

Mapping migration paths through the dwindling institutional diversity of Florida

Hien L.D. Phan¹[0009-0004-5717-0112] and Frederick M.C. van Amstel²[0000-0002-9163-7095]

¹ Boise State University

² Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná
hienphan@boisestate.edu

Abstract. Higher education institutions in the United States of America are known internationally for institutionalizing race, gender, sexuality, and nationality relations under the label of diversity programs and policies. In recent months, such programs and policies are being reverted and defunded in many of these institutions for being supposedly exclusionary towards white people. On one hand, dismantling institutional diversity reveals the institutional racism that it concealed. On the other hand, it reduces the already narrow resources available to confront institutional racism. How do international design students navigate this contradiction? This paper presents findings from a co-autoethnographic research on this dwindling institutional diversity in a graduate design program in Florida, where 77% of the students are immigrants from the Global South. Through a specific codesign experiment involving local news and an inverted world map, students reflected on their experience of racialization through educational migration and the role of institutional diversity in alleviating and concealing it.

Keywords: Institutional Diversity, Geopolitics, Autoethnography, Codesign, Migration

1 Introduction

In recent decades, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have become common words in design history, research, and education, thanks to research largely conducted in the United States of America (USA). Qualitative research has been done to better understand and support students in academic performance, based on their race (Underwood & Conrad, 2021), dis/ability (Roberts & Boys, 2020), and other factors in positionality such as nationality, class, and age (Noel, 2022). In design education, design students are encouraged to observe and analyze cultural differences, while integrating cultural sensitivity into their design training (Regonini, 2014; McMullen, 2016). While cultural differences have been studied in anti-racist, liberative design pedagogy (Mercer & Moses, 2023; Noel, 2021) of the local marginalized social group Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), there have been scarce design research on how non-USA citizens, immigrants responded to the DEI policies in the USA institutional system.

The case of the USA is unavoidable, even outside this nation, for its remarkable contradictions. The USA history, culture, and politics are built on settler colonialism,

massive and forced immigration, and multiculturalism (Joppke, 1996). Indigenous Native Americans were displaced and killed while enslaved Africans were traded like things until abolition paved the way for systemic racism, which is still in place. Due to geopolitical conflicts and economic crises, many people migrated from former colonies to metropolises in the 20th century (Zolberg et al., 1989; Rystad, 1992). The USA, as a new imperialist force, became a major destination for migrants from Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America (Rumbaut, 2012). Such recent immigration created the phenomenon of US multiculturalism, or the peaceful coexistence of multiple cultures within the same territory, nation, or city. Citizenship laws, civil rights, and immigration policies have been challenged and updated to accommodate a multiethnic-racial nation (Reimers, 1981).

Multiculturalism itself changed through its engagements with neoliberalism, rejustifying coexistence based on increased labor efficiency, innovation, and creativity (Wiley et al., 2012; Pedrosa, 2024). On one hand, this turn served as the institutional efforts in including the social groups that were systematically marginalized for their different races, genders, and ancestries from the Western/European settler colonizers. On the other hand, neoliberal multiculturalism became a symbolic, shallow approach in resolving the inequalities among social groups, who are culturally commodified, economically exploited, and politically excluded (Kymlicka, 2012). The Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) were still racialized under the capitalist, colonialist, white supremacist, heteropatriarchist multicultural environment of the USA (Thobani, 2018; Bourassa, 2021).

Neoliberal multiculturalism gave birth to institutional diversity, a strategy that replaces the equality mechanisms put in place by the civil rights movement of the 1960s—equal employment opportunity and affirmative action (Joppke, 2023). Institutional diversity reached its peak in the aftermath of George Floyd's brutal murder by the police in 2020 (Martin, 2022; Balakrishnan, 2023). From that point on, institutional diversity faced a conservative backlash. In 2022, Florida became the first state in the USA to abandon DEI policies. In 2024, the backlash reached the whole nation with the election of Donald Trump for a second term. Immigrants were blamed for national economic crises and massively deported in 2025. The words 'diversity,' 'equity,' and 'inclusion' were banned from federally funded research and severely restricted in public education.

This research presents findings of an autoethnographic study conducted by the first author on institutional diversity in a graduate program in design and visual communications MxD at a public university in Florida, USA, between 2023 and 2025. In anthropology and education, autoethnography is used to study the experience of marginalization as a *culturally embedded self* who claims autonomy in speaking about the world from their own lenses (de F. Afonso & Taylor, 2009). In design research, autoethnography is used to foreground the political implications of design in private lives (Keshavarz & Patchineelam, 2012), the emotional journey of institutional services (Catoir-Brisson & Paixão-Barradas, 2025), as well as a particular way of informing or guiding product design (Xue et al., 2025). Autoethnography is

increasingly used in design research to incorporate the designers' emotions, actions, and reflections in the integrated research of design and anthropology (Fuller, 2022).

The graduate program MxD is founded on the idea of codesigning with marginalized populations for social justice and development (Rogal & Sánchez, 2024). As of October 2024, when the co/design experiment took place, 77% of the graduate students (n=13) were from the Global South and 70% were female. Their ages range from 20s to 50s. While the first author facilitated the co/design experiment, the second author was the complicator with geopolitical expansive knowledge, who also supported the data documentation, analysis, and theorization after the experiment. The autoethnography co/design experiment took place as a democratic space for a collaboratively graphing culture among the diverse student body. The experiment, thus, sought a collective response to existential crises during the rise of anti-immigration policies and the associated xenophobia.

This design experiment was set based on Sara Ahmed's postcolonial feminist research on institutional diversity (2012). Through Ahmed's critical analysis of institutional diversity as a contradiction, this research sought to understand the institutionalization and deinstitutionalization of diversity through the migration paths taken by the student body. Through this process, the diverse student body positioned themselves in relation to racialization, neoliberal multiculturalism, and institutional diversity.

2 Institutional diversity as a contradiction

Understanding institutional diversity as a contradiction requires considering the design space where the contradiction has accumulated over the years. Contradiction, in design research, is a "continuous source of change" in societal development (van Amstel et al., 2016, pg. 202), driving design activity over design space (p. 203). Design space is, therefore, engraved with the history of design activities and its historical contradictions.

The design space considered here is Florida graduate design education. Florida is engraved with the history of White Settlement and Black Slavery (Riordan, 1996; Rivers, 2009; Rizzi, 2019). The state was originally the land of various Native Indian tribes, including the Seminoles who welcomed the African enslaved people to their communities (Kokomoor, 2009). Through the Seminole Wars, the Native lands were sold from the Spanish colonial government to the United States in 1821 while the Seminoles were dehumanized, exiled, and enslaved (Moore-Wilson, 1896). Florida was incorporated as the 27th state of the USA in 1845 (Johnston, 1895, p. 243). Since then, several subsequent racial, cultural, and institutional conflicts were held in this land.

While being historically marginalized, the diverse social groups in Florida have constantly fought for their civil rights, challenging the postcolonial, racist institutional structure. In return, they faced constant backlashes from the predominant White sector of society. In 1999, affirmative action was redefined in Florida as "One

Florida Initiative” (OFI) to increase diversity in education without recognizing the historical marginalization of certain races (Hilton et al., 2023). Since 2022, the conservative far-right policies in Florida have eradicated critical race theories and DEI initiatives in public education, claiming that race- and gender-references are the reverse discrimination against the White population. Diversity in education was assimilated under postcolonial racialization discourse (Wolfe, 2006) and then redefined as “race-neutral” policy in accumulating wealth while sustaining racial gaps in literacy (Hilton et al., 2021).

To analyze the contradiction of institutional diversity as it manifests in Florida's design space, the authors rely on Sara Ahmed's postcolonial feminist scholarship expounded in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012). This book is a phenomenological study on institutional diversity in the relation of institutional whiteness, racism, and excellence, through the lenses of diversity workers in Global North universities.

Institutional diversity means racial, social, cultural, sexual, and gender diversity co-opted by the institution's goals, statements, and stable practices (Ahmed, 2012, p.24). Institutionalized diversity seeks to change non-white's perceptions of whiteness as less oppositional. Thus, non-whites are permitted to enter, occupy, and work in predominantly white institutions. The language of diversity is used to replace the words “equal opportunities,” “affirmative action,” or ‘anti-racism’ in the statement of institutional values and commitments (Ahmed, 2012, p. 52).

While diversity is included as an institutional effort in repairing the issues of colonialist, racist history, institutional diversity does not perform the anti-racism commission as promised. Rather, its celebratory tone gives a false signal that institutional racism is already overcome, further concealing the in-depth engraving of racism in the institutional structure. This celebratory diversity hinders the institutional lack of commitment to systemic changes, avoiding confrontations from the marginalized diverse bodies (Ahmed, 2012, p. 52 - 53).

Through institutionalization, diversity is essentialized, otherized, and racialized as the opposite of whiteness, yet being exploited to represent institutional excellence (2012, p. 105-111). Instead of conforming diversity as the co-optive solution for whiteness, Ahmed suggests being the radical problem (2012, p. 152-157; 184-187). This implies the crucial role of the diversity body in persistently resisting the institutional narratives at the standpoint of the other. Following Ahmed's suggestion to be the studied problem, this design research adopts and integrates autoethnography and codesign method.

3 Studying institutional diversity through autoethnography co/design method

Autoethnography is a method to study culture from the experience of the self embedded in culture (de F. Afonso & Taylor, 2009). That means the self reflects the changes of culture; and vice versa (Adams, 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 2010). The

concept of *culturally embedded self* (de F. Afonso & Taylor, 2009) describes the ontological relation of self and culture. The culturally embedded self changes itself through interacting with others and navigating self-otherization and/or estrangement. Following Ahmed's (2012) suggestions on non-essentialized marginalized diversity, the authors emphasized codesign practices in the autoethnography method, which highlight dialogues and emotions (Rinehart & Earl, 2016) in centralizing viewpoints, trajectories, statements, and even transformation of the diverse design student body (Breault, 2016; Irmak & Ulutaş, 2024), or their *culturally embedded selves*. The codesign experiment took place in the graduate design studio, where the diverse student body shared professional and daily activities.

Materials are crucial in autoethnographic reflections (Schouwenberg & Kaethler, 2021) as well as codesign engagements, creativity, and dialogues (Sanders & Stappers, 2012). Digital or high-tech platforms are critiqued for perpetuating coloniality for industrial efficiency (Saito et al., 2024), which parallels how institutional whiteness conforms to and appropriates diversity for institutional excellence (Ahmed, 2012). Meanwhile, low-tech materials are considered slow, reflexive interfaces (Hallnäs, & Redström, 2001), highlighting local knowledge, cultural memories (Kołakowski, 2016), as well as reflective storytelling. Thus, the low-tech materials to be described below were strategic to enable self-representation by the diverse student body during the co/design experiment as well as the qualitative data analysis.

This designerly, participatory, autoethnography is slightly different from the traditional autoethnography method, which emphasizes an artistic and/or philosophically abstract approach centered on an individual self (Schouwenberg & Kaethler, 2021). The co/autoethnographic design method here centered on a collective self shared and produced by the participants ("us"). While not a formal student, the second author feels part of this collective for his shared migration experience.

3.1 Low-tech is the metaphorical play and story-telling materials.

In a previous experiment hosted by two other students in May 2024, the diverse student body realized that geopolitics was a major unknown-unknown in their Blind Side game (Fig. 1), preventing us from understanding its connection with our collective existence and design research. While the conservative far-right state policies have discriminated against the immigrant population from several Global South countries, we sought to trace the historical roots of such otherization. To understand how the diverse student body was grappling with the contradiction of institutional diversity in personal lives, the authors facilitated a codesign experiment as a part of the autoethnography study.



Fig. 1. ‘Geopolitics of design’ as the prominent unknown/unknown in the design studio MxD

The design experiment took place in the design studio MxD, lasted 2 hours, and was part of the second author’s graduate course in Design Research and Practice (Table 1). Local newspapers were used to highlight the local knowledge of [Florida] where Design Studio is located (Fig. 2). The mentions of many other countries from the local materials projected the USA’s global interests and impacts. However, as Benedict Anderson (2006) analyzed, the newspaper is among the important material conditions for building the collective understanding and being of nationality. Rather than merely a news report, the newspaper is embedded with the subjective analysis of differences between one nation and the others. Using the local newspapers allowed the collective to understand how our national cultures are described as the other by the USA.

Table 1. Activities in the codesign experiment, with Lego Serious Play and low-tech materials

Step	Leading questions	Codesign materials
1	From the local newspapers, what are the mentions of other nations? How are they portrayed?	South-up map, local newspapers collected from the campus town in Florida, USA
2	Why is the news of other nations mentioned in Florida, USA? What are the connections across the spaces?	Color markers
3	Pick an animal that represents you/r ancestor. In this geopolitical background, what are the migration tracks of these animals? What makes them migrate?	Transparent film, Lego Serious Play animal puppets, and color labels for migration trajectory
4	What are the ecosystems that the animals could survive, sustain, and thrive in the future? What is their future in the current geopolitics?	Tracing papers and color markers



Fig. 2. Newspapers were sourced in the local recycling center, university buildings, and nearby coffee shops. It is dated August - October 2024, including the conservative, privately owned as well as independent, student-owned newspapers.

The South-up map (Fig. 3) strategically challenges the dominant roles of the USA and Global North countries as the center of the global view. Instead, it asked the players to collectively adjust to the alternative ways where the Global South countries are the central views. This decentralized the Western/European dominant views while encouraging the players to center their marginalized voices.



Fig. 3. On the South-up map, the diverse student body positioned the immigration tracks on the geopolitics perceived by local narratives.

Against the geopolitical backdrop in the South-up map, the students used Lego Serious Play (LSP) animal puppets as their metaphorical representation of selves and their ancestors in the migration process (Fig. 4 & Table 2). Through hand movements engaged in storytelling by the LSP method (Nienaber & Kriszan, 2023), the students described themselves through unveiling the symbolic meanings of the animals in their cultural contexts, revealing students' hidden emotions and thoughts on the visual, interactive surface (Schwabenland & Kofinas, 2023). During this process, students

held dialogues and reflected on each other's migration trajectories, which are specifically stigmatized under Trump's presidential elections in October of 2024.



Fig. 4. In the annotated South-up map, the diverse student body mapped their generational migrations (color labels), using the Lego Serious Play animal puppets as self-representation.

Other low-tech materials such as color labels, transparent films, and color markers were facilitated to resist the limits of colonial aesthetics in design (Angelon & van Amstel, 2021). This is used to describe the generational attempts in global migrations, as the self's effort in wayfinding across cultures and institutions.

3.2 Data analysis procedure

Qualitative data analysis is an important step in researching autoethnography, where self- and other-reflection contributed to critical consciousness of self and other (Schwabenland & Kofinas, 2023). From this co/design experiment, qualitative data is carefully documented, transcribed, analyzed, and reflected upon (Jordan & Henderson, 1995). Per the agreements of the student body, the class was recorded, transcribed, and printed for visual data analysis, including the discussion and the codesign experiment. Low-tech materials were applied to encode the collected data, generating common themes, and draw connections to theories and ongoing news on the USA geopolitics and Florida conservative backlash (Fig. 5). The analysis also took place in the studio space, where the codesign experiment, along with other experiments, were facilitated, documented, and collectively analyzed.

The data analysis using low-tech materials (table 2) followed the surrealist method entopic graphomania, which investigates emerging meaningful and beautiful links between random points, creating a complex graphic pattern out of a simple rule (Sherman, 2013; Larsson, 2017). This surrealist data analysis approach projected the authors' intuitions and perceptions in a visual medium that others could scrutinize and, through dialogue (mainly with the second author), generate theories from the critical representational practice (hooks, 2014). By thoroughly viewing and reviewing this surrealist data visualization, the authors traced many connections between geopolitics and institutional diversity. The emerging visualization aesthetic resembles the monster aesthetics of anticolonial designs (Angelon & van Amstel, 2022).



Fig. 5. A part of the data analysis, unveiling the connections between the autoethnography co/design, Ahmed's theories on institutional diversity, and geopolitical canvas.

Table 2. Steps and low-tech materials in the qualitative data analysis

Step	Descriptions	Analysis materials
1	Reading and rereading the transcript of the co/design experiment and annotating it with the emerging themes. The transcripts were then grouped by the students and patched with tapes, highlighting the common themes.	Printed transcripts (letter size), color markers, masking tape (white)
2	Writing Ahmed's analyses of institutional diversity, inclusion, and racism (2012) in the duck tapes, which were located closely with the themes (step 1).	Duck tapes (black), markers
3	With sharpies, drawing many connections among the emerging themes (step 1) and literature (step 2), through which the contradictions of institutionalized diversity manifested through the co/design experiment.	Sharpies
4	Adding a translucent layer on top of the analysis, where geopolitics served as the background of the co/design experiment (step 1). Each student metaphorized their nations, which were then connected through conflicts or unions in economy or politics.	Translucent white paper, color labels, masking tapes (red & blue), sticky notes, and markers
5	Adding key for the analysis materials, for dialogues, reflections, and theorizations among the authors.	Markers

4 Findings

The codesign experiment took place in the graduate studio in October 2024, when Donald Trump and his supporters demonized immigrant workers as pet-eaters, job-stealers, and criminals as part of his Presidential campaign. Immigrants, especially from South America, were blamed for the decline of the USA empire, while China shined as the emerging technological and economic empire. His false claims ensconced the long history of institutional racism (Griffith et al., 2007; Rosa & Díaz, 2020; Vargas et al., 2023) which has its links to the colonial, capitalist institutional structure that is built on merit-based, labor exploitation. The institutional racism, however, was naturalized as anti-immigrants, anti-DEI initiatives were highlighted in Trump's presidential campaign "Making America Great Again (MAGA)," promising the reversal of the USA empire decline under the Trump administration. To understand the manifestation of national initiatives on geopolitics at the local scale, local newspapers were analyzed in this experiment, pinpointing the representation of other countries by the Floridian perspectives.

In this step, we looked for news items that described the others of the USA—the non-USA countries, people, commodities, or events. Thus, the USA was portrayed as the big self while other countries and cultures were portrayed as the other. The connection between self and other can be shown through the USA's hindered interventions in other countries, such as the headline "FBI says China could deal 'devastating blow' to the US," Mexico migrants, Palestine genocide by Israel, and Venezuela political turmoil. A Bolivian student said "The United States (of America) likes to talk about other countries," which *differs from* her hometown's newspaper. The differences in newspaper topics unveiled the crucial role of the USA in geopolitics, which is referred to as "dramatic" by non-USA citizens.

To the non-USA citizens, "dramatic" is an external event which could be irrelevant to the locality. To the USA, however, dramatic events are crucial to drastically undermine the other in opposition to self, i.e. the USA's fragile national solidarity. This includes the coexistence of diverse cultures in a multicultural campus town in Florida, through food, sports, and arts activities. One of the advertisements highlights this fragile solidarity: "Mochiry offers desserts and Korean cuisine to Gainesville residents" (Fig. 6). While this mention aimed to benefit the local minor-owned businesses, the other (Korean cuisine) is represented as the exotic product and service to be consumed by the big self (Gainesville residents). In a way, the other is welcomed, adapted, consumed, and internalized by the big self, emphasizing the dominant narratives of the local USA space where many others are accumulated to add on the aesthetic, multicultural, silenced, happy fabrics.



Fig. 6. Food is a common representation of diversity in the institutional space.

Another news piece that we found of other-representation in emphasizing the USA as self-representation was a news column titled “the United States guard Anthony Edwards shoots against Puerto Rico during the Paris 2024 Olympic Summer Games” (Fig. 7). This description has a symbolic meaning of geopolitics through sport, with a USA citizen (a Black American player) defeating a USA colony (Puerto Rico) in the globally soft culture - Basketball in Olympics. While the Black community was historically otherized due to the enslavement of the African population by the Western/European settler colonization in the USA, the Black American player currently represented the athletic, victorious, strong aspect of the USA. In contrast to the individual winner, Puerto Rico as a collective was undermined, aligning with its dependent geopolitics as a colony of the USA. While the main character of the image is Anthony Edwards, the national label ‘USA’ is at the center of the winner’s uniform, confirming the USA as the essential narrative of victory on the global scale. The good performance of diversity, as Ahmed critically analyzes, implies the institutional inclusion of diversity to amplify the institutional excellence (2012, p. 105 - 111), which is the USA in the global sport in this case.

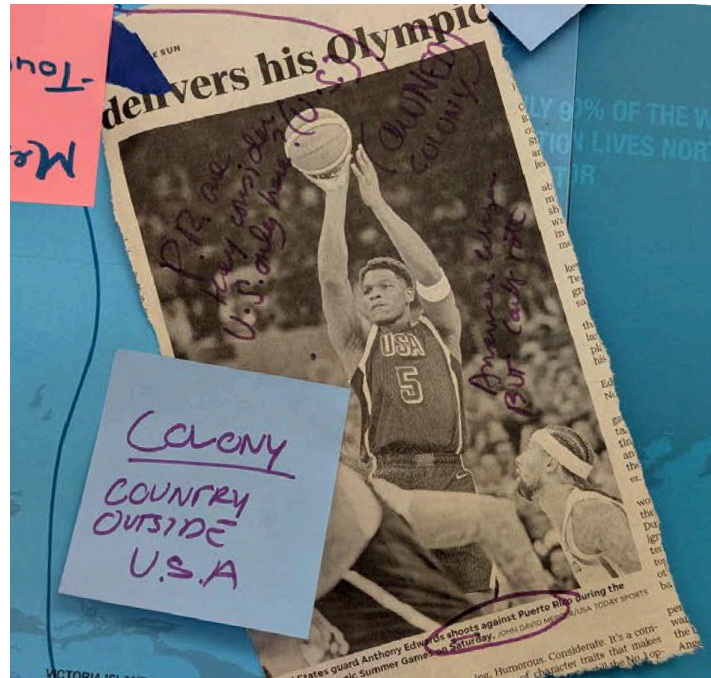


Fig. 7. The news column highlighted the Black American player as a symbolic victory of the USA in sport.

The accumulation of the celebratory diversity aims to show that the USA is different from its metropolis as the Western/European by opening arms for everyone to enter. Although this counters with the anti-DEI policies in Florida and the “dramatic” others (Venezuela, Palestine, Israel, China, and Russia), this portrait implies the local space in the campus town as the safe space of many internalized others (African American, Korea, Japan, and Fusion Asian). Through other-representation, the USA is highlighted as the big self, perpetuating stereotypes of other countries and cultures. This cultural and political material is manifested in the lives of the diverse student body, where the other is scrutinized in the local Florida school:

I started thinking about what kind of stereotypes about Russians that I felt in the US. Even my kid, he already joined schools where he is differently [...] as a Russian spy. And before I came to the US, I did not think about us this way. But now, even when we meet other Russians, I start thinking, “Oh, could she be a Russian spy?” Because she's so open for communicating. (Russian student, transcript)

Russia was the direct competitor of the USA in the Cold War era in the late 20th century. Despite the several decades past this opposition, the demonic stereotype has been sustained in cultural materials such as news and movies (Petersson & Persson, 2011; Alikina, 2018), revived by the American framing of the Russian War on Ukraine. This stereotype was projected on the Russian child and women, when the

Russian student expressed her skepticism of the label “Russian spy” on the other who was “open for communicating.” This unveiled how the reductionist, essentialized other-representation was embedded in daily contexts and disrupted the meanings of the subaltern’s daily behaviors. However, the student did not conclude this problematic other-representation, not because she agreed with this normalized, otherized stereotype but because of the Floridian conservative political climate still labeled Russia among seven countries of concern.

Students’ silence towards the USA’s other-representation can also be seen as a strategic approach to resisting the suppressive imperial policies. As the other is essentialized and represented as the opposite of the big other, meticulous word choices have been used to categorize and manage diversity, especially classifying levels of non-USA citizens:

So whenever people asked me “Do you want to emigrate here?” I’m like “I cannot answer you.” When they said “But you’re an immigrant,” I responded “I’m not an immigrant.” And they’re like “But do you plan to stay here?” I cannot answer you that, because if I say something that will be used against me at some point. (Bolivian student, transcript)

The non-USA citizens are identified not only by “non-USA” as the biological and national identification, but also “citizenship” as their social status, labor certificate, future plan, and dream. Like the American dream, the USA citizenship appears a desirable status to the non-USA citizens, who are often stereotyped as the external, demonic, threatening others to the USA institution (Bow, 2019). Thus, in the excuse of self-defense, the other is dehumanized and threatened as deportable and excludable “aliens” in the USA management (Johnson, 1996). The exclusion of the other as the manufacturable, consumable, and disposable cultural commodities in the USA can be understood as the strategic, productive inclusion to cover up institutional racism (Bourassa, 2011; Ahmed, 2012).

5 Discussion

The autoethnographic co/design (or co/autoethnographic design) experiment marked one of the first attempts to discuss geopolitics among the diverse student body, which was often deemed problematic and shied away from the celebratory, inclusive, supposedly safe space of institutional diversity. On one hand, as the diverse student body shared their migration trajectories and future prospects, they took the multicultural celebratory tone as a code of conduct, a behavior of mutual respect, and a gift of freedom (Nguyen, 2012) they set themselves to carry on in their future designs. On the other hand, they also noticed the contradictory silence generated by the centralization of their bodies in a colonial and imperialist space that did not expect them to speak up. Mapping migratory paths enabled foregrounding the geopolitical aspect of institutional diversity, an aspect not emphasized by Sarah Ahmed’s (2012) original criticism.

Through low-tech materials, the diverse student body mapped the trajectory of their generational migrations against the geopolitical backdrop, through which we realized that the migrating self is not just embedded in one culture, but also in many cultures at the same time. Similar to how the USA interprets other national bodies on a global level, the local newspapers in Florida self-represent what is an American body and other-represent what is not American but still a curiosity, a concern, and a local theme. While such representation practices reduce the global to the local, enabling institutional diversity management, the shift towards deinstitutionalizing diversity reinstates a national diversity management policy, which is no longer locally managed, yet still very much managed. Through this autoethnographic co/design experiment, the diverse student body recognized the prevalence of institutional racism in both forms of management, consistent with Ahmed's (2012) findings.

The autoethnography co/design experiment proceeds coincidentally with Ahmed's suggestions who critique the essentialized categories of diversity such as race and gender (2012). Rather, the diverse student body positioned their trajectories against the South-up map, instead of the normalized Eurocentric North-up one. The collective body unveiled themselves as not only culturally, but also historically and geo/politically embedded selves. As the diverse student body represents selves alter/natively (van Amstel, 2023), diversity is in the process of deinstitutionalization, which challenges the perpetual assimilation, alienation, and misrepresentation by the dominant narratives in the institution. To the diverse design student body, this act means resisting the coloniality in design aesthetics, technology, and education where the Western/European institutional narratives were normalized (Noel et al., 2023; van Amstel, 2023; Pallanez, 2024)

Although we were conscious of the stereotypical other-representation by the USA imperialist institutional narratives, we often chose not to speak up in the geopolitical matters in our design research. Due to the local political climate in our Global South home countries, most of us chose silence to avoid problematic issues in the future, which remained unknown due to global geopolitics. Despite such silence, we commonly shared the anger towards our home countries. The negative sentiment was made possible by the biases in cultural and political materials in the USA that have local and global impacts. Just like how the oppressed is terrified while also desired of the oppressor's colonial aesthetics and materials conditions (Fanon, 1986), we looked forward to the freedom and success in the USA neoliberal multiculturalism. While this is deemed naive consciousness and lack of political consciousness, the desire for betterness is reflected as the source of existential crises that made our generational migrations possible against the global geopolitical backdrop.

Through conversations and reflections on local narratives on geopolitical conflicts, we realized the political grounds of self- and other-representations. In postmodern design, these representations are often reduced to stylistic choices, market segmentation strategies, or even (entertainment) products to be consumed on their own. As biases and stereotypes of the other are naturalized by design, the contradiction of institutional diversity and its geopolitical backdrop are hindered. In response to the naive consciousness of self and other, we realized the importance of

the oppressed's political consciousness (Fanon, 2007) as a response to the conservative turn of higher education in Florida (Giroux, 2022). While institutionalized diversity is critiqued as the superficial inclusion of diversity in perpetuation of institutional whiteness and racism, it remained a potential structure for diverse bodies to enter, occupy, critically hold conversations, and seek alternative possibilities in advocating anti-racist transformation in higher education and subverting the institutional oppressions. In hindsight, the structure of institutionalized diversity holds perspectives for deinstitutionalizing diversity as suggested above. Hence, we do not endorse the dismantling of DEI in the USA, even if we recognize their underlying contradiction. Alter/native approaches to diversity are still possible and we put our existences at stake for them through our design research and education.

References

1. Adams, M. (2003). The reflexive self and culture: a critique. *The British journal of sociology*, 54(2), 221-238.
2. Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.
3. Alikina, V. (2018). U.S.-Russia relations and the mass media: The representation of Vladimir Putin in the American media.
4. Anderson's, S. (2006). Imagined communities. *Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory*, 49.
5. Balakrishnan, K., Copat, R., De la Parra, D., & Ramesh, K. (2023). Racial diversity exposure and firm responses following the murder of George Floyd. *Journal of Accounting Research*, 61(3), 737-804.
6. Bourassa, G. (2021). Neoliberal multiculturalism and productive inclusion: Beyond the politics of fulfillment in education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 36(2), 253-278.
7. Bow, L. (2019). Racist cute: Caricature, kawaii-style, and the Asian thing. *American Quarterly*, 71(1), 29-58.
8. Breault, R. A. (2016). Emerging issues in duoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(6), 777-794.
9. Catoir-Brisson, M. J., & Paixão-Barradas, S. (2025). Crafting emotional narratives: autoethnography as a tool for reflexive inquiry in healthcare codesign practice during COVID-19. *CoDesign*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2025.2455612>
10. de F. Afonso, E. Z., & Taylor, P. C. (2009). Critical autoethnographic inquiry for culture-sensitive professional development. *Reflective Practice*, 10(2), 273-283.
11. Fanon, F. (2007). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove.
12. Fanon, F. (1986). *Black skin, white masks*. Pluto Press.
13. Fuller, J. (2022). *The Auto-Ethnographic Turn in Design*: Edited by Louise Schouwenberg and Michael Kaethler. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2021, 336 pp. 978-94-93246-04-1. \$35.00/£27. *Design and Culture*, 16(1), 109–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2022.2061138>
14. Giroux, H. A. (2022). Resisting fascism and winning the education wars: How we can meet the challenge. *A Development Education Review*, 35, 111-126.
15. Griffith, D. M., Mason, M., Yonas, M., Eng, E., Jeffries, V., Plihcik, S., & Parks, B. (2007). Dismantling institutional racism: theory and action. *American journal of community psychology*, 39, 381-392.
16. Hallnäs, L., & Redström, J. (2001). Slow technology–designing for reflection. *Personal and ubiquitous computing*, 5, 201-212.

17. Hilton, A. A., Gasman, M., & Wood, J. L. (2013). The Impact of One Florida Initiative on Florida's Public Law Schools: A Critical Race Theory Analysis. *Educational Foundations*, 27, 103-116.
18. Hilton, A. A., Gragg, R. D. S., Vasquez, M. C., Covington, M., & Hicks, T. (2021). *The One Florida Initiative: Reversing Reverse Discrimination*. Rowman & Littlefield.
19. Huff, D. J. (1997). *To live heroically: Institutional racism and American Indian education*. State University of New York Press.
20. hooks, b. (2014). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.
21. Irmak, B., & Ulutaş, A. (2024). Duo autoethnographic approach to peer-to-peer collaboration in PhD process. In *Collaboration in Media Studies* (pp. 44-58). Routledge.
22. Johnson, K. R. (1996). Aliens and the US immigration laws: The social and legal construction of nonpersons. *U. Miami Inter-Am. L. Rev.*, 28, 263.
23. Joppke, C. (2023). Liberal Multiculturalism versus Diversity. *Global Perspectives*, 4(1), 87792.
24. Keshavarz, M., & Patchineelam, V. (2012). Design and the Politics of Fear: An Auto-Ethnography on Design Education. *Zootechnica: Journal of Redirective Design*, (2).
25. Kołakowski, M. M. (2016). Modernism or Tradition in Low-Technology? A Humanistic Perspective on the Architecture of Paulina Wojciechowska [application of Fromm's theories to art]. *Architecture, Civil Engineering, Environment*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2016), pp. 21-34.[Online ISSN 2720-6947][doi. org/10.21307/acee-2016-003].
26. Kokomoor, K. (2009). A Re-assessment of Seminoles, Africans, and Slavery on the Florida Frontier. *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 88(2), 209-236.
27. Kymlicka, W. (2013). Neoliberal multiculturalism. *Social resilience in the neoliberal era*, 99-125.
28. Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (2010). Cultures and selves: A cycle of mutual constitution. *Perspectives on psychological science*, 5(4), 420-430.
29. Martin, L. L. (2022). Black out: Backlash and betrayal in the academy and beyond. *AAUP Journal of Academic Freedom*, 13, 1-14.
30. Moore-Willson, M. (1896). *The Seminoles of Florida*. United States: American Printing House.
31. Nguyen, M. T. (2012). *The gift of freedom: War, debt, and other refugee passages*. Duke University Press.
32. Noel, L. A. (2021). Encountering development in social design education.
33. Noel, L. A. (2022). Dreaming Outside the Boxes that Hold Me In: Speculation and Design Thinking as Tools for Hope and Liberation against Oppression. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 26(3).
34. Noel, L. A., Ruiz, A., van Amstel, F. M., Udoewa, V., Verma, N., Botchway, N. K., ... & Agrawal, S. (2023). Pluriversal futures for design education. *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation*, 9(2), 179-196.
35. Pallanez, M. O. (2024). Weaving Reflexivity in Decolonization Paths and Knowledge in Design. *Diseña*, (25), 2-2.
36. Panayotakis, C. (2014). Capitalism, Meritocracy, and Social Stratification: A Radical Reformulation of the Davis-Moore Thesis. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 73(1), 126-150.
37. Petersson, B., & Persson, E. (2011). Coveted, detested and unattainable? Images of the US superpower role and self-images of Russia in Russian print media discourse. *International journal of cultural studies*, 14(1), 71-89.
38. Schouwenberg, L., & Kaethler, M. (2021). *The auto-ethnographic turn in design*. Amsterdam: Valiz.

39. Reimers, D. M. (1981). Post-World War II immigration to the United States: America's latest newcomers. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 454(1), 1-12.
40. Regonini, S. R. (2014). 'What will this do for my career?' Teaching Cultural Diversity to Design Students in a For-Profit Institution. *Southern Anthropologist*, 36(1), 5.
41. Roberts, C., & Boys, J. (2020). Learning Creative Practice: Starting from difference. *Charrette*, 6(2), 73-94.
42. Rogal, M., & Sánchez, R. (2024). Co-Designing for Development. In *Routledge handbook of sustainable design* (pp. 299-312). Routledge.
43. Rumbaut, R. G. (2012). Origins and destinies: immigration to the United States since World War II. In *New American destinies* (pp. 15-45). Routledge.
44. Rinehart, R. E., & Earl, K. (2016). Auto-, duo-and collaborative-ethnographies: "caring" in an audit culture climate. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 16(3), 210-224.
45. Riordan, P. (1996). Finding freedom in Florida: Native peoples, African Americans, and colonists, 1670-1816. *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 75(1), 24-43.
46. Rivers, L. E. (2009). *Slavery in Florida: Territorial days to emancipation*. University Press of Florida.
47. Rizzi, C. A. (2019). My Feet Are Chained: Settler Colonialism and Mobility in the Florida Borderlands, 1812-1866.
48. Rosa, J., & Diaz, V. (2020). Raciontologies: Rethinking anthropological accounts of institutional racism and enactments of white supremacy in the United States. *American Anthropologist*, 122(1), 120-132.
49. Sanders, E. B. N., & Stappers, P. J. (2012). Convivial toolbox: Generative research for the front end of design. *Bis*.
50. Saito, C., Freese Gonzatto, R., and van Amstel, F. (2024) Anticolonial prospects for overcoming the coloniality of making in design, in Gray, C., Hekkert, P., Forlano, L., Ciuccarelli, P. (eds.), *DRS2024: Boston, 23–28 June, Boston, USA*. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2024.255>
51. Schwabenland, C., & Kofinas, A. (2023). Ducks, elephants and sharks: Using LEGO® Serious Play® to surface the 'hidden curriculum' of equality, diversity and inclusion. *Management Learning*, 54(3), 318-337.
52. Thobani, S. (2018). Neoliberal multiculturalism and western exceptionalism: The cultural politics of the West. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11, 161-174.
53. Underwood, G., & Conrad, F. (2021). DIVERSITY IN DESIGN: ADDRESSING THE BLACK AWARDING GAP. In *DS 110: Proceedings of the 23rd International Conference on Engineering and Product Design Education (E&PDE 2021)*, VIA Design, VIA University in Herning, Denmark. 9th-10th September 2021.
54. Van Amstel, F. M. (2023). Decolonizing design research. In *The Routledge companion to design research* (pp. 64-74). Routledge.
55. Van Amstel, F. M., Hartmann, T., van der Voort, M. C., & Dewulf, G. P. (2016). The social production of design space. *Design studies*, 46, 199-225.
56. Vargas, E. A., Scherer, L. A., Fiske, S. T., Barabino, G. A., & National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2023). The historical and contemporary context for structural, systemic, and institutional racism in the United States. In *Advancing Antiracism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in STEMM Organizations: Beyond Broadening Participation*. National Academies Press (US).
57. Wiley, S., Deaux, K., & Hagelskamp, C. (2012). Born in the USA: How immigrant generation shapes meritocracy and its relation to ethnic identity and collective action. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 18(2), 171–180. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027661>
58. Wolfe, P. (2006). Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native. *Journal of genocide research*, 8(4), 387-409.

59. Xue, H., van Kooten, K., & Desmet, P. M. A. (2025). A consent for myself/ourselves: designing for responsible use of autoethnography. *CoDesign*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2025.2456609>
60. Zolberg, A. R., Suhrke, A., & Aguayo, S. (1989). *Escape from violence: Conflict and the refugee crisis in the developing world*. Oxford University Press.