over others or can differentiate people in terms of their value, is linked to the notion of privilege, a very important issue to feminism. In my view, in this context, the introduction of feminist pedagogy, which takes into consideration the social privileges of each student as well as other social aspects, could benefit the public school system. Indeed, since educational values have been defined in general economic terms, this discussion underlines that educational policies deal more with political agendas than social transformation (Lingard and Rizvi 86). Exploring how globalization is transforming the concept of educational values, Rizvi and Lingard reveal that global policies of education develop alongside the worldwide spread of Western models and values. Nowadays, as a result of European imperialism, Western forms of schooling dominate the world scene. In particular, since the Second World War, the world educational system is based on the human capital model, which assumes that education is an economic investment designed to produce better workers. As suggested by Joel Spring, from this perspective, global policies of education are shaped by specific economic and political agendas that benefit rich nations at the expense of the poor. He explains that colonial power continued after the end of colonial empires: postcolonial theorists state that after the disappearance of colonial empires, the power of previous colonizers reemerged in new forms through the work of intergovernmental organizations, such as the promotion of market economies, human capital education, and neoliberal school reforms, which promote the interests of powerful countries. However, while it is easy to demonize the West, less easy but more productive is to propose alternatives. With my thesis, I intend to propose an alternative pedagogy and, according to me, postcolonial theory can give a rich contribute. Postcolonial theory is committed to explaining the reality of global modernity, analyzing the consequences of colonialism and imperial power. Devoted to those who continue to suffer colonialism's effects, postcolonial theory is interested in discovering and theorizing new forms of human injustice. The postcolonial analysis includes issues of race, culture, class, and gender in postcolonial settings, as well as the effects of neo-colonial domination, slavery, and migration. In my opinion, postcolonial theory represents a productive alternative since it gives the instruments to understand reality taking into account all the mechanics which characterize the modern world and recognizes the role of power in every aspect of life, including the use of power to impose educational policies. Since the 1950s, most educational systems around the world have been concerned with issues of equality (Lingard and Rizvi 140) and it was finally acknowledged the role that education can play in reducing social inequality and eradicating social oppression. Indeed, education is eventually seen as a basic human right to guarantee social justice as well as an economic good: "commitment to equality in education has been based on the principles of both economic efficiency and social justice" (140). With the new

concept of education as a tool to ensure a socially just society, there is the development of the notion of lifelong education, which during the 1960s found favor among feminist, civil rights and other social movements (83). Its attempt was to “transform education away from formal rigid and authoritarian traditions to more informal approaches that highlighted the importance of experiential and informal learning” (83). The notion of lifelong education has been theorized by philosophers such as John Dewey, who insisted that educational values should outgrow the context of educational systems, concerning also other contexts (75). Dewey’s contribution is crucial because his work recognizes the relationships between society and education; in particular, he “noted that contexts change in ways that demand different educational responses” (75). His theory establishes that educational values are implanted within a wider context of social relations and practices. Dewey’s reflections concern the United States, which are, according to him, characterized by sentiments about democracy and the role of education in producing certain kinds of citizens (75).

In conclusion, this section aims to clarify how education is globally understood and how educational policies are conceived in terms of economics and politics. Indeed, modern theories of education confirm Foucault’s view on education, according to which a connection inevitably exists between discipline and power. In particular, they echo the Foucauldian concept of discipline meant as a power to train students to become good members of the society and better workers. Moreover, this section underlines the hegemony of Western conceptions in the education field and the role that postcolonial theory could have in unsettling this Western way of thinking.

1.4. Conclusion

In the aftermath of Western colonialism, education is viewed as an economic investment to serve the labor market (Spring 13-14). Following the postcolonial theory, “the world we inhabit is impossible to understand except in relationship to the history of imperialism and colonial rule. [...] Postcolonial theory has influenced the way we read texts, the way we understand national and transnational histories, and the way we understand the political implications of our own knowledge as scholars” (Elam). Thus, I think that postcolonial theory can help to understand the connection between power/politics and knowledge. In particular, it focuses on the hegemony of Western culture and its effect on education and highlights that education implies gaining as well as losing a certain kind of knowledge. An important postcolonial issue is the construction of the Other, which explains very well the limits of what Foucault calls “official” knowledge: according to postcolonial critics, the Other is mainly constructed via the idea of white western people. Based on this, the Other voice is always silenced. I agree with postcolonial critics asserting that this practice influences the way we understand others and read texts. In other words, we perceive others through the dominant perspective and read texts through the lens of western culture. Therefore, from my

point of view, postcolonial theory can give instruments to rethink our assumptions. In her work *Actionable postcolonial theory in education*, the Professor of Global Education Vanessa Andreotti suggests that postcolonial theory can be a valuable tool in the educational field. According to her, “colonial discourse analyses challenge the neutrality and objectivity of academia and its role in constructing stereotypes, images, and knowledge of colonial subjects and cultures which support and legitimize institutions of economic, administrative, judicial, and bio-medical control”. Moreover, she suggests that postcolonial intellectuals can “facilitate dialogue between the Western and non-Western academies, and in so doing, to think a way out of the epistemological violence of the colonial encounter” (Gandhi qtd. in Andreotti 86). I agree with Andreotti in acknowledging that postcolonial theory could challenge, and eventually improve, the traditional idea of pedagogy and education. She inevitably quotes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose work is crucial in the field of postcolonial studies. Indeed, she assumes that colonialism started a process of global inequality and socioeconomic impoverishment in the Third World, which is still maintained today; in addition, she recognizes that notions of power and privilege deriving from colonial processes still play significant roles in the justification and maintenance of inequalities. Spivak analyzes the controversies of the modern postcolonial world from a feminist-deconstructivist viewpoint, using deconstruction to reread the works that constitute the roots of the Western philosophical tradition. Spivak is known worldwide and particularly in the United States for her translation of Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, the work which introduced most of the predominant ideas within deconstruction. Since then, Spivak has applied deconstructive strategies to various readings and she is eventually associated with deconstruction along with feminism, Marxism, literary criticism, and postcolonialism. I decided to include Spivak in my pedagogical project since her postcolonial approach can enrich research on educational issues. In particular, at the core of her research, there is the attempt to re-read and re-think the texts and ideas which constitute the basis of western philosophical thought.

2.

Education and the Roots of Western Philosophical Thought: Spivak

2.1. The Feminism-deconstruction Nexus: Poovey, Duyfhuizen and Spivak

To deeply understand the economic, political, and cultural consequences of imperialism and colonialism on theories of education, I introduce Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in my research. Her feminist-deconstructivist analysis demonstrates that the works of Western tradition are mainly male-dominated, revealing that the notion of “woman” in such texts just reflects masculine ideals. Thus, for postcolonial critics, deconstruction becomes essential to recognize the sexist implications which have eventually constituted the basis of Western culture. I also find deconstruction a valuable tool that can help scholars to develop critical thinking and to discern deeper meaning present in their books. In her article *Feminism and Deconstruction*, the American historian and literary critic Mary Poovey argues:

Deconstruction provides the tools for exposing the fact that the opposition between the “sexes”, like the definitions of “women” and “men”, is a social construction, not a reflection or articulation of biological fact. In so doing, deconstruction sets up the possibility that the supposedly fixed opposition of masculine/feminine might lose its social prominence because we could begin to recognize that there is no necessary connection between anatomical sexuality and gender stereotypes or roles. This, in turn, might legitimate behaviours that do not seem to “derive from” sex [boys might be allowed to be more nurturing, for example]. (50)

Deconstruction aims to prove that masculinity and femininity are social constructs whose significance depends on the social context in which they are used. Poovey tries to demonstrate that the major works of the western philosophical tradition are essentially male-dominated: most of the canonical works are written by men and the concept of “woman” is indeed the representation of masculine ideals. Thus, these texts are full of sexist implications. The use of deconstruction becomes essential to rewrite such texts, in order to reevaluate the ideas which have become the basis of Western culture. In other words, deconstruction is particularly useful to inquire critically about masculine forms of domination typical of the West and to rewrite the texts that govern the traditional male-dominated canon of Western culture. Feminist criticism investigates images of women and men through works that have become the basis of Western traditions and, instead of taking some assumptions for granted, it urges to reevaluate such texts, making people ponder their implications and discover sexism beyond the words. This is the reason why I find that deconstruction always implies critical thinking, reflection, and questioning about literary and political assumptions. I recognize it as the tool to analyze texts critically and to recognize the sexism which characterizes them.

In his essay *Deconstruction and Feminist Literary Theory*, the American educator Bernard Duyfhuizen clearly explains the interdisciplinarity between deconstruction and feminism:

Deconstruction and feminism have probably been the most debated issues in literary theory during the last few years. These two critical movements share an interdisciplinary emphasis and an interest in texts that have both directed and misdirected much of traditional western thought. Recent literary studies demonstrate how well deconstructive and feminist theories join to produce powerful and unsettling readings of canonical works and to uncover significant texts by women that have been excluded from the traditional canon of literary studies. (159)

According to Duyfhuizen, feminist literary criticism engages in a political struggle “to open restrictive and repressive critical ideologies to the play of sexual difference which has been long either excluded from the study of literature or repressed by masculine mode of reading that was considered the established norm” (163). Duyfhuizen pays his greatest attention to the notion of conventional norms, asserting that “the deconstructive reading of the terms male/female extends to a dismantling of the established literary canon to allow for previously excluded texts by women to be studied both for their literary merit and for their significance in reconstructing our cultural sensibility along non-sexist lines” (163). Drawing on the American literary critic Jonathan Culler, Duyfhuizen reflects on the man/woman discussion. According to him, “the deconstruction of [the man/woman] opposition requires investigation of the ways in which various discourses – psychoanalytical, philosophical, literary, historical – have constituted a notion of man by characterizing the feminine in terms that permit it to be set aside” (Culler qtd. in Duyfhuizen 166). They both agree asserting that woman is treated as a “supplement”: discussion of “man” can proceed without mentioning the woman since it is viewed as “automatically included as a special case” (166). Culler’s first example of the exclusion of “woman” in discourse is the conventional use of male pronouns which “exclude her without calling attention to her exclusion”; and “if she is considered distinctly, she will be defined in terms of man” (166). In addition, he also exposes the case of psychoanalysis (164), asserting that psychoanalytic discourse also excludes women; indeed, feminist readings of Freud underline the suppression of female sexuality in speculations such as penis envy or the inferiority of women as sexual beings. Such hypotheses are indeed dominated by phallogocentric discourses which bring to a particular representation of the woman. Particularly, feminist critics observe that women have always been excluded from great discourses about philosophy, as well as male philosophers have always generalized the concept of “woman”. As a result, the symbolic representation of the “woman” in such texts is always a construction given by a masculine figure with particular masculine ideals. From this view, the role of deconstruction in feminist criticism is crucial to highlight male dominance in social and political history. Put simply,

feminist criticism tries to dismantle the theories which have shaped the patriarchal and capitalistic Western societies. Indeed, Spivak's criticism focuses on deconstructing the theories of Freud and Marx, both condemned for avoiding the idea of the womb as a place of production. In the introduction of *Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, the editors Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean claim that Spivak's "wide-ranging critical and theoretical challenges" influence the development of multicultural and postcolonial studies as well as the feminist theory, both in the U.S and internationally (14). They assert that her "sustained critical engagement with the intellectual tradition represented by the writings of Freud, Lacan, Marx, Derrida, and Foucault has been instrumental in transforming and politicizing the reception of the feminist and poststructuralist critiques of psychoanalytic and Marxist thought" (14). Indeed, "her career has followed a complex intellectual trajectory through a deeply feminist perspective on deconstruction, the Marxist critique of capital and the international division of labor, the critique of imperialism and colonial discourse, and the critique of race in relation to nationality, ethnicity, the status of the migrant" as well as "what it might mean to identify a nation or a cultural form as postcolonial in a neocolonial word" (13). The third chapter of the *Spivak Reader* concerns a selection of a rewritten and expanded version of the talk *Feminism and Critical Theory* and recapitulates Spivak's economic and social critique:

Spivak demonstrates that Marx's theory of the alienation of the worker from the product of his labor is based on inadequate evidence, because it does not take into account the instance of the womb as workshop, and the very different forms of alienation of product from labor represented by childbirth and by women's domestic work as unpaid, and thus unvalued, labor. Freud's account of penis envy as the chief determinant of femininity similarly avoids confronting the womb as a place of production, or the possibility of womb envy as penis envy's interactive complement. Thus Spivak proposes that feminists use the texts of Marx and Freud by reading them "beyond" themselves, producing a new "common currency" with which to understand society. (63)

Therefore, the essay clarifies that a deconstructive-feminist viewpoint and the ability to read texts "beyond themselves" can be very helpful in changing our ways of thought. The feminist challenge is to rewrite the "great male texts" so that "there is new material for the grasping of the production and determination of literature within the general production and determination of consciousness and society". The real challenge is that these texts "do not become great adversaries, or models from whom we take our ideas and then revise or reassess them". (69) In other words, Spivak calls for a "neuter and practical" criticism, which has to do with neither the gender nor the theories of revolution or psychoanalysis that "operate our ideas of world and self". She calls for a kind of criticism which would "infiltrate the male academy" and "redo the terms of our understanding of

the context and substance of literature as part of the human enterprise” (69). According to me, Spivak’s idea on criticism can be expanded to the pedagogical field, welcoming the idea of a pedagogy which is not necessarily anchored in tradition. Spivak’s contribution to my thesis is instrumental to understand and accept the limitation of western philosophical thought. For example, with the introduction of feminist pedagogy, students could recognize the limitations of Marxist sociology and Freudian psychoanalysis. In a such way, they can learn to question everything, without taking things for granted.

Employing deconstructive methods, Spivak has highlighted the importance of deconstruction to an international feminist project. Indeed, her object of investigation goes far beyond the mere history of “third world women” or their testimony; she focuses on the production of the colonial object, through the great European theories (69). Her work belongs to the Subaltern Studies, whose aim is “to promote a systematic discussion of history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity” (Ashcroft 199). Subaltern studies analyze the kind of relationship between the subaltern and ruling classes in colonial systems: “subordination cannot be understood except in a binary relationship with dominance, the group aimed to examine the subaltern ‘as an objective assessment of the role of the élite and as a critique of élitist interpretations of that role’” (Guha qtd in Ashcroft 199). Spivak addresses issues of voice and representation in relation to the “Third World”, giving much attention to the subaltern women of the global South, who are mostly silenced. One of her most known essays is *Can the subaltern speak*, where she shows that attempts to speak for or listen to the subaltern end up silencing the subaltern. Meaning “of inferior rank”, subaltern is a term adopted by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes, and thus, are denied of accessing to ‘hegemonic’ power (198). I think that Spivak’s work gives great insight into the pedagogical field and it echoes the theories of pedagogy previously discussed: it gives the possibility of understanding that politics shape pedagogy as well as pedagogy shapes our minds. Thus, the issue of “Otherness” and, in particular, the construction of the Other become pivotal to understand that people eventually tend to shape others according to the idea they have of them. Through Spivak’s work, students could finally realize that generalizing is always a mistake since the complexity and uniqueness of every individual must be acknowledged.

2.2.The Construction of the Other

This section focuses on Spivak’s research on the consequences of imperialism and colonialism: she talks of “worlding of the West as world”, referring to the “arrogance” of the

West to consider itself better and in charge of “civilizing” the other countries. Furthermore, Spivak also talks of “unlearning one’s privilege as one loss”, to urge us to reflect on the possibility that our social privileges may prevent us from gaining the Knowledge of the Other. I find the concept of “unlearning” very interesting when associated with teaching: people need to unlearn so that they do not take for granted their way of thinking as right and unquestionable. When Spivak urges to “unlearn one’s privilege as one loss”, she intends to demonstrate that privileges (in terms of race, class, nationality, gender) may prevent people from gaining another kind of knowledge, with a loss of other options and a closing down of creativity. As loss of knowledge, she does not only intend “information that we have not yet received”, but things people are not equipped to understand because of their privileged social positions (Landry and MacLean 4). Thus, Spivak gives us an important point to ponder: privilege can also be a kind of loss since it cuts off from a certain kind of “other” knowledge. In addition, she makes also us consider that even the most granted of our possibilities are privileges, such as the possibility of reading. As the two editors suggest, the mere fact that one can read Spivak is a privilege. Spivak encourages people to unlearn their privilege and learn to learn from below (from the subaltern). In such a manner, people can recognize the limitations that privileges give them, which is a sort of contradiction since we are used to considering privileges as advantages and not as a loss; at the same time, unlearning can become not only an act of inclusion but also a way to improve and increase knowledge. To do that, it is necessary to think critically and try to go beyond one’s beliefs and prejudices. Spivak’s contribution to pedagogy could revolutionize the entire idea of teaching overturning the concepts of privileges and learning. It could enable learners to value and learn from differences and reconstruct new visions of the world. According to Landry and MacLean, Spivak can offer very valuable pedagogical advice for teachers who have to deal with teaching the multicultural canon. They claim that Spivak offer great suggestions for an educational approach which can enable students to value and learn from differences (78). For them, Spivak’s insights can help students to reconstruct their worldviews and identities on an “ethical relation to the other” (78). In particular, they mention “an educational practice that prompts learners to examine their locus of enunciation and the connections between language, power and knowledge, to transform relationships and to reason and act responsibly” (78).

Since the Western academy is at the center, Spivak’s work aims to deconstruct some of the colonial discourses taken for granted in the West and that see the Others just as inferior. Western thought is indeed dominated by the idea that civilization missions of imperialism helped the colonized regions. As a matter of fact, the Other is excluded from the dominant

philosophical discourses of the West World and the identity of the subaltern has been constructed by the perceptions of the West. Postcolonial studies help to acknowledge that the western conceptualization of identity has become the norm. According to that norm, we consider ourselves different from the Other. However, differences cannot be valuable when we give no voice to the Other and still consider them according to our parameters. By doing so, we just create prejudices and stereotypes and continue to privilege the western way of thinking, keeping the Other and their knowledge marginalized. Spivak uses the myth of colonialism to explain the way the West constructs the identity of the Other, criticizing the fact that even when we attempt to be inclusive, we talk for them. In other words, we think, speak, and write about the Other according to our assumption, trying to insert them into a western way of thinking. We prevent them to speak, to come to their own voice.

Can the Subaltern Speak? significantly influenced postcolonial studies and the development of the notion of the subaltern, even generating much critique and controversy. As the title itself suggests, Spivak wonders about the subaltern's possibility of speaking, examining issues such as coming to voice or the agency of the subaltern. Moreover, she explores the results of imperialism and the shaping of identities in the capitalistic and globalized world. She urges to acknowledge that the marginalization of subaltern groups does not concern only the past and did not end with the end of imperialism; it is still present in the postcolonial world. In the first part of the essay, Spivak discusses the problem of representation. Indeed, she condemns Deleuze and Foucault to ignore both the epistemic violence of imperialism and the international division of labor, blaming them for making gross generalizations when speaking of the Third World subaltern, and for silencing them, preventing them to speak for themselves. She considers that:

According to Foucault and Deleuze (in the First World, under the standardization and regimentation of socialized capital, though they do not seem to recognize this) the oppressed, if given the chance (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here), and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here), can speak and know their conditions. We must now confront the following question: on the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside and outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, can the subaltern speak?
(78)

According to Spivak, they lack acknowledging their privilege, representing the subaltern according to their own cultural assumptions. From her point of view, this is part of the general system of Western exploitation of the Third World: she suggests that even progressive intellectuals who want to struggle for giving subalterns greater recognition end up reproducing the same kind of power that

they proclaim wanting to end. For her, they just underline their privilege, ending up speaking for the subaltern and confirming Western superiority. Moreover, she adds: “this benevolent first-world appropriation and reinscription of the Third World as an Other is the founding characteristic of much third-worldism in the US human sciences today” (84). *She introduces the* concept of “epistemic violence”: the attempt to speak for the subaltern which eventually ends up silencing the subaltern. Indeed, she explains that “the clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other” (76). She urges us to reflect that in constructing the identity of the Other we consider our own experience, our own knowledge, which is primarily based on western thought. Indeed, she is critical of the way Western institutions produce knowledge about the “Third World”. It always seems to be a matter of power. Spivak underlines the fact that the subaltern and in particular the subaltern woman does not have the power to speak and tell her story by herself. The lack of agency is, ones again, linked to the notion of power and politics. She draws on the example of the British intervention in the practice of widow sacrifice (sati) in India, what she calls “a schematic summary of the epistemic violence of the codification of Hindu Law” (76). Sati is the act in which a Hindu widow sacrifices herself, burning herself to death on the funeral pyre of her husband. Spivak examines how the British tried to ban the practice on the basis of their “civilising mission”, whilst the widows just wanted to die, “committing a pure and courageous act.” With such an example, she desires to highlight the arrogance of the British Empire to consider itself superior and even savior, justifying their intervention as liberating and modernizing, while, in the belief to act benevolently, they still ignore the voice of the widows (93). Spivak thinks that “the protection of woman (today the 'third-world woman') becomes a signifier for the establishment of a good society which must, at such inaugurative moments, transgress mere legality, or equity of legal policy”. In this case, the practice, previously tolerated as ritual, has been redefined as a crime, jumping “the frontier between the private and the public domain”. She claims that “the leap of suttee from private to public has a clear and complex relationship with the changeover from a mercantile and commercial to a territorial and administrative British presence”. Thus, given that “imperialism's image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as object of protection from her own kind” (94), she wants the reader to wonder “how should one examine the dissimulation of patriarchal strategy, which apparently grants the woman free choice as subject?” (94,95) Indeed, she wants to underline the free choice that they have since the practice can be understood by the female subject as “an exceptional signifier of her own desire” (96). She wants the reader to consider that what “the British see as poor victimized women going to the slaughter is in fact an ideological battle-ground” (96). However, she specifies that she does not agree with the killing of windows, but

she wants the reader to compare the act of sati as a “reward” and the pretense of imperialism as a “social mission”, recalling the concept of *différance* in the French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction.

Obviously I am not advocating the killing of widows. I am suggesting that, within the two contending versions of freedom, the constitution of the female subject in life is the place of the *différend*. In the case of widow self-immolation, ritual is not being redefined as superstition but as crime. The gravity of sati was that it was ideologically cathected as 'reward', just as the gravity of imperialism was that it was ideologically cathected as 'social mission'.” (97)

The term *différance* is central to Derrida’s work on deconstruction. Since the French word *différer* means both “to defer” and “to differ”, Derrida employs it to designate both a difference and an act of deferring. Considering that the meaning of a word is always created through contrasts with the meanings of other words and that the meanings of those words are in turn dependent on contrasts with the meanings of still other words (and so on), it follows that the meaning of a word is not something that is fully present to us; it is endlessly deferred in an infinitely long chain of meanings (Britannica, Deconstruction). Derrida explains that “every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general” (11). He continues: “the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called present element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself” (12). The concept of *différence* is at the core of deconstruction: it explains that people can attribute different meanings to words and even that the same person in reading and re-reading can attribute a different meaning to the text. Spivak uses the term to explain the situation of sati and how its meaning assumes different meanings according to the interpreter. She concludes that “between Patriarchy and Imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization” (102). Relying on Spivak’s essay, we understand that the epistemic violence is caused by the Western colonizers so that the colonized subject is conceived as Other, because of the speculations of modern Western philosophical thought. When she talks of “unlearning” she also refers to unlearning the dominant system of knowledge which makes people think of themselves as better and culturally superior. In particular, she tries to challenge the dominant rhetoric that the Third World is in trouble and that the West has the solution. She focuses on the position of the subaltern woman who has no

voice in the civil mission of colonizers as well as in the patriarchal practices of their land. She reminds readers that the ritual Sati concerns women even though we actually have no consideration by them. They are completely silenced.

I admit I strived to read and analyze Spivak's writings. However, despite her critique, I noticed similarities between Spivak's and Foucault's thought. I think that she identified the limits of Foucault's ideas about power and knowledge and expanded them to a postcolonial framework. During his conversation with Deleuze, Foucault introduces the intellectual as the person who "spoke the truth to those who had yet to see it, in the name of those who were forbidden to speak the truth" and that "in the most recent upheaval" has discovered that "the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge", since the masses "know perfectly well" and "are certainly capable of expressing themselves". Indeed, he continues claiming that the role of the intellectual is "no longer to place himself somewhat ahead and to the side in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of "knowledge", "truth", "consciousness", and "discourse" (207). I find that Foucault here limits his viewpoint to his country, speaking about the student uprisings of May 1968 in France; Spivak acknowledges the generalization of his words as wrong since there is a world outside that does not reflect the reality represented by Foucault. Indeed, Spivak criticizes Deleuze and Foucault condemning them to cooperate with imperialism and colonialism, since they lack to acknowledge that the subaltern cannot speak for themselves. However, I find both Foucault and Spivak important to the purpose of my study. I think that Spivak's critique helps to open a new window to postcolonial and subaltern studies, and it can be very enlightening to my proposal of feminist pedagogy as beneficial to the public school system. For instance, hooks also recalls Spivak, talking about the power of colonizers to distort reality in relation to the history of black slaves in America and, especially, to the figure of the black "matriarchal" women. According to hooks, racist scholars labeled black women matriarchs, a term that in no way describes the social status of black women in America, since no matriarchy has ever existed in the United States. Indeed, to describe them as matriarchs, these women should have exercised social and political power, while neither black women nor all women in American society have ever lived in such a condition (*Ain't I a woman* 72). hooks explains that black women eventually embraced the label "matriarch" since it made them feel privileged. In her opinion, this reflected the capacity of the colonizers to distort the reality of the colonized, to such an extent that "they embrace concepts that actually do them more harm than good". For example, she mentions the "oppressive tactics" that while slavers used to prevent rebellions and slave

uprisings, brainwashing slaves “to believe that black people were really better taken care of as slaves than they would be as free people”, with the result that some black slaves “accepted their master’s picture of freedom” and “were afraid to break the bonds of slavery” (81). This is an oppressive tactic similar to that used to brainwash black women, “economically oppressed and victimized by sexism and racism”, to believe that they are matriarchal and exercise some kind of social or political control over their lives (81). For hooks, all these tactics and “the false sense of power black-women are encouraged to feel” allowed and allows them to think that they do not need social movement that would liberate them (81). Therefore, supporting the idea that oppressed people end up believing what is told them, hooks underlines the power of language to create reality. She believes that the words used can help to construct a reality which benefits the system of oppression. Acknowledged the false myth of the matriarch as a tactic to brainwash black women, hooks also believes that the matriarchy myth suggests that black women had been granted privileges that they never received. Indeed, this myth dismisses the fact that black women in America have always been victims of sexism and racism (80). She condemns official historiography to maintain facts that “cannot be substantiated by historical evidence”, depicting facts as if black women had received more advantages than black men. Particularly, she claims that “historiographers who study black people’s history tend to minimize the oppression of black females and concentrate their attention on black men” (80). Thus, acknowledged also that historiography continues to minimize history at the expense of minority groups, she assumes that education helps to maintain racial imperialism in the form of white supremacy and sexual imperialism in the form of patriarchy. For her, “American women have been socialized, even brainwashed, to accept a version of American history that was created to uphold and maintain racial imperialism in the form of white supremacy and sexual imperialism in the form of patriarchy” and she acknowledges “one measure of the success of such indoctrination” the fact that “we perpetuate both consciously and unconsciously the very evils that oppress us” (120). This discussion about the way facts are narrated and how these narrations can brainwash people, leading them to even sustain oppressive ideologies, clarifies the importance of education and teachers’ influence on students’ lives. According to hooks, this influence has a huge impact on students’ lives, which can also be irreversible. Talking about the “black female sixth grade teacher” who taught her and her black classmates history asking them to identify with the American government, she claims that “unknowingly” she implanted in their psyches “a seed of the racial imperialism that would keep us forever in bondage” (121). Indeed, she remembers that this teacher loved those students who could recite the pledge of allegiance to

the American flag. For hooks, this was a “contradiction”, since the government that her teacher asked them to love was the same that segregated them, forbidding them to attend schools with white pupils. However, the real subtle matter in the word “unknowingly”: hooks recognizes that her teacher was not aware of this paradox, but she unconsciously led her black students to perpetuate, support and even love the system which oppressed them. The damage is irreversible since “how does one overthrow, change, or even challenge a system that you have been taught to admire, to love, to believe in?” (121). Even though hooks recognize her innocence, it did not change the reality or made the teacher less responsible. Indeed, both teachers and students need a kind of pedagogy that can enable them to recognize the contradictions told, read and heard in the classroom; as hooks reminds her readers, people need to know that there is a “silenced history” behind the romantic notion of the new world and the American dream that they can read at school.

2.3. Conclusion

Postcolonial criticism can help students to individualize the capitalistic and patriarchal features of the canonical texts of western tradition, with the purpose of rethinking and rewriting them. Postcolonial studies give the possibility to ponder the notions of power and subalternity which have been discussed in the previous chapter.

The introduction of feminist pedagogy and its practices in schools can give the possibility of thinking critically about texts, acknowledging the lack of attention on the female figure and the lack of material written by women. Feminist pedagogy could provide the students with the tools to go beyond the words read and listened to in the classroom. Deconstructing the texts which represent the root of western society and culture can help students to acknowledge the extent to which they internalize ideas and beliefs. By deeply understanding that, they can finally have the possibility of eradicating them. People grew up unaware of the weight words have upon them, until these words become their thought and eventually their actions. This is the reason why I find it very important to understand how much the education can be shaped by culture, politics, and economics. Students are hardly prepared to understand these issues and they end up overlooking all the aspects which can make them more aware, free, and human. Introducing feminist pedagogy, students can learn from below, unlearn their knowledge, and rethink traditional thinking. The way I would use postcolonial thinking and feminist pedagogy in schools is by giving the students the tools to learn to think with their own mind. It would not mean that teachers should not give instruction, but that they should give instruction as well as give them the instruments to deconstruct such instructions. Welcoming students’ considerations, even teachers can rethink their assumptions. Approaching feminist pedagogy at school would not mean deleting canonical accounts from schools but presenting them

along with valuable insights into the modern world. Moreover, students must not learn traditional theories following the “banking system”, that is by reading, storing, and repeating, if required, their words; instead, they should analyze and question what they read, to acknowledge all the gaps that texts present and the role they have had in shaping Western society and the idea that Western society has of Other societies.

3.

Feminism and Feminist Pedagogy

3.1. Feminist Pedagogy: Education as Practice of Freedom

[...] I add my voice to the collective call for renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices. Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom. (*Teaching to Transgress* 12)

While major theories of pedagogy have associated traditional pedagogy with oppression, bell hooks has defined feminist pedagogy as practice of freedom. She declares that her development as a critical thinker has been greatly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire. His work permits her to understand the limits of the education that she received as well as to have the tools to discover alternative strategies which would change the idea of teaching. In *Teaching to Transgress*, she collects essays to share her vision of education as the practice of freedom. As the title itself suggests, it wants to be a provocation and a challenge to the traditional way of teaching, seen as obedience to authority; she condemns the classroom as a prison where feeling trapped, a place to hate, “rather than a place of promise and possibility” (4). She uses the term “engaged pedagogy”, to promote feminist ideas and participation in the feminist classroom, deconstructing the traditional idea that the professor is the only person responsible for the lesson. She claims that “students do not become critical thinkers overnight”, since “first, they must learn to embrace the joy and power of thinking itself”. She describes “engaged pedagogy” as “a teaching strategy that aims to restore students' will to think, and their will to be fully self-actualized”. Thus, “the central focus of engaged pedagogy is to enable students to think critically”. (*Critical Thinking* 8) I find critical thinking the key to deconstruct traditional idea of teaching, since it consists of “seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms young ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, solving problems, and so forth” (Willingham qtd in hooks, 8-9). Against the Foucauldian idea of schools as political places, she demands a pedagogy that value everyone and takes into consideration everybody’s diversity, cultural background, storytelling, and opinion. She condemns Freire's lack of attention on pleasure in the classroom. According to her, the idea that a lesson should be exciting, or even “fun,” was discussed only by educators writing about pedagogical practices in grade and high schools. Instead, traditional and radical educators seem to have no interest in discussing the role of excitement in higher education (*Teaching to Transgress*, 7). Relying on her own experience, she emphasizes the

role of excitement as essential for teaching and learning: she believes in a pedagogy that is successful until professors are excited about teaching, and students about learning.

When I entered my first undergraduate classroom to teach, I relied on the example of those inspired black women teachers in my grade school, on Freire's work, and on feminist thinking about radical pedagogy. I longed passionately to teach differently from the way I had been taught since high school. The first paradigm that shaped my pedagogy was the idea that the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring. And if boredom should prevail, then pedagogical strategies were needed that would intervene, alter, even disrupt the atmosphere. Neither Freire's work nor feminist pedagogy examined the notion of pleasure in the classroom. (7)

Thus, she decides to talk about excitement because, for her, neither Freire nor feminist writings give much importance to the role of pleasure in schools. Instead, she envisions it as crucial to the success of the lesson. The idea of encouraging excitement or creating a "fun" classroom means, according to her, to transgress, because in contrast to the traditional idea of classroom as a serious place. Indeed, for her, if a "serious" class becomes boring, teaching cannot be successful. According to her, the only way to get rid of boredom, uninterest and apathy is indeed by creating a classroom community and bypassing the traditional educational pedagogy which gives authority only to the teacher. Indeed, she states that "excitement about ideas" is not sufficient to produce "an exciting learning process". For her, the ability to create excitement resides in students' and teachers' interests in each other, in hearing every voice and in recognizing every presence (8). In other words, in building a "learning community". Since teachers cannot create an exciting class on their own, she claims that excitement must be generated through collective effort (8). To create an exciting class and a learning community, with the involvement of both teachers and students, it is necessary that teachers allow students' participation and "genuinely value" students' presence, recognizing that everyone contributes and influences the classroom dynamic (8). For her, when everybody is responsible of the classroom dynamic, "learning is at its most meaningful and useful" and in such context "there is no failure" (*Critical Thinking* 11). When bell hooks claims that there can be no failure in such context, according to me, she intends that there is no need to fear the idea of exposing your own ideas, even though they are against the tide. She is in favor of a pedagogy that finally values everyone's presence: each voice needs to be respected, so that students do not feel afraid of intervening and feel free to talk. For her, it is pivotal that new pedagogical approaches insist that "everyone's presence is acknowledged", "since the vast majority of students learn through conservative, traditional educational practices and concern themselves only with the presence of the professor" (8). hooks urges for changes in teaching practices, "to emphasize that the pleasure of teaching is an act of resistance countering the overwhelming boredom, uninterest, and

apathy that so often characterize the way professors and students feel about teaching and learning, about the classroom experience” (10). As a matter of fact, with her works on teaching, she calls for a renewal in the teaching system, condemning the traditional “banking-system” of education for reinforcing domination and oppressive systems such as racism, sexism, class exploitation, and imperialism. In her opinion, her contributions to teaching practices can constitute the resources to build an open learning community, where everybody gets the possibility of expressing their own points of view. The revolutionary aspect of such approach is that it could also lead to a change of mind and be the hope for a social change. Instead, the theories of Freire and Foucault have identified education as the means through which society preserves its stability and conformity; they portray the classroom as a place where students are asked to intervene only if required. Sharing the same concerns, hooks bases her research on Freire’s and Foucault’s theories and condemns the conventional educational approach which seems to prevent students from getting involved in the lesson. Since they are just supposed to memorize information, repeat them and, then, gain knowledge which can be stored and used onward, students end up assuming that they have just to obey, unable to give a valuable contribution to the lesson. On the contrary, hooks is in favor of a manner of teaching which cares for the intellectual and spiritual growth of students (13). In addition, she hardly tries to challenge “the conservative banking system which encourages professors to believe deep down in the core of their being that they have nothing to learn from their students” (152). Indeed, she envisions as central goal of transformative pedagogy the possibility of converting the classroom from a safe place to a “democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute” (39). In particular, hooks calls for critical thinking, deconstruction, and engaged pedagogy in an educational world that sees students more comfortable in being passive. She describes critical thinking as an “interactive process” which demands equal participation by teachers and students (*Critical Thinking* 9). She claims that “it is a way of approaching ideas that aims to understand core, underlying truths, not simply that superficial truth that may be most obviously visible”. She also describes deconstruction as “a rage in academic circles”, since it finally urges people “to think long, hard, and critically; to unpack; to move beneath the surface; to work for knowledge” (9-10). She praises feedback as a way to stimulate critical thinking, urging teachers to create a climate of free expression, engaging students in dialogue. “Initiative from everyone” is, for hooks, “the most exciting aspect of critical thinking in the classroom”. It asks all students “to think passionately” and “to share ideas in a passionate, open manner”. In hook’s opinion, when everyone participates and shares in the classroom, both students and teachers can leave the classroom knowing that critical thinking empowers them (11). Indeed, I think that there is no need to fear the idea of a different pedagogical approach and see engaged pedagogy as less safe for students. As

underlined by hooks, there is no failure (11), only different and stimulating points of view. The focus on difference has the potential to revolutionize the classroom; students' involvement in the discussion gives the opportunity to explore differences between students as well as grow the teacher's experience. Thus, the concept of critical thinking is hardly linked to that of "learning community", since critical thinking empowers students and teachers when they build a community. hooks claims that she always enters the classroom with the assumption that she must build a community with her students, "to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor". In particular, she believes that "a feeling of community" generates a sense that there is a "shared commitment" and a "common good" that ties them all together (*Teaching to Transgress* 40). According to hooks, there is little focus on class differences in the United States; actually, class differences are particularly ignored. She thinks that, traditionally, people are brought to think that entering a classroom is like entering a zone where they are all equal. hooks does not agree with this "democratic idea" of classroom, since it does not take into consideration that everybody does not share the same backgrounds and privileges. Nullifying everybody's differences, students can instead feel uncomfortable sharing ideas which are unpopular. hooks identifies feminist and critical pedagogy as two "alternative paradigms for teaching which have really emphasized the issue of coming to voice". Such issue has become the core of more progressive teachers since it is still evident that "race, sex, and class privilege empower some students more than others, granting authority to some voices more than others". (179) She calls on students to be active participants, to link awareness with practice, and to create a class community. However, she does not intend to build a community by cancelling differences, pretending to be a productive group because its members are all equal. Differences are instead what make the learning community very fruitful and special. Such differences eventually become the reason for different feedbacks and interesting discussion. To give life to the teaching method that she calls "engaged pedagogy", however, it is important that both students and teachers feel comfortable dealing with difference. Since participation is essential, they cannot be passive consumers. They have to intervene and be part of the discussions. As Freire asserts, education can empower only when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor (13).

To change the educational system, and to deeply understand issues of difference, marginalization and privilege, hooks suggests considering contemporary movements in support of social issues, to renew minds and create new visions. However, "to create a culturally diverse academy", what she asks for seems to be very demanding. First of all, she requires that everybody commits themselves fully and affirm their solidarity "in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedication to truth" (13). She

motivates academics to not feel discouraged and despair when there is conflict (13). She asks to accept struggles and sacrifice, remaining both “patient and vigilant”, to transform the academy so that “it will be a place where cultural diversity informs every aspect of our learning” (13). I find that considering social movements in pedagogy studies can finally spread the message that it is not necessary to be victim of some kind of oppression to stand against and fight it: students can finally grasp that they do not need to be lesbian or gay to be concerned about the oppression of lesbians and gays, to be a woman or man of color to be concerned about racism, or to be a woman to support feminism. Everybody can stand in opposition to sexism, heterosexism, racism and other social oppressions. The introduction of movements for social change in the classrooms would make students learn social issues. This could finally make people aware of a reality that has been ignored for a very long time. Sometimes people do not think something is a problem if it does not touch them directly. Feminist pedagogy seems to teach students that it is their duty and responsibility to change society and that they have to commit themselves fully and actively to participate in the process of change. Feminist pedagogy expects that everybody works together for a common goal. Relying on hook’s research, teaching practices that enable transgressions permit people to open their minds and go beyond the boundaries of what is considered socially acceptable. According to me, a pedagogy which pays attention to social movements and raises awareness about social issues can create support for disadvantaged groups. Undoubtedly, it is pivotal open-mindedness to leave prejudices and change the mind. hooks devoted her life to highlighting the importance of open-mindedness as the key to critical thinking. I agree with her viewing open-mindedness and critical thinking as necessary to detach from one’s own beliefs and prejudices in order to embrace new perspectives.

Keeping an open mind is an essential requirement of critical thinking. I often talk about radical openness because it became clear to me, after years in academic settings, that it was far too easy to become attached to and protective of one's viewpoint, and to rule out other perspectives. So much academic training encourages teachers to assume that they must be "right" at all times. Instead, I propose that teachers must be open at all times, and we must be willing to acknowledge what we do not know. A radical commitment to openness maintains the integrity of the critical thinking process and its central role in education. (*Critical Thinking* 10)

What is interesting about the previous passage is that she talks of the difficulty to detach from one’s perspective and to embrace new viewpoints with reference to teachers. Indeed, she thinks that the commitment to open-mindedness and critical thinking requires courage and imagination (10) for teachers since it becomes particularly difficult for them to deal with the idea of being wrong. She wishes to overcome the traditional idea that the teacher must be always right and

states that “learning in action means” that “the shape of knowledge is constantly changing” (10). She urges for “seeing things from perspectives other than our own and envisioning the likely consequences of our position” (Barnet and Bedau qtd in hooks 10).

Even though hooks acknowledges only the influence of Freire on her work without mentioning Foucault, I also find Foucault’s influence on her whole thought, including her ideas on feminism. In one of his interviews, Foucault gave his definition of revolutionary action: “the simultaneous agitation of consciousness and institutions”, which implies the attack of “the relationships of power through the notions and institutions that function as their instruments, armature, and armor” (*Revolutionary Action* 228). I find profound connection with what hooks has written in *From Margin to Center*, when she defines feminism as revolutionary action:

Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires. (24)

3.1.1. Beyond Sexist Roles: Men in Feminist Pedagogy

Writing about critical thinking, hooks highlights the inclination of children to think critically until they face conformity and biases. For her, “children are organically predisposed to be critical thinkers”, longing to understand how life works and “across the boundaries of race, class, gender, and circumstance, children come into the world of wonder and language consumed with a desire for knowledge”. She defines children as “eager for knowledge” and “relentless interrogators”, “demanding to know the who, what, when, where, and why of life” (*Critical Thinking* 7-8). However, once they are taught obedience at home and in schools and learn that self-awareness and self-determination are wrong, according to her, they lose their passion for thinking and questioning. She asserts that most children “learn to suppress the memory of thinking as a passionate, pleasurable activity” and, even, that “thinking is dangerous”. As a consequence, they “stop enjoying the process of thinking and start fearing the thinking mind” (7-8). According to hooks, by the time they enroll at the college, most students “have come to dread thinking”. For her, these students enter college classrooms supposing that thinking is not necessary and that “all they will need to do is consume information and regurgitate it at the appropriate moments”. She blames this on the traditional higher education settings where critical and unconventional thinking is not encouraged (8). However, she does not limit herself to criticize conventional educational settings. She proposes settings where critical thinking is what mostly matters: “classrooms in which individual professors aim to educate as the practice of freedom” (8).

Therefore, it seems that the rigid sex roles given by patriarchal culture can be reinforced once entering a patriarchal school system. According to hooks and feminists, by raising children without sexism, it can be created a world where there would be no need for anti-sexist-movement (*Feminism is for Everybody* 72). However, nowadays there is need for contemporary feminist movement which focuses on children and the sexist sex roles that are imposed on children from birth on. (72) Anyway, she denounces that the feminist attention is more on girls than boys. She believes that “the critique of male patriarchy” as well as “the assumption that boys always had more privilege and power than girls fueled feminists prioritizing a focus on girls” (72). What she wishes to highlight is that the problem does not start only from male figures. For example, when confronting sexism within families, “more often than not female parents were the transmitters of sexist thinking” and “even in households where no adult male parental caregiver was present, women taught and teach children sexist thinking” (72). When feminist thinkers pay attention to children, they also try to create greater cultural awareness about the need for equally shared parenting, to sustain gender equality in parenthood as well as to build better relationships with children. Moreover, she underlines the importance of parenting without violence. In particular, feminists hardly fear the idea of parenting in violent ways since it can lead children to behave with violence when handling difficult situations (66), as well as to see violence as valuable and right reaction in some situation. However, in her opinion, even though people seem to be concerned about violence, they firmly refuse to link that violence to patriarchal thinking or male domination (66). Instead, she identifies violence as one of the biggest problems at the core of patriarchal education. She believes that violence is the expression of the male desire to dominate: she claims that when a woman gains her financial independence, men see violence as the only way to assert their domination at home. Moreover, she thinks that, in a patriarchal culture, even women learn to assert their power through violence, ending up using violence upon children. As a result, home becomes the first place where people learn to assert themselves through violence. However, she recognizes the refusal to acknowledge the perpetuation of violence by women as a “serious gap in feminist thinking and practice” (74). For her, women emphasize male domination to ignore how women abuse children embracing the patriarchal thinking according to which “the powerful have the right to rule over the powerless and can use any means to subordinate them” (74). Even worst, she highlights how the patriarchal culture romanticizes violence. Such romanticization is very mean since it leads violent men to think that their violence is not wrong as well as women to think that who makes use of violence over them can be in love with them. As a result, men do not seek for change, considering that society even rewards them for it and women do not leave abusive relationships, believing that their partner love them. According to hooks, violence is “glamorized,

made entertaining and sexually titillating”. People are day by day overwhelmed by “tales of male violence, especially male violence against women” through media, since “the more violent the male hero is (usually in his quest to save or protect a woman/victim) the more he receives love and affirmation from women”. This violence is rewarded because the “acts of violence in the interest of protection” are seen as a “gesture of care” and “love” for women. Equating the act of love with violence is really dangerous. For hooks, this equation also represents the reason why it is even more difficult to motivate people to work to end violence (*From Margin to Center* 122-123). hooks also blames on romances for encouraging women “to accept the idea that violence heightens and intensifies sexual pleasure”. In addition, “they are also encouraged to believe that violence is a sign of masculinity and a gesture of male care” and that “the degree to which a man becomes violently angry corresponds to the intensity of his affection and care”. Therefore, women learn that the acceptance of violence is essential “to receive the rewards of love and care” (124). She urges women to recognize violence, reminding them that its acceptance and idealization must be destroyed. For her, it is crucial that women assume responsibility for the role they play in condoning violence (130). She is afraid that “by only calling attention to male violence against women, or making militarism just another expression of male violence” there can be the risk to “fail to adequately address the problem of violence” and to “make it difficult to develop viable resistance strategies and solutions”. Acknowledged “the severity of the problem of male violence against women or male violence against nations or the planet”, people “must oppose the use of violence as a means of social control in all its manifestations: war, male violence against women, adult violence against children, teenage violence, racial violence, etc” (130). In other words, she asks that “feminist efforts to end male violence against women must be expanded into a movement to end all forms of violence” (130). To end all forms of violence, hooks states that children should be raised and educated to distance themselves from patriarchal values. So, they can shape a new kind of social consciousness. To eradicate patriarchal thinking, families should not impose rigid gender roles on boys and girls: for instance, by teaching girls to be always kind and sweet, because only boys are angry or violent. Every time children learn that only girls can play with dolls while boys are supposed to play with guns or cars, they reinforce sexist thinking. From childhood, children are taught that caring for others is a thing for females while violence is representative of males. According to this view, sexist bases continue to characterize society, since children get indoctrinated by family, society, and public institutions. Even much feminist literature can be sexist in its content. Moreover, she denounces the feminist movement claiming that while it “has successfully stimulated an awareness of the impact of sexist discrimination on the social status of women in the U.S., it has done little to eliminate sexist oppression”. In particular, she believes that

“teaching women how to defend themselves against male rapists is not the same as working to change society so that men will not rape” as well as “establishing houses for battered women does not change the psyches of the men who batter them, nor does it change the culture that promotes and condones their brutality”. She adds that “denouncing housework as menial labor does not restore to the woman houseworker the pride and dignity in her labor she is stripped of by patriarchal devaluation”. Strictly speaking, “demanding an end to institutionalized sexism does not ensure an end to sexist oppression”. According to her, “the rhetoric of feminism with its emphasis on resistance, rebellion, and revolution created an illusion of militancy and radicalism that masked the fact that feminism was in no way a challenge or a threat to capitalist patriarchy” (*Ain't I a Woman* 191). hooks associates the misunderstanding of feminism and its prime aim to the fact that most time feminist movement focus only on women, addressing mainly to them. Because of the lack of feminist literature addressed to men and the kind of rhetoric used to describe them, or simply because of the false beliefs about feminism, hooks acknowledges that most men would never buy or read a feminist book. Thus, as implied by hooks, they continue to preserve their idea of masculinity learned at home, confirmed at school, and reinforced by conservative mass media, which emphasizes men's abusive domination and romanticizes men's violence. Many male authors wrote about masculinity, criticizing patriarchy; in *The Will to Change* hooks cites books such as *The Male Machine*, *Men's Liberation*, *The Liberated Man*, *The Limits of Masculinity*, *For Men Against Sexism*, *Being a Man* and *White Hero, Black Beast*, which challenged the male acceptance of stereotyped sex roles (125), but these books have never generated great interest among men; at least, they have never had the impact that feminist books focusing on womanhood had on women. Perhaps, the reason is that, as men have a privileged position over women, they think that they have no need to be liberated. However, hooks stresses the fact that sexist thinking prevents people from reaching the wholeness of their being. Thus, from her point of view, even men need to be liberated and feminist writings addressed to boys can help them to construct an identity that is not rooted in sexism. As a solution, hooks proposes a body of feminist children's literature as an alternative to patriarchal perspectives. For her, only a feminist vision that embraces feminist masculinity, that loves boys and men, can renew men in society. Despite everything, she recognizes that demolishing patriarchal culture is a very demanding task. Indeed, feminist masculinity cannot be easily accepted, since the idea of masculinity has always been related to strength, power, and domination. Therefore, a man who embraces feminist masculinity is inevitably seen as a wimp, weak, and dominated by women. As a consequence, men lose interest, even though feminist masculinity offers them the possibility to find their true nature and get in touch with their feeling (*Will to Change* 111). As claimed by hooks, while patriarchal culture supports women's emotional development, on the contrary, it denies men

being in contact with their feelings; as a result, men avoid appearing vulnerable and emotional. In *All About Love*, hooks states that “the very concept of being a man and a real man has always implied that, when necessary, men can take action that breaks the rules”. Every day, through movies, television, and magazines, patriarchal canons show that men can do whatever they want. It is indeed their freedom that makes them men (37). Then, to men arrives the message that to be honest is to be “soft”, while “the ability to be dishonest and indifferent to the consequences makes a male hard, separates the men from the boys” (37). She quotes John Stoltenberg’s book *The End of Manhood: A Book for Men of Conscience* which “analyses the extent to which the masculine identity offered men as the ideal in patriarchal culture is one that requires all males to invent and invest in a false self”: she acknowledged that “from the moment little boys are taught they should not cry or express hurt, feelings of loneliness, or pain”, “they are learning how to mask true feelings”. She envisions the “worst-case scenarios” where men eventually learn “how to not feel anything ever”. These lessons are taught to males by other males but also by sexist mothers. In addition, she recognizes that even in the most loving families, where boys are encouraged to express their emotions, they risk to learn a different interpretation of masculinity outside home, or through media (37-38). In this case, it become pivotal the capacity to thinking critically. Indeed, hooks fears that young boy “may end up choosing patriarchal masculinity to be accepted by other boys and affirmed by male authority figures” (38). The ability to thinking critically and reevaluating some concepts can bring criticism, improvement, and, eventually, change. For this reason, I believe that feminist pedagogy must be addressed to men because also men need a revolution of values and must contribute to changing oppressive aspects of society. Indeed, men’s engagement is crucial in a world where gender equality is a norm. Feminists need men to challenge patriarchy as well as men need feminist thinking if they intend to free themselves from patriarchal models. Feminist pedagogy can create a space where boys can learn to be who they are without conforming to patriarchal visions. Indeed, feminist pedagogy, as conceived by hooks, tries to reveal patriarchy as a system of domination that dominates also men and aims to free men from patriarchal demands. hooks explains that breaking with rigid sex roles allows men to reach true freedom and independence. She depicts men as victimized by patriarchy, even though they receive rewards. Indeed, men should struggle to change themselves in a society that does not want them to change and guarantees them privileges. However, by approaching feminist pedagogy, people could learn to act on the basis of ethical values rather than personal rewards. Moreover, through feminist pedagogy, new conceptions of masculinity could be created. Since manhood has been defined as a cultural concept, feminist thinking could change the idea of manhood. Gender roles are indeed the roles that men and women are expected to occupy based on their sex and they are created on the basis of stereotypes

and exaggerated or erroneous statements about the nature of males and females. The main problem is the false assumption that “sex” and “gender” are synonyms. While sex is biological, and determined on the basis of physical differences between males and females, gender refers to the meanings, values, and characteristics that people of specific cultures attribute to different sexes. Thus, whenever we identify someone as a man or woman, inevitably social meanings and expectations come.

How we perceive people and what we expect from them on the basis of their sex depends on cultural ideas, such as the belief that women are more sensitive than men, or that men are more violent than women. The prejudices and discriminations based on sex or gender take the name of sexism. However, expectations about gender are incredibly powerful, since they construct the sense of who we and other people are. Thus, I propose to consider how much what we are depends on which society we are participating in rather than on our real being; acknowledging the way society can shape our identities can be the first step to liberating ourselves from social biases. Being aware of the social construction of such expectations finally prevents us from thinking of them as natural and objective. Feminist pedagogy can give students an idea of how society contributes to creating their identities. According to Johnson, people are shaped by society as individuals. Through examples of parents, teachers, and public or religious figures, people develop a sense of themselves and the world they live in.

In short, the tendency in this patriarchal society is to ignore and take for granted what we can least afford to overlook in trying to understand and change the world. We need to see and deal with the social roots that generate and nurture the social problems that are reflected in and manifested through the behavior of individuals. We cannot do this without realizing that we all participate in something larger than ourselves, something we did not create but that we now have the power to affect through the choices we make about how to participate. (Johnson 28)

Studying patriarchy, Allan Johnson states that “as individuals, we participate in it as we live our lives. Paradoxically, our participation both shapes our lives and gives us the opportunity to be part of changing or perpetuating it” (32). People participate in society, following its “rules”, but just as people make systems happen and perpetuate, so they can make it happen differently and change. However, to obtain the power to change systems, people need to know how they work and feminist pedagogy could give great insights in social issues.

3.2. “Feminist Knowledge is for Everybody”: bell hooks

The previous section examined how Freire’s and Foucault’s criticism of the conventional system of education has inspired bell hook’s research on teaching. She wrote three impressive books dedicated to

education: *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), *Teaching Community* (2003), and *Teaching Critical Thinking* (2010). Her trilogy celebrates the power of critical thinking and education “as practice of freedom” to build a community. Most of her works highlight the way patriarchal propaganda perpetuates systems of oppression. Proclaiming herself a critic of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal mass media, hooks asserts that “much of the pedagogy of domination is brought to us in the United States by mass media” (*Teaching Community* 11). Meanwhile, “the academization of feminism” and “the use of inaccessible language and/or academic jargon” (xii) prevent feminist ideas from reaching an audience outside the academic world. As a result, much of what people know, as well as the limits of their knowledge, is defined by the information contained in mass media. Indeed, according to hooks, most people think that “feminism is always and only about women seeking to be equal to men”, as well as that feminism is essentially “anti-male”. She associates this misunderstanding of feminist politics with “patriarchal mass media” (*From Margin to Center*, 1). Therefore, she produces works that can be addressed to people with diverse learning skills. Moreover, she focuses more on intersections between gender and other social factors, such as race and class. In her first book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, hooks examines the impact of sexism as well as racism on first feminists who exclusively advocated for the rights of white women. Indeed she states that “every women’s movement in America from its earliest origin to the present day has been built on a racist foundation”, since “the first white women’s rights advocates were never seeking social equality for all women; they were seeking social equality for white women” (122). According to hooks, even feminism did not change the fact that black women were still marginalized, since “in a capitalist, racist, imperialist state there is no one social status women share as a collective group” (136). Instead, “the racial apartheid social structure that characterized 19th and early 20th century American life was mirrored in the women’s rights movement” (122). As bell hooks states, in a racial imperialist nation, the dominant race shows their experience as representative. Hence, she condemns that the white American woman’s experience becomes a synonym of the American woman’s experience as well as the general word *woman* just refers to the white woman. Indeed, it is pivotal to recognize that women do not constitute a homogenous group with analogous interests, as gender is not the only determinant of women’s identity. She recognizes the privileges that some groups of women have over others since social groups in power emerge with the oppression of other minority groups. In this way, women of other races are perceived and perceive themselves as Others. Thus, the women’s movement described by hooks in the previous passages seems to serve the interests of the middle or upper-class educated white woman seeking social equality with men. However, this reality does not prevent bell hooks from proclaiming herself an active feminist advocating for the reconstruction of U.S. society (189).

She indeed underlines that this exclusion “in no way invalidates feminism as a political ideology” (122).

For ten years now I have been an active feminist. I have been working to destroy the psychology of dominance that permeates Western culture and shapes female/male sex roles and I have advocated reconstruction of U.S. society based on human rather than material values. I have been a student in women’s studies classes, a participant in feminist seminars, organizations, and various women’s groups. Initially I believed that the women who were active in feminist activities were concerned about sexist oppression and its impact on women as a collective group. But I became disillusioned as I saw various groups of women appropriating feminism to serve their own opportunistic ends. Whether it was women university professors crying sexist oppression (rather than sexist discrimination) to attract attention to their efforts to gain promotion; or women using feminism to mask their sexist attitudes; or women writers superficially exploring feminist themes to advance their own careers, it was evident that eliminating sexist oppression was not the primary concern. While their rallying cry was sexist oppression, they showed little concern about the status of women as a collective group in our society. (189-190)

She condemns all the white feminists who denounce the oppressive imperialistic, capitalistic, and sexist system, while they just struggle to fully participate in it. Thus, in proclaiming herself feminist, she advocates for “authentic feminism”, whose primary concern is the liberation, for both females and males, from sexist role patterns. In her book *Feminism is for Everybody*, she shares her favorite definition, with the hope that it would become very common: “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (1). What makes me prefer hook’s definition is that there does not appear the word “women”, making it immediately clear that feminism is not exclusively committed to them. Indeed, her definition does not imply that men are the enemy (1). As she claims, “by naming sexism as the problem”, it clarifies that sexism is the problem, “whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult” (1). At the same time, it also underlines the intersectionality of feminism putting the word “oppression” alongside sexism, establishing that feminism aims to end also other forms of injustice towards minority groups. In short, she wants to explicate that the problem is sexism and not men. In addition, she underlines that feminism does not involve only issues of sex and gender; other forms of oppression and discrimination concern other social issues such as class, race, religion and power. I find it strategic that she chooses it to open her book *Feminism is for everybody*, because feminist knowledge is and must be for everybody since a feminist revolution is not possible for women alone. Moreover, it can be for everybody if its understanding finally becomes clear. Transforming the consciousness of society as a whole implies transforming both women’s and men’s consciousness. hook’s whole work emphasizes that both women and men have been socialized to passively accept sexist ideology. Thus, even though they

do not have to blame themselves for accepting sexism, they must assume responsibility for eliminating it (*From Margin to Center* 72). Emphasis on men as the enemies makes only worse the relationship between women and men (76) while bonding together is necessary to end sexism. As hooks states, if feminists wrongly assume that men are the enemy, they fail to acknowledge the real enemy: ideologies of domination rooted in western society and culture.

Another reason why I find hook's definition of feminism very powerful is that it shifts attention to the purpose rather than the mere meaning of the word. I find feminism very demanding to define since it evolved and critically empowered over time; it has been conceived differently in its development until acquiring the plural pattern -s: in the introduction to *Where the Meanings Are*, Catharine Stimpson assumes that since the 1960s, feminism has split until it has become feminisms, a set of groups, still linked together but with their own identity and agenda. She employs a transdisciplinary approach to encourage a greater understanding of the differences among women as socially-constructed: she argues that, as "off-springs of culture", what is meant by women and men can change over time and this is the reason why feminisms demand to begin again and again. Stimpson paraphrases feminist change as an "incessant process" claiming that "feminisms demand change because time changes, compositions such as art, culture, interpretations, ideologies and language change, teachers and students change" (*Beginning Again and Again*). Indeed, the most recent wave of feminism scholarship focuses more and more on the structure of society and culture, the place where oppression begins and extends until penetrates social consciousness. Stimpson values the huge contribution given by the legitimate pressure of groups such as black feminists, so that "feminist critics are now more apt to remember that every woman is more than a woman: she belongs to a class, a race, a nation, a family, a tribe, a time, a place" (*Feminism and Feminist Criticism* 276). In this passage, Stimpson acknowledges the mistake made by the feminist critics who, throughout the centuries, missed that gender is only one of the aspects which influence women's lives and that the only word "woman" cannot be enough. This acknowledgment is crucial in the development of feminism and to get to what I mean by feminism today: while in the beginning, feminists fought for the interests of a single group of women, without recognizing it, in the end, they finally faced the reality that women's lives were influenced by aspects of social life who made them different from each other. As a consequence, throughout time, one of the feminist subjects has become the study of differences (Stimpson, *Beginning Again and Again*). Such evolvement and critical growth have led to the awareness of the discrimination that characterized the movement itself at the very beginning. I urge the spread of feminist propaganda since I find it unacceptable that the term is still misunderstood today. Particularly, I think that spreading a definition of feminism which clarifies its goal is crucial. Indeed, hook's definition shows the core of the movement, going straight to the point: end

oppression, discrimination and domination in society. I also appreciate that her definition goes against the rhetoric that women are victims and men oppressors. There is a shift of focus from women to individuals. It finally clarifies that feminism does not exist only to promote (one small category of privileged) women's rights. The rhetoric that feminism supports every individual's (every woman's and even men's) rights is much more impressive. Spreading this definition is useful to clarify that feminism does not privilege women over men. According to hooks, men can even benefit from feminism: she thinks that some advantages that men receive from patriarchy come with a price, as some of them find it difficult to be patriarchs. For hooks, the very problem is the way people have been socialized from birth to accept sexism and to think and act in a sexist way. In other words, also men have to meet the patriarchal society's expectations. I understand that it comes difficult to acknowledge also men as victims since patriarchy harm primarily women and gives much more benefits to men as well as I understand that the privileged group tries to maintain its position rather than struggle for equality. Indeed, according to me, in a typical Western consumer-capitalist and patriarchal society, women feel more social pressure: on the one hand, there is patriarchy that wants all women confined at home, caring for their husbands and children, and on the other hand, there is capitalism which wants all women to work and to contribute to the market economy. Most times, a lot of women have to decide between career and family and in doing that, they usually have to face other's women judgments. Speaking of which, hooks underlines a strong point of sexist societies: patriarchal propaganda teaches that women cannot bond together, since they are "naturally" invidious, jealous, and against each other, preventing their sisterhood's bond. She states that patriarchal society has socialized women to see themselves as inferior to men, as well as to see themselves "always and only in competition with one another for patriarchal approval". As a result, they end up looking upon each other "with jealousy, fear, and hatred", and judging each other "without compassion and punish one another harshly" (*Feminism is for Everybody* 14). Thus, she calls for feminism which can finally help society to unlearn patriarchal and sexist thinking. Using her own words, feminist thinking can enable people "to break free of the hold patriarchal thinking had on our consciousness" (14). She wishes for a society where also female bonding is affirmed and accepted as male bonding. Indeed, she asserts that in patriarchal culture, it is supposed and taken for granted that "men in groups would stick together" and support one another, while female bonding is not possible. She claims that it is considered "an act of treason" (14). In addition, according to hooks, masculine society encourages women to believe they are valueless and obtain value only by bonding with men (*From Margin to Center* 43). She claims that women have been socialized to think they cannot bond with one another because they are "natural enemies" (43). Women are taught, throughout their own life, that their relationships cannot

empower them and these lessons, learned very well, prevent women themselves to build a sustained feminist movement. Even hooks uses the verb *unlearn* (43): she pleads for women to unlearn such lessons, to live and work in solidarity. She declares that women must learn the true meaning and value of Sisterhood to form a tight-knit group, in spite of differences between each other. She calls for solidarity, admitting that “although contemporary feminist movement should have provided a training ground for women to learn about political solidarity, Sisterhood was not viewed as a revolutionary accomplishment women would work and struggle to obtain”. What she condemns is that “the vision of Sisterhood evoked by women's liberationists was based on the idea of common oppression”, when “the idea of common oppression was a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality”. Indeed, for her, “bourgeois white women, both liberal and radical in perspective” firstly “professed belief in the notion of common oppression” but the real obstacle is that “women are divided by sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices” and “sustained woman bonding can occur only when these divisions are confronted and the necessary steps are taken to eliminate them”. (43) According to hooks, many women are not supportive of one another because they do not experience the same oppression, and the idea of “common oppression” undermines the success of the movement. I agree with her in asserting that people (both women and men) need to bond together, even though they do not share the same kind of oppression. This could make the movement more powerful, permitting all people, even the most privileged, to recognize that some injustices hurt others and must be fought. Overcoming the idea of “common oppression” could make men join the movement, even though the inequality which affects aspects of women’s lives does not hurt them directly. To sum up, hooks condemns feminists who think that unity between women can never be possible because of the differences between them and abandon the idea of Sisterhood; however, without solidarity, the movement weakens and a real change in society would never happen (44). I think this is one of the most important lessons feminist thinking can give to people: there is no need to share the same kind of oppression to fight together.

Special interest groups lead women to believe that only socialist feminists should be concerned about class; that only lesbian feminists should be concerned about the oppression of lesbians and gay men; that only black women or other women of color should be concerned about racism. Every woman can stand in political opposition to sexist, racist, heterosexist, and classist oppression. (*From Margin to Center* 61)

The rhetoric of common oppression must be eradicated since oppressed groups alone will never succeed in ending oppression. On the contrary, most times, oppressed groups even contribute to perpetuating their own oppression: as already highlighted, a lot of women have internalized

patriarchal values and allowed them to survive. They are not aware of the role that they play in preserving their oppression, or even they never realize that they are oppressed. According to hooks, patriarchal societies indoctrinate women as well as men to accept and maintain patriarchal attitudes. From childhood, people are constantly influenced by messages (through media, family, and institutions) that have shaped their ideas and convictions. From this perspective, who we and other people think we are has a lot to do with where we are in relation to the social system in which we participate and the position that we occupy in it. It is hard to imagine just who we would be and what our existence would consist of if we took away all of our connections to the symbols, ideas, and relationships that make up social systems (Johnson 40). Sociologist Allan Johnson has analyzed patriarchy and how it works, giving his readers the possibility of realizing how social systems such as patriarchy shape individuals and the role these individuals have in perpetuating such systems. Understanding that we all participate in an oppressive system, allowing it to survive, we can eventually acknowledge also that we have the power to change it.

3.2.1. Misreading Feminism: The Media

Since hooks alerts her readers to the role of media in reinforcing patriarchy, I decided to dedicate the following section to analyzing media in U.S. society. In contemporary society, mass media is not only a very powerful tool for spreading and reinforcing patriarchal thinking, influencing public opinion, but it also represents the main source where people learn about feminism. Since the images and the messages spread by media shape American society and influence the way people think and act, analysis of media stresses the importance of the role of education in changing society; it is under these circumstances that feminist pedagogy can give a great contribution to opening everybody's mind and heart. According to hooks, in the U.S., mass media works to protect white-male supremacy, and to make the women's movement appear anti-male. She identifies mass media as "the weapon used to destroy the new-found independence of women" (*Ain't I a Woman* 177). She denounces the endless propaganda which encourages white and black women "to believe that a woman's place was in the home—that her fulfillment in life depended on finding the right man to marry and producing a family" (177). Such propaganda also persuades to not compete with men in the job market, confining them to stereotyped sex roles and to jobs like teaching and nursing (177). Many western societies have believed that women are more nurturing than men. Indeed, the traditional family ideal sees the married woman quitting her job because she should nurture her family by working full-time within the home rather than taking employment outside. Differently, the traditional view of the masculine gender role suggests that men are the leaders and the head of their households, providing financially for the family and making important family decisions. For hooks, this represents a clear example of how patriarchy

weighs even on men's lives. She also highlights the fact that society as a whole tends to consider the father who does equal parenting as unique and special rather than as the representative of what should be the norm is a further example of sexism that characterizes society. Such men are indeed seen as assuming a "maternal" role (138). Labeling the role of a father as "maternal" is a clear example of how language stresses sexism in a patriarchal society. hooks also condemns mass media for the damage made to US women in the 50s, including black women obsessed with pursuing the ideal of femininity described on television, in books, and in magazines, striving to adapt themselves to standards set by the dominant white society (178). Indeed, she talks of a "pursuit of idealized femininity": a legacy left, since still today mass media are full of fatphobic messages and unrealistic body images which lead women to strive to live up to strict beauty standards. Whenever a woman thinks that all that counts in her life is being good-looking, valuing appearance over essence, she reduces herself to a sexual object for men. According to me, media fool women to meet the aspirations of a patriarchal society, which sees the value of a woman in being appetible for a man and in building a family with him, which in turn fits the goals of a consumeristic society, where the family is the fundamental consumer unit. On the other hand, confining women to jobs like teaching and nursing is another patriarchal attempt to assume that women are biologically programmed to take care of others and naturally committed to caregiving work. It is worth underlining that hooks talked about the 50s; but the attention on social issues is incredibly increased nowadays, and there is still a lot to work on. In the following passage, hooks talks of the past days and, sadly, nowadays feminist goals have not been accomplished yet.

Feminist theory had as its primary goal explaining to women and men how sexist thinking worked and how we could challenge and change it. In those days most of us had been socialized by parents and society to accept sexist thinking. We had not taken the time to figure out the roots of our perceptions. Feminist thinking and feminist theory urged us to do that. (19)

According to hooks, feminism must clarify how sexist thinking works and how people can challenge it to change society. Thus, she urges spreading feminism in a society that socializes its citizens to accept and preserve sexism and other systems of oppression. Indeed, even female figures sometimes are the patriarchal voices in our lives. Grandmothers, mothers, and female teachers teach sexist assumptions and patriarchal values without being really aware of the damage they are causing, perpetuating a system that reinforces gender inequality and their own oppression. In other words, it seems that women are socially encouraged to preserve their exploitation.

I really appreciate that hooks always includes men in her pleas. Concerning this point, hooks notices a lack of feminist literature addressed to men. She believes that if they understood more about feminism, they would not fear it; they could even find that it can be helpful for them. Such

clarifications are important since mass media spreads fake notions and false messages about feminism. In my opinion, the media continues popularizing the idea that feminism essentially is women against men and feminists are presented as annoying women with the desire to be equal to men, while hypocritically considering themselves superior. After years of critical analyses which have permitted the growth of the movement, the media still reduces feminism to a mere matter of sex and gender, based on men-hating. According to hooks, the media emphasizes that we do not need feminism anymore since now women have equal rights. For her, the belief that now women are finally free, and equal to men, is strictly linked to the dynamic of work. Indeed, most people nowadays would argue that feminism is no longer relevant since work liberated women from male domination. However, inequality dominates the working field since, on average, most women still do not get equal pay for equal work; in addition, history has largely demonstrated and confirmed that work does not liberate women from male domination. Many professional rich women remain in relationships with men where male domination is the norm. And then, most women are angry because they have found themselves working long hours at home as long as at work (hooks, *Will to Change* 49). Moreover, the notion of “work liberates women”, already used in past, alienated many poor and working-class women, especially non-white women (hooks, *From Margin to Center* 96). hooks believes that such a discussion highlights the trapping of patriarchal masculinity: money, power and sex (129-130). According to hooks, masculine power has been, indeed, tragically seen as synonymous with the ability of males to provide financially (126). For her, with women entering the area of work, where they could be even bosses, domination of women and children in the private sphere remained the only opportunity to assert a patriarchal authority.

Early on in the feminist movement women insisted that men had the upper hand, because they usually controlled the finances. Now that women’s earning power has greatly increased (though it is not on a par with men’s), and women are more economically independent, men who want to maintain dominance must deploy subtler strategies to colonize and disempower them. Even the wealthiest professional woman can be “brought down” by being in a relationship where she longs to be loved and is consistently lied to. (*All About Love* 40-41)

In *All About Love*, bell hooks condemns the patriarchal culture which assumes that love can also exist in a situation where one group dominates another, perpetuating a vision of love that is oppressive and abusive. The idea that love can be associated to violence is really dangerous. Many people who live abusive relationships still think that their partner can be loving, even though violent. This is a commonly accepted assumption in patriarchal culture (40). Indeed, “patriarchal masculinity requires of boys and men not only that they see themselves as more powerful and superior to women but that they do whatever it takes to maintain their controlling

position” and to gain power in relationships (40). hooks urges for a new vision of love where it can never coexist with violence, or oppression.

Female working is inevitably linked to motherhood, another controversial issue that is still open to debate. Indeed, “some white middle-class, college-educated women argued that motherhood was a serious obstacle to women's liberation, a trap confining women to the home, keeping them tied to cleaning, cooking, and child care. Others simply identified motherhood and childrearing as the locus of women's oppression” (hooks, *From Margin to Center* 133). Meanwhile, other feminist activists tend to romanticize motherhood “employing the same terminology that is used by sexists to suggest that women are inherently life-affirming nurturers, feminist activists reinforce central tenets of male supremacist ideology”. In particular, “they imply that motherhood is a woman's truest vocation; that women who do not mother, whose lives may be focused more exclusively on a career, creative work, or political work are missing out, are doomed to live emotionally unfulfilled lives” (135). I think that this discussion highlights that there can always be a hint of judgment when discussing women’s lives. Moreover, women’s decisions are never considered free choices. As if women’s choices should be always analyzed in relation to the cultural influence or the social context. I advocate for feminism that also embraces the idea that a woman can decide to stay home nursing her family because it is her own choice. This discussion also underlines that social biases have a huge impact on people’s decisions. It is worth reflecting if women (as well as men) make their choices because they deeply desire to make them or if they just attempt to fit social standards, with the belief that they are doing what is right and acceptable. Thus, I would like to propose a pedagogy which can help people to discern the difference between the two.

Through her analysis, hooks condemns the images of violence presented in the media, even though she recognizes that domestic violence was widespread much before the era of mass media (*All About Love* 98). She thinks that people are highly influenced by the images of violent dehumanization shown to them as entertaining and they end up accepting such acts in their daily life; according to her, images of violence in the media are romanticized and made interesting and seductive (98). However, she acknowledges that such images would not change until the patriarchal thinking and perspective changes. Indeed, she clarifies that “the vast majority of the images we see are created from a patriarchal standpoint” and it is obvious that whoever creates these images “have an investment in providing us with representations that reflect their values and the social institutions they wish to uphold” (96). She hopes in “reeducation”, even though she recognizes that “individual women and men who do not see themselves as victims of patriarchal power find it difficult to take seriously the need to challenge and change patriarchal thinking”. Moreover, since “patriarchy, like any system of domination (for example, racism), relies on socializing everyone to believe that in all

human relations there is an inferior and a superior party”, who support patriarchal thinking, would maintain power and control by whatever means (96-97). In other words, hooks tries to explain that patriarchal thinking will dominate the canons of mass media until people will be exclusively interested in patriarchal productions. To succeed, “they need a consumer audience to whom they can sell their product” and hooks envisions in our power as consumers the power to demand change (96-97). In addition, according to her, patriarchal media as well as advertising encourages lovelessness. Particularly, she claims that “lovelessness is a boon to consumerism”, since “keeping people in a constant state of lack, in perpetual desire, strengthens the marketplace economy” (47). For hooks, this cultural propaganda also inspires lies, while she urges for a commitment to truth-telling. She sees revealing one’s true self as the weapon to fight biases and wrong beliefs since “when we hear another person’s thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, it is more difficult to project on them our perceptions of who they are” (49). Nowadays people are encouraged to see honest people as naïve and losers and, as a consequence, they fear exposing their true feelings. Her idea is that, in a patriarchal world, people tend to create false selves and mask themselves; for example, males hide their feelings in order to not appear weak and too sensitive, a characteristic considered typical of females, while females deny their feelings in order to attract and please others. However, hooks does not limit herself to demonize the media. On the contrary, she gives her solution suggesting that, as consumers, people have the power to change things: she motivates us claiming that “we can exercise the power all the time by not choosing to invest time, energy, or funds to support the production and dissemination of mass media images that do not reflect life-enhancing values, that undermine a love ethic” (97-98). Another reason why I decide to explore media is that its analysis allows us to investigate many feminist relevant issues. For example, while talking of women striving for being desirable to men or of families understood as traditional families with a man and a woman, it has to be noted that the idea of sexual desire or relationships in general, is not inclusive, but specific to heterosexual and monogamous relationships. Heterosexist oppression is indeed another form of oppression. In *From Margin to Center*, hooks affirms that the feminist movement challenges the idea that female sexuality exists to serve the sexual needs of men. hooks calls for “sexual liberation” by asserting that being sexually free means being free to explore your own sexuality, without fear of humiliation, discomfort, or abuse. To choose implies being free of experiencing and, then, defining your sexuality.

To sum up, hooks’ research underlines that the kind of messages spread by media reinforces discriminatory beliefs. According to her, media is primarily dominated by the patriarchal ideology, which reminds the audience to think and act according to the patriarchal, consumeristic, and capitalistic rules. Moreover, patriarchal media is very popular and appreciated since it reflects the

patriarchal values of society and find favor among masses. Thus, I also do not limit myself to demonize media. On the contrary, I do not demonize media at all. I think that what matters is the use we decide to make of it. Since the huge influence that mass media has on people cannot be denied, I find that media could become a very powerful tool for education. Since feminism needs to go much beyond the academic field to reach everybody, I see the media as a good means to spread feminist ideology. In the previous chapters, we have understood that even learning is a privilege and that most people lack the opportunity to learn about feminism. The media would be pivotal in spreading the message of “authentic” feminism; it could become the powerful means which can make feminism for everybody. Even though nowadays you can find more inclusive and less discriminatory messages in the media, I believe that the mainstream still depicts the problems analyzed by hooks; and unless you deliberately decide to follow a kind of stream, you are surrounded by the dominant one. Indeed, thanks to social networks, today people have the possibility of following intellectuals or various professionals who spread messages capable of stimulating critical thinking. A lot of them are interested in social issues and use their social channels to connect with as many people as possible. This is a wonderful use of social networks because it gives the opportunity to learn, and it is totally free. Nowadays, the possibility of approaching feminist thinking is mostly reserved to college-educated women, as most men are not interested at all. hooks urges to create a mass-based movement that offers feminist education to everyone, since “sharing feminist thought and practice sustains feminist movement”. She reminds her readers that “feminist knowledge is for everybody” (24), but if feminist education is not offered to everybody, the feminist theory will always be reduced to the negative information produced by the mainstream media.

3.2.2. Language: The Importance of Words

The previous section stressed the importance of words in everyday life and the power that language can have to influence people and shape identities. Indeed, the language used to describe feminists has a great impact on the way people eventually perceive them. In the introduction of *Feminism is for Everybody*, hooks feels the need to explain what she means by feminism because of the common misreading of the term; she relates this misunderstanding to the way society influences the masses. Indeed, she acknowledges that most people who proclaim themselves against feminism do not even know what it actually is about.

I tend to hear all about the evil of feminism and the bad feminists: how "they" hate men; how "they" want to go against nature and god; how "they" are all lesbians; how "they" are taking all the jobs and making the world hard for white men, who do not stand a chance. When I ask these

same folks about the feminist books or magazines they read, when I ask them about the feminist talks they have heard, about the feminist activists they know, they respond by letting me know that everything they know about feminism has come into their lives thirdhand, that they really have not come close enough to feminist movement to know what really happens, what it's really about. Mostly they think feminism is a bunch of angry women who want to be like men. They do not even think about feminism as being about rights - about women gaining equal rights. When I talk about the feminism I know - up close and personal- they willingly listen, although when our conversations end, they are quick to tell me I am different, not like the "real" feminists who hate men, who are angry. I assure them I am as a real and as radical a feminist as one can be, and if they dare to come closer to feminism they will see it is not how they have imagined it. (xvii-xviii)

She condemns the stereotypes that people have associated with feminists: they are often labeled as queer, lesbian, abortion advocates, and men-haters who want their jobs and privileges. People hardly talk about equal rights that are fair to obtain. This is the reason why it is still necessary to spread the aim of feminism: it is not still clear that it is about ending all forms of social oppression. This section highlights that words deserve much more attention since they can shape our identities and influence our behaviors. Words can have a different impact on people. The choice of one term rather than another can be very effective: for instance, hooks proposed the use of "I advocate feminism" instead of "I am feminist":

To emphasize that engagement with feminist struggle as political commitment we could avoid using the phrase "I am a feminist" (a linguistic structure designed to refer to some personal aspect of identity and self-definition) and could state "I advocate feminism." Because there has been undue emphasis placed on feminism as an identity or lifestyle, people usually resort to stereotyped perspectives on feminism. Deflecting attention away from stereotypes is necessary if we are to revise our strategy and direction. I have found that saying "I am a feminist" usually means I am plugged into preconceived notions of identity, role, or behavior. When I say "I advocate feminism" the response is usually "what is feminism?" A phrase like "I advocate" does not imply the kind of absolutism that is suggested by "I am." It does not engage us in the either/ or dualistic thinking that is the central ideological component of all systems of domination in Western society. It implies that a choice has been made, that commitment to feminism is an act of will. It does not suggest that by committing oneself to feminism, the possibility of supporting other political movements is negated. (*From Margin to Center* 29)

As hooks points out, the use of the verb "advocate" instead of "be" avoids the kind of absolutism to which the verb "be" alludes. Telling "I advocate feminism" pushes people to associate feminists with the goals of the movement; I think that it makes other people avoid the connection "I am feminism" with "I am lesbian/man-hater/abortion-supporter" and it also allows people to understand

that being feminist does not prevent them to be a supporter of other movements. In addition, hooks suggests that it implies an act of will, because you do not need to be woman, lesbian, man-hater or abortion-supporter to be a feminist. You can choose to embrace its cause, whoever you are, even and especially a man.

What feminism aims for is very challenging, since resisting male domination and breaking ties to sexism demands transforming people's consciousness. As already mentioned, feminism is not only about learning, it has a lot to do with unlearning. People do not have to limit themselves to recognize sexism and fight it, they have to be deeply capable of unlearning it. Emphasis on unlearning is determining. Feminist writings focus on learning how sexism manifests in our lives, but the real work to do is working within ourselves, examining our consciousness to transform our sexist thoughts and action. Advocating for feminism and still being attached to unconscious forms of oppression is possible. I deeply think that feminist thinking allows people to understand the intricacy of situations and the complexity of people, it could help to judge less and understand more. For example, when we recognize the hypocrisy of our own behaviors, it becomes easier to understand others. hooks teaches that institutionalized sexism can be very slimy, pointing out that women are sexist above all towards each other. For her, while sexism teaches women to be sex objects for men, it also manifests when women who have repudiated this role feel contemptuous and superior in relation to those women who have not (47). About women abusing other women, she claims:

All over the United States, women spend hours of their time daily verbally abusing other women, usually through malicious gossip (not to be confused with gossip as positive communication). Television soap operas and night time dramas continually portray woman-to woman relationships as characterized by aggression, contempt, and competitiveness. In feminist circles sexism towards women is expressed by abusive trashing, total disregard and lack of concern or interest in women who have not joined feminist movement. (48)

In her opinion, oppressive people seldom act repressively and brutally because they have been socialized to act in this way and to think that it is right. I think that there are many aspects to take into consideration, such as personal attitude, but feminist pedagogy could really help to recognize the role that society has in shaping identities. Through this acknowledgment, people could deeply understand themselves and get a move on to change things.

3.2.3. Turning Away from the Rhetoric of the Victim

Acknowledged the importance of words in shaping identities, hooks criticizes the rhetoric of victimhood employed by feminists. Indeed, she hardly believes that "sexist ideology teaches women

that to be female is to be a victim” (*From Margin to Center* 45). She condemns the “psychology of female victimization” as “utterly disempowering”. In particular, she recognizes that “there is clearly a connection between submitting to abuse and the extent to which any of us already feels that we are destined to be victimized” (*Teaching Community* 150). Thereby, she has “consistently called on women to resist identification with victimhood as the only possible location from which to struggle for social change” (142). She repudiates the idea of “making shared victimization the basis for woman bonding” (*From Margin to Center* 45), which has been largely embraced by women’s liberationists. Moreover, she rejects the idea that women have to conceive themselves as powerless victims to feel that feminist movement can be relevant to their lives. The women-victims equation consequently excludes “self-affirming women” from feminist movement. Women who do not see themselves as victims end up believing that there is no place for them in feminist movement, or even worst, that they do not need it as well as the movement does not need their participation. Instead, hooks actually suggests avoiding expressions that depict women as victims, because by doing that people just serve the existing ideology. Such rhetoric is one of the reasons why women find it so difficult to bond together; indeed it makes women distance themselves from one another. There are women who think they do not need feminism because they are not negatively affected by the consequences of social inequality. Besides individualizing the problem, once again she gives her solution: she urges women to bond together on the basis of their “political commitment to a feminist movement that aims to end sexist oppression”, “rather than bond on the basis of shared victimization or in response to a false sense of a common enemy” (47). She is particularly against the principle of bonding “on the terms set by the dominant ideology of the culture” (47). Indeed, identifying men as enemies is, for hooks, another arduous mistake in feminist rhetoric, which is important to avoid for an alliance of all the members of society. The common enemy is sexism, as well as other forms of oppression; and it usually manifests in the behaviors of women too. By insisting that only men are the enemy, women cannot identify and challenge their sexist attitudes towards other women. “Bonding as victims” women can never “assume responsibility for confronting the complexity of their own experience”. Specifically, hooks refers to white women who never question their sexist views towards women “unlike themselves”, “exploring the impact of race and class privilege on their relationships to women outside their race/ class groups” (45-46). For hooks, identifying themselves as victims and blaming only on men could be threatening since could “abdicate responsibility for their role in the maintenance and perpetuation of sexism, racism, and classism” (46). Awareness and responsibility are necessary tasks to build political consciousness (46). Indeed, even feminists can internalize sexist or other oppressive ideologies and continue to perpetuate repressive behaviors and, according to hooks, feminist writings place little

emphasis on ways to unlearn sexism. For example, hooks writes about the racism implemented by white activists, who tend to exclude black women, making them feel that feminism is not for them. Moreover, she describes white feminist activists' call for Sisterhood as a "racist gesture". She reports her own experience, claiming that many white women have said to her to want "black women and other non-white women to join the movement", totally unaware of their perception that they somehow "own" the movement, that they are the "hosts" inviting minority groups as "guests". (53) This passage recalls the notion of language, the choice of words, and their importance. People must learn to weigh words because even when they have no intention, they can hurt and make other people feel bad and excluded; people must learn to acknowledge if words express abusive feelings. Giving importance to the words used and thinking about them can reveal to what extent people have internalized biases. Moreover, hooks urges us to recognize that "this unconscious maintenance and perpetuation of white supremacy is dangerous" since racist attitudes cannot be changed if people do not recognize that they exist (54). According to hooks, the only way to put an end to the women-to-women negative behaviors is to accept we are simply different and to start talking without competition (63). For her, women "do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression" and "do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity" (65). She states that women "do not need anti-male sentiments" to bond together, since they can be simply "united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression, united in political solidarity" (65). hooks sees diversity and acceptance of such diversity as the actual way to create solidarity. To be a community, hooks urges for solidarity between women who, in spite of their differences, share the same beliefs and aim for the same goal. "To experience solidarity", for her, women "must have a community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood" (64). She asserts that "there is need for diversity, disagreement, and difference" for the feminist movement to grow. Indeed, women should not avoid confrontation and fear diversity. If they desire to feel always "safe", they "may never experience any revolutionary change, any transformation, individually or collectively". Struggling actively in a truly supportive way to understand differences, to change "misguided, distorted perspectives", women "lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity". (64)

In conclusion, acknowledgment is necessary. Only it can lead to transformation since some people are not aware of their sexist thoughts, words, and actions. This unconscious perpetuation of sexism is very dangerous considering that sexist attitudes cannot be fought until we do not recognize them. Feminist pedagogy can help people to recognize sexism and the role that society plays in sustaining it. It can make women aware of their behaviors and create the right context for female, and also human, bonding. In *Where the Meanings Are*, Stimpson claims: "the alliance of

people who oppose Women's Studies is more often implicit than explicit, more a quiet, mutual recognition than a public pledge of common interest. What they share, and another weight that Women's Studies must bear, is the cultural bias against intelligent women" (47). Stimpson makes explicit that ignorance is crucial to perpetuating the patriarchal system. Without facing all these truths, women live all their lives without recognizing when they face a system of domination, or if they even help it to survive. However, for a revolution of values, I hardly think that we must involve men in this discourse. As members of society, they are not only part of the problem; instead, they can play a great role in the solution, since no change would be possible without them. The will to change and the responsibility to make a change must be collective. It seems still necessary to clarify that it is not a war between the sexes and that we need to be on the same side. Moreover, by positing women and men in a conflict between the sexes, the empowerment of women would necessarily be at the expense of men (hooks, *From Margin to Center* 67). It must be clarified that feminism does not aim to the dominance of women over men, it aims to end all kinds of dominance, with a focus on human relationships and the value of everybody's differences. This is the reason why I agree with hooks who encourages feminists to stop addressing their messages only to women, urging them to start involving men. I think that addressing feminist writing only to women, expecting struggles only from them, can never change society: since most of the oppression comes from men, they also need to know and understand. To try to eradicate all kinds of oppression, and eliminate inequality we need to make also men understand the feminist struggle and its motivations. As already told, the reason why most people know nothing about feminism is that they do not get educated about it. I propose the introduction of feminist pedagogy in public schools because it is unacceptable that people cannot learn what feminism is really about unless they join some gender studies courses at the university. People deserve the truth much earlier and need to be able to think critically and be aware of their true feelings. hooks claims:

Living consciously means we think critically about ourselves the basic questions who, what, when, where, and why. Answering these questions usually provides us with a level of awareness that enlightens. Branden contends: "To live consciously means to seek to be aware of everything that bears on our actions, purposes, values, and goals – to the best of our ability, whatever that ability may be – and to behave in accordance with that which we see and know." To live consciously we have to engage in critical reflection about the world we live in and know most intimately. (*All About Love* 55-56)

The previous passage highlights the importance of thinking critically about themselves and the world around. This represents the starting point to live consciously. Then, people can finally start taking responsibility for their own actions, which means that they can choose how they "respond to

acts of injustice”, without denying “the reality of institutionalized injustice” (57). Thus, only by cultivating awareness, people can change things; only being aware enables people to critically examine their actions (94). The introduction of feminist pedagogy in public education offers the possibility of addressing feminist writing to an audience that varies in its degree of education so that feminist ideas can be understood by more and more people. Since feminist writings are actually written in an academic style, their understanding is guaranteed only to a few fortunate people. To spread feminist thinking, feminism cannot be limited to the academic field; we need to start a kind of literature which shifts in relation to whom we are speaking and allows communication with a diverse audience.

3.3. Conclusion

This chapter aims to reveal that cultural ideas about gender roles can shape the way people actually are. I rely on bell hooks’ research on teaching and engaged pedagogy to demonstrate that feminist pedagogy can have the power to show new visions and new ways to participate in society. Feminist education can give people the possibility of acting consciously in a system that they do unconsciously support. This is why I agree with bell hooks in defining it as the practice of freedom. Indeed, when reinforcing sexist roles, the traditional school system restricts the formation of children’s identities. On the contrary, pedagogy as practice of freedom aims to create a space where boys and girls can construct a sense of self that has nothing to do with sexist biases. Feminist pedagogy demands schools where patriarchal culture is not the norm so that students do not get educated into accepting some social bias as “natural”. It shows the truth and gives the freedom to act, without manipulation and brainwashing. I would like to highlight also another aspect of feminist pedagogy which deals with freedom: feminist teachers are not supposed to impose their way of thinking but to enable students to think on their own. I understand feminist pedagogy as a kind of pedagogy which does not intend to indoctrinate people; I understand it as a practice of teaching which permits students to know about social issues, and to be aware of social privileges and disadvantages. I appreciate feminist pedagogy because it represents a resource that can enable people to be fully aware of their identity and all the aspects which define it. Moreover, it can help people to behave in the respect of others. Sharing different points of view can always be possible if we learn to respect them and, since feminist pedagogy values diversities, it can create the basis for a way of thinking where diversity is prized but inequality neutralized. Sexism, racism, and homophobia are kinds of oppression that would never exist if diversity was not seen as frightful, wrong, or dangerous. Feminist pedagogy can help many children to grow up cultivating their identity completely free of cultural biases. Approaching the engaged pedagogy means considering

the classroom as a liberating place where students are engaged with teachers and also with each other, learning to respect their differences. However, hooks also highlights how learning ideas that are against values and beliefs learned at home can put students in an uncomfortable position; she shares her personal experience:

And I saw for the first time that there can be, and usually is, some degree of pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches. I respect that pain. And I include recognition of it now when I teach, that is to say, I teach about shifting paradigms and talk about the discomfort it can cause. White students learning to think more critically about questions of race and racism may go home for the holidays and suddenly see their parents in a different light. (*Teaching to Transgress* 43)

Here, it becomes even clearer that feminist pedagogy always deals with critical thinking, respect, recognition of different (or uncomfortable) reactions, and openness toward the creation of new approaches to teaching. Indeed, feminist pedagogy continually challenges itself and changes, questions its practices, grows, and improves. According to me, feminist thinking can show a more ethical way of reflecting on things. Recognizing that sometimes there is not a single right point of view, it always welcomes discussions and debates.

In *All About Love*, bell hooks calls for new ways to think about love. She thinks that, in a country where what means love is clear, there would not be politics that affirm sexist gender roles or force women to live with their violent and abusive men because perfectly aware that there are no possibilities for them out there. Unfortunately, even when we talk about love, gender stereotypes are on the front line: women are too sensitive and emotional, while men are linked to reason and non-emotion. Thus, the perspective of men and women about love often differ. Even though such perspectives are considered innate and natural traits, hooks identifies them as learned characteristics. Moreover, such stereotypes convince people to believe that love makes them irrational and weak. Reviewing the literature on love, hooks notice that most books are written by men; she believes that the reason is that men receive more love, while women mostly long for it, and when they speak about love, they do it from a position of lack. In the introduction, hooks quotes one of her favorite books on the topic: John Bradshaw's *Creating Love: The Next Great Stage of Growth*. While a few books talk about the impact of patriarchy, J. Bradshaw identifies the link between male domination and the lack of love in families, recognizing that "ending patriarchy is one step in the direction of love", since family is the primary place where people learn about love. hooks' main idea is that "learning faulty definitions of love when we are quite young makes it difficult to be loving as we grow older" (3). What she considers highly wrong is thinking of love as a feeling; she identifies love as an act of will, an action, and an intention. She claims that if people

start considering love as an action, rather than a feeling, they “automatically assumes accountability and responsibility” (13). She lists various ingredients that belong to true love: care, affection, recognition, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication (3). Thinking about love as an act of will and action, rather than a feeling, implies that love is a choice, something you decide to do and not that just happens, while “we are often taught we have no control over our feelings” (13). If we start teaching that true love requires dedication, engagement, loyalty, and devotion, children immediately understand that love cannot exist where domination is. hooks talks about the will to live in a culture where love can flourish and be a “sacred presence”. However, we need to understand what she means by love to catch the reason why learning the art of loving is so important: in a culture where love is not associated with irrationality and weakness, there would not be men who kill for love or women who decide to live in abusive homes. Indeed, for her, accepting that “one simply “falls” in love without exercising will or choice” lead also society to believe that exist such things as “crimes of passion”: for example “he killed her because he loved her so much”. She firmly condemns this assumption of love. She argues that when people are loving, they “openly and honestly express care, affection, responsibility, respect, commitment, and trust” (13). hooks finds essential to give a definition of love since “definitions are vital starting points for the imagination”. She claims that what cannot be imagined cannot come into being. “A good definition marks our starting point and lets us know where we want to end up”. (13-14) She finds pivotal that people know what they mean while speaking of love.

Thus, hooks focuses on families because she identifies the family as the “original school of love” (17) and, therefore, the place where it is given the idea that abuse and neglect can coexist with love (22). Many parents think that they can be abusive and still loving towards children, and children learn that abuse and love can exist side-by-side. Moreover, she identifies family as the “place where we are first given a sense of the meaning and power of education” (*Teaching Community* 117). Therefore, she asserts that the closed-minded thinking challenged in classrooms must be challenged also at home (120). She gives concrete advice: “I emphasize the importance of shared family time reading and engaging in discussion, even if that time is only ten minutes”. Because of the damages made by the media, she continues: “I share the importance of engaging in critical discussion of what we see on television and in movies” (121).

Conclusion

As well as interrogating the traditional idea of teaching, my thesis also proposes an alternative pedagogy which conceives education as the means for change and liberation. I present a line of pedagogy that can help students to recognize the social and cultural roots that influence their own lives and behaviors. Moreover, I suggest using deconstruction as a tool to develop critical thinking. By learning to deconstruct what they read and listen to in the classroom, students can go beyond words and instructions. The thesis also explores Freire's and Foucault's theories about the conventional system of education. The two philosophers assert that society works to establish, through institutions, their beliefs, and values. Relying on Freire's theory, bell hooks struggles to develop an idea of teaching as "practice of freedom", in opposition to that of teaching as "practice of oppression". bell hooks urges for an approach to teaching which stimulates critical thinking and permits students understanding the limits of knowledge given at school. Such awareness could help students to understand the relationship between knowledge and power discussed by Foucault. Indeed, she condemns the way teachers lack acknowledging the power they have in influencing students' thoughts and perpetuating oppressive behaviors.

However, my research does not intend to be an attack on the traditional educational system; instead, I propose a new line of pedagogy that recognizes the way knowledge is understood and how it can be linked to issues of power and control. Indeed, I underline the need to go beyond what is taught by someone in authority who decides what is worth learning. I believe that critical pedagogy does not limit students and teachers to a single view of reality and I advocate for feminist pedagogy since it can make people aware of human complexity, allowing them to understand how the human mind can be manipulated and structured by sociocultural environments. According to Freire, traditionally, the teacher's point of view is considered the only one of value. As a result, students do not develop their own opinions because of the false assumption that they have to obey authority and should not intervene in the classroom. Thus, they never develop critical thinking, which is one of the main problems with the traditional educational approach. Moreover, around the world, education is mostly seen in terms of human capital formation: educational policies seek to prepare students for new kinds of work and labor relations. Therefore, educational policies are driven more by the values of the market and system efficiency than by culture and community (Lingard and Rizvi 116). According to hooks, this represents another problem with conventional pedagogy: education is geared toward the future (*Teaching Community* 165) and does not value learning for learning but "as a means to something else" (173).

College education is so often geared toward the future, the perceived rewards that the imagined future will bring that it is difficult to teach students that the present is a place of meaning. In

modern schooling the messages students receive is that everything that they learn in the classroom is mere raw material for something that they will produce later on in life. This displacement of meaning into the future makes it impossible for students to fully immerse themselves in the art of learning and to experience that immersion as a complete, satisfying moment of fulfillment. (165-166)

According to hooks, “the vision of progress that is central to imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy is one that always places emphasis on the future” making students live in a perpetual state of dissatisfaction: “there is always a better moment than the moment that is, a better job, a better house, a better relationship” (166). hooks thinks that the idea of conventional education, as future-oriented, makes students devalue what they learn in the classroom because “they are unable to attach any substantive meaning to experiences that do not directly intersect with their future visions of success” (166). For her, since people “tend to postpone being alive to the future”, they “may never be alive at all in their entire life”. She acknowledges that professors in the humanities mostly face this problem. She suggests reminding of the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh’s principle “to be in the present moment, to be aware that we are here and now, and the only moment to be alive is the present moment . . . This is the only moment that is real”; she claims: “we can share it in a five-minute lecture. We can help them trust in the present” (172). She envisions the classroom as “a place where paradise can be realized, a place of passion and possibility, a place where spirit matters, where all that we learn and know leads us into greater connection, into greater understanding of life lived in community” (183). She struggles to propose a new pedagogy where the classroom is not the site where domination is perpetuated. She seeks for a change in the educational system with the aim that “schooling is not the site where students are indoctrinated to support imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy or any ideology, but rather where they learn to open their minds, to engage in rigorous study and to think critically” (49). Moreover, stopping linking education with future would imply that “whether we were in an academic setting or not, we would continue to study, to learn, to educate” (49).

I think that starting questioning theories and considering each specific case can help a lot even in everyday life. Nowadays, we are constantly overloaded by information, and society in general really presses us about performance. Learning that we can even deconstruct, and rethink theories developed by great names of our history can give us the agency to ponder all the information we read everywhere, today. We should understand that nothing can be generalized without taking into account the single individual experience of every person. There could be a single method that works for more people as well as more methods that cannot work for a single one. Learning to question everything we hear and read can save us from generalization which can destroy us. As Spivak reminds us, generalization is a mistake, and in generalizing we forgive to recognize the single

experiences which can make someone more privileged than another, ending up judging experiences that we are not able to completely understand. Acknowledging the role of power, patriarchy, capitalism, politics, and all the forms of oppression present in society can help us to fight them. Feminist pedagogy could play a great role in touching the consciousness of students from a tender age. This becomes pivotal when discussing a pedagogy which could eventually lead to a change. People are what make society exist or change (Johnson 40); thus, it is crucial touching people, making them more aware. Approaching feminist pedagogy, students can start listening to others, giving them the possibility to come to voice, and valorize what makes them different, stopping considering the word *different* as a bad word. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word different as “dissimilar”, “not the same”, and even “unusual, special” but most time different is seen as something undesirable, to worry about. Even the word seems to be avoided because discriminatory. However, the adjective which has actually a negative connotation is *abnormal*: the dictionary describes it as “deviating from the normal or average person”, with a note: “often: unusual in an unwelcome or problematic way”. Thus, while being different just means not being the same as another, what people really fear is when someone deviates from the norm. To avoid discrimination, whoever in charge of educating should start teaching that norms given by society do not have to influence one’s thinking and character. On the contrary, deviating from norms can even embark someone on the path of personal discovery. Diversity is a trait that makes people special, and difference in class is a richness since listening to different ideas can empower and improve knowledge. This awareness and the ability to think critically are at the core of a pedagogy that attempts to liberate, a kind of pedagogy which demands a process of collective effort and transformation.

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