Critical Education

Teaching through Contradictions
Anti-Colonial Pedagogy and English Language Learning

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Article abstract

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Teaching through Contradictions
Anti-Colonial Pedagogy and English Language Learning

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Abstract

The following paper describes a pilot project in anti-colonial pedagogy for English Language Learning (ELL). This anti-colonial curriculum and pedagogy was developed by drawing from anti-colonial and Marxist theorizations of migration, settler colonialism, and imperialism as well as insights from critical adult education. This paper explores the conceptualization of anti-colonial pedagogy through attention to dialectical social contradictions and attends to how contradictions were used to frame curricular choices and informed classroom practices. The utilization of dialectical contradictions in anti-colonial pedagogy drew attention to the role played by ideologies of liberalism, in particular, in mediating the student learning experience. The implications of ideological mediation in student learning are considered for critical and radical educators.

Since the publication of the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action in Canada, many areas of educational work have been identified as in need of 'decolonization' or 'indigenization.' Adult education and English Language Learning (ELL) are not exempt from these calls, particularly since resettlement work is mentioned in the final two Calls to Action. Similarly, scholars of migration and anti-racism have, over the last fifteen years, worked to integrate an understanding of settler colonialism into research, practice, and activism around migration justice. Informed by findings from the *Youth in Transition* research project, which we describe in the next section, a collaborative group of critical adult educators designed and piloted an English Language Learning course designed to address the conceptual and political spaces in between resettlement work and anti-colonial learning in the context of Canada.

This paper describes our design and pilot of an anti-colonial ELL course and provides some initial analysis of the implications of teaching about settler colonialism and liberal democracy as contradictory social relations in the lived reality of refugees in Canada. In this discussion, we want to describe not only the theoretical and pedagogical aspects of the ELL course, but also the implications of conceptualizing a critical adult education project through a pedagogy of inner relations and contradictions. We recognized throughout the course, and in post-course reflections, that students' engagement with the content was mediated through various complex ideological constructions. In what follows, we first describe our conceptualization of the course through the philosophical terms of dialectical, historical, and material contradictions, which parallels other traditions of critical adult education. We then discuss the nuts and bolts of the project, delimiting the activities, strategies, and content of the course. In the third section of the paper we analyze the modes of meaning making deployed by participants as they struggled to engage with core contradictions within settler colonial relations. We conclude with some ways in which educators can conceptualize the complex modes of meaning making that emerge in anti-colonial and anti-imperialist pedagogy.

An Anti-Colonial Pedagogy of Inner Relations and Contradictions

Planning for the course began in January 2018 and was a collaborative effort between an English as a second language scholar and long-time instructor, a subject area scholar of settler colonialism in the Middle East and Canada, a critical adult educator, and the extended members of the *Youth in Transition* research team. Throughout the development of the curriculum, we consulted with Indigenous colleagues and the content of the course was peer reviewed by these colleagues before delivery. The project we pursued was situated at the confluence of a number of different streams of thought, thus there were three key 'conceptual frames' influencing our thinking during the development of the curriculum.

First, the demand for this ELL course emerged out of the research project *Youth in Transition: War, Migration, and Regenerative Possibilities*. This project examined the migratory experiences of young adults who were displaced from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and resettled in Canada between 2015-2018. Of particular interest in the research were the educational experiences of these young adults as many had journeyed through periods of displacement in third or fourth countries and had experienced interruption of their educational trajectories. We were also interested in how they made meaning of extended experiences of displacement and eventual resettlement in 'the West.' During this work, we became very much aware that the experience of migration is conceptually framed in binaries, both by scholars of migration and migrants themselves (Ritchie, Carpenter, & Mojab, 2022). Key among these is, of

course, departure/arrival, which is rarely so smooth or continuous, but also binaries of inclusion/exclusion, access/denial, and legal/illegal. A key binary we recognized in our research was migration to 'the West' as a liberal, free, and democratic society and the MENA region as a 'dictatorship,' echoing other xenophobic and orientalist constructs from the past several centuries, but which have gained greater traction in the post 9/11 context (Ritchie & Mojab, 2019). In this articulation of Canada as a free and democratic society, we also observed that our research participants very easily and quickly absorbed the dominant racist narratives of Canadian society regarding Indigenous peoples, including binaries of past/present that reinforce the white supremist erasure of Indigenous nations. We noticed, through interview data and relevant literature, a complex reliance on false binaries to explain processes of migration and resettlement. These binaries, however, did not hold empirically with the realities of displacement, dispossession, and imperialism within our current historical moment. This challenged us again to direct our attention towards the inner relations of migration processes.

Second, as mentioned briefly above, in Canada we currently work in a context driven by the ethical and political imperative to address this country's history and ongoing reality of settler colonialism. Part of this mandate arises from the Truth & Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action (2015), which followed a public inquiry into the colonial apparatus of Residential Schools. Despite important critique of the limitations of TRC as a framework for decolonization, the calls to action include acknowledgement of the needed revision of adult education in the resettlement of migrants and newcomers. The TRC-era in Canada has also allowed debates concerning anti-racism to gain deeper traction in both scholarly and popular realms. Over the last fifteen years, there has been an expansive debate amongst Canadian anti-racism scholars as to how to understand the forms of racism experienced by people of color who migrate to Canada, Indigenous people who have been colonized and dispossessed by the British Empire and then the Canadian state, and Black Canadians, many of whom are descended from individuals trafficked in the transatlantic slave trade throughout the Americas and the Caribbean or whom fled enslavement in the United States. In 2005, a landmark paper by Lawrence and Dua (2005) argued that Canadian anti-racist theorists had formulated a critique of Canadian multiculturalism from the vantage point of migrating peoples to the exclusion of the Indigenous experience, thus positing immigrants of color as complicit in the settler colonial project. Black Canadian Scholars echoed this critique. In what followed, numerous perspectives emerged as to how best to conceptualize the relations between settler colonialism, imperialism, different forms of racism, white supremacy, and the role of cultural and material dispossession within capitalism, and thus to envision a political or pedagogical project within this context (Chatterjee, 2018b; Dhamoon, 2015; Jafri, 2012; Sehdev, 2011; Sharma & Wright, 2008; Snelgrove, et al, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Walia, 2012, 2021). Given these debates, traditional approaches to teaching about immigration and resettlement, which have historically focused only on the experiences of migration and integration, were rendered conceptually and ethically inadequate (Chatterjee, 2018a). For the purposes of an anti-colonial approach to ELL, it became clear that we should direct our attention to the inner relations between different formations of white supremacy and capitalism.

The third influence on our conceptualization of this project was our own grounding in resettlement education and in the critical tradition of adult education, as well as historical materialist dialectics, as Marxist feminist educators. This philosophical orientation calls upon us to, as Paula Allman (2010) challenged, forgo "hesitancy" and "prevarication" in our approach and not to "capitulate to capitalism and the continuing de-humanisation of millions of human beings" (p. 150). As Marxist feminist scholars and educators, we share an intellectual, political, and

pedagogical commitment to collaboratively building knowledge and pedagogical praxis that endeavors to explore the fulsome totality of capitalist social relations. We look beyond capitalism as an economic system and into the ways in which it is constituted through racialized and gendered class relations, constantly moving around the globe through process of expansion, dispossession, and extraction, including through forms of resistance to and struggle against capitalist violence. As Marxist feminists, we share a theoretical grounding with other scholars who have looked beyond the false universalism of white, male, cis-gendered, able bodied workers to examine how the exploitation of the many in every nook and cranny of life has been necessary within the universe of capitalism. To do this, we recognize deficits and missed opportunities in Marx's theorization of capitalism, but we share his intellectual and political commitment to dialectical, historical, and materialist methods of inquiry as the best possible analytical tools to more fully elaborate the complexities of our social reality.

These commitments meant that we had to depart substantially from traditional, de-politicized approaches to English language instruction as well as those that focus on work readiness. As scholars with practical experience working with migrant, refugee, and newcomer communities in North America, we were already cognizant of the ways in which the myths of migration in the context of settler colonialism occlude the core social contradictions within capitalism, including the relationships of exploitation, extraction, and expropriation that drive displacement, movement, and resettlement. We found that these contradictions were also not clear for the majority of our research participants, which left them struggling to make sense of the disjunccxtures between their hopes and aspirations for a life in Canada and the realities of resettlement in a white supremacist neoliberal capitalist state, which relies heavily on the exploitation of recent immigrants for its daily social reproduction (Ferguson & McNally, 2015).

Sitting within this confluence of messy, complex, ideologically mediated social relations, we recognized that at a minimum, education projects in resettlement work need to include the history of colonization and realities of Indigenous communities. Thus, ELL theorists and practitioners should also begin to think through what an anti-colonial approach to ELL might entail. Our interpretation of this problem was informed by a reading of a diverse range of anti-colonial thinkers (Abdo, 2011; Abdo & Yuval-Davis, 1995; Chatty, 2010; Coulthard, 2014; Estes, 2019; Fanon, 1965, 2004; Memi, 1965; Pappe 2006, 2017; Said, 1978, 1994; Simpson, 2016, 2017; Watenpaugh, 2015; Wolfe, 1999, 2016). From our own study, we recognized that our design of this curriculum is heavily influenced by our conceptualization of the social relations of capitalism, which are articulated through concepts such as white supremacy, patriarchy, settler colonialism, and imperialism. From our standpoint, we understand capitalism as not only an economic 'mode of production,' but, following Marx and Engels (1968), as a "mode of life" (p. 32). The mode of life of capitalism has, at its core, relied upon social relations constructed through differentiations based in gender, sexuality, race, nation, and ability in order to organize class relations. We follow the articulation of Marxist feminist sociologist Himani Bannerji (2011) who urges us to understand processes of racialization as forms of consciousness and practice that 'concretize' social relations of race and gender as the organizational mode of capitalism. This concretization, embodied in the complex discursive, juridical, and material relations named as white supremacy and patriarchy, are both processes through which capitalism developed historically and constitute recurrent and changing logics of accumulation. As such, we understand the historical period of European colonization, and specifically the settler colonization of Canada, as part of both the expansion and development of capitalist social relations on a global scale. Settler colonialism indicates a social process through which a colonizing force seeks to not only extract value from a colony, both in

terms of human labor and natural resources, but intends to eliminate and replace an indigenous society through its own 'settlement.' As such, settler colonialism is the constituent relationship of the Canadian state and is the political and cultural mechanism through which the land known as Turtle Island and its inhabitants were incorporated into expanding global capitalist relations as a dispossessed population (Nichols, 2019). Settler colonialism necessarily requires ongoing acts of racialization of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Estes, et al, 2021). Further, it involved the expansion and consolidation of capitalist patriarchal social relations (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015; Gilo-Whitaker, 2019).

However, departing from many theorists of settler colonialism, we understand imperialism in a conceptually distinct way. Following Wood (2003), we recognize that it is important not to use the terms 'empire' and 'imperialism' interchangeably, nor to conflate all historical examples of empire building in which centers of empire established colonies. While the term 'imperialism' is often used to demarcate the process of empire building in a trans-historical way, we understand imperialism as a specific aspect in the development and concentration of capitalism on a global scale (Saccarelli & Varadarajan, 2015; Smith, 2016). The need to understand imperialism as distinct from the expansionism of territorial empire is derived from both our understanding of the changing dynamics of capitalist accumulation in the last hundred or so years, but also the lived reality of refugees, specifically those we worked with who were displaced from the MENA region by ongoing imperialist wars. This reading of imperialism, of course, stems from important debates at the end of the 19th century about the changing dynamics of accumulation and forms of militarization that were used as European, and then American, empires continued to engage in imperialist rivalries for control of not only territory but global markets (Hobson, 1902; Lenin, 1967; Luxembourg, 1951). Today, war over global markets persists and, as Hanieh (2019) argues "imperialism is primarily about ensuring the ongoing subordination of the region's political economy to the forms of accumulation in the core capitalist states of the world market" (p. 46). This means that the situation of settler colonialism in Canada, typically conceptualized as a dynamic between Indigenous and 'settler' populations, can only be fully understood in the broader context of global capitalism dynamics, in which imperialism drives migration and settlement, just as enclosure and privatization were key dynamics of early settler colonialism (Linebaugh, 2003; Linebaugh & Rediker, 2000).

Working with such an analysis, it becomes clear that it is insufficient to 'decolonize' or 'indigenize' English Language Learning with refugee populations. The specifics of their own displacement and migration must be articulated as internally related to ongoing settler dispossession in North America. Our challenge was to bring both aspects of lived reality, the imperial and the settler colonial, into conversation with one another as experienced by displaced peoples. For this reason, we had to adopt an anti-colonial approach to ELL, one that draws of Marxist traditions of investigation into the constitutive relations of capitalism as a global project. As critical adult educators working in the Marxist feminist tradition, we were intrigued by the opportunity to build a learning experience that took seriously the inner relations between the lived experiences of refugees from the MENA region and First Nations communities in Canada.

The course ran for 10 weeks with fifteen participants and an average attendance of 8 people per class. Each week of the class was co-facilitated by the ELL scholar/instructor and the subject area expert. Facilitators used a variety of modalities including videos, literature, music, storytelling, group activities, writing activities, discussions, and presentations. Some of the classes were facilitated by guest lecturers, including Indigenous professors and graduate students at the

university. Each class met for three hours and was structured to begin with an interactive lecture and discussion on that week's theme, often accompanied by a short assigned reading. The lectures were followed by a short break and the remainder of the class was dedicated to language learning activities. Each week the participants worked with a vocabulary list of concepts generated from the lecture and readings and worked in pairs or small groups to complete a series of language learning exercises that reinforced aspects of grammar and spelling, and also gave them the opportunity to engage in discussion, present to the class, and analyze readings (see Appendix A). This format allowed them to listen, read, and speak in the conceptual language of the week's theme. At the end of each week, learners were provided a prompt, which they utilized to write a short reflection on the weeks' theme. These written responses were read and responded to by members of the teaching team.

We began this course by situating ourselves in what we had learned about the migration experience of young adult refugees who had been displaced by war in the MENA region and relocated to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). We took seriously their experiences of settlement and their aspirations, which hinged on the pressing necessity to resume postsecondary education. Many felt thwarted and unsure about what kind of future they had in Canada. At the same time, resettlement for young adult refugees involves learning to navigate the contradictions between liberal democracy, capitalism, and white supremacy. Their resettlement experiences involved piecing together aspects of society that appear to be disparate, but are actually deeply related, and they had to do this learning from a place of vulnerability and uncertainty.

This kind of learning is familiar within the field of adult education. The long and varied tradition associated with critical education inherently deals with experiences of oppressive social relations. This tradition is related to a history within adult education of radical or critical approaches to literacy and language learning, and many of these approaches draw from the traditions of popular education or transformative learning. However, young adult refugees reported that it was also difficult to find an instructional experience that mirrored what a Canadian postsecondary classroom might be like, including not just lectures, but expectations around discussion, participation, writing, reading, and group work. In considering these challenges and contexts, we committed to piloting an ELL course that would provide them with some sense of a postsecondary educational experience and at the same time elevate the level of language instruction beyond free, publicly available, and introductory ELL courses. Given these demands, we leaned towards a more traditional instructional approach; however, we drew from our knowledge base of the philosophies and practices of critical adult education.

While there are certainly common philosophical roots between critical education perspectives, our approach to this ELL course was premised on utilizing *dialectical contradictions* as a generative source of learning, which has its own history in critical adult and popular forms of education. The word 'contradiction' implies conflict or opposition. As Paula Allman (2010) argues "our normal concept of a contradiction is drawn from formal logic, wherein contradictions are illogical assertions or arguments or even aspects of a person's behavior that don't fit together or make sense" (p. 36). The contradictions our participants were experiencing, however, were not of this sort. They had moved from a war zone into a seemingly inclusive, just, fair, peaceful, and tolerant society that nevertheless thwarted almost all of their attempts at moving forward. This type of contradiction, in which aspects of our social reality are in conflict with one another, is understood as a dialectical contradiction within Marx's conceptual universe. These sorts of contradictions hold a very specific analytical space amongst his tools of social analysis because

"formal, or logical, contradictions reside in people's thinking and behavior, whereas dialectical contradictions are located in our material reality or, more precisely, in the social relations of our material world" (p. 36). For our purposes, conceptualizing dialectical contradictions in the historical materialist tradition means emphasizing "a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world" (Ollman, 2003, p. 12).

Our exploration of the dialectical contradictions experienced by young adult refugees in the resettlement process was deeply rooted in a historical understanding of the ways in which capitalism has developed as a global process, utilizing different forms of occupation, colonization, apartheid, war, dispossession, and domination as its modus operandi. However, capitalist social relations are easily reproduced through the production, circulation, and experience of ideology, which necessarily involves knowledge produced through abstraction and which obscures the inner relations of our social reality (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017). Historical materialist dialectics pushes us to conceptualize our social reality from a relational and historical standpoint, rather than a static one. The social relations we examine through this framework cannot be understood to be transhistorical or abstract, but rather historically specific and concrete. For example, in attempting to bring refugees into a discussion of settler colonialism, we did not want to reproduce the spatial or temporal dislocations we often see in discussions of migration experience. We did not want to frame the course on the premise that imperialism happens in one geographical locality while settler colonialism happens in another or to presuppose these relations as separate, disconnected realities. While there are crucial particularities to these processes, and also chilling sameness, we wanted, using dialectical inquiry as Ollman (2003) advises, to expand "our notion of anything to include, as aspects of what it is, both the process by which it has become that and the broader interactive context in which it is found" (p. 13). Further, we recognize that shifts in consciousness require moving beyond the experiential particularities of an oppressive condition (Lenin, 1978). Dialectical contradiction is a tool that allows us to put multiple geographies, multiple temporalities, and multiple identities in conversation with one another.

Our conceptual grounding in the realities and contradictions of resettlement meant that in conceptualizing the course a deeper framing of the relationship between colonialism and liberal democracy was necessary. In order to both make sense of the experiences of racism, sexism, and classism that characterize the resettlement process as well as interrupt the internalization and normalization of settler colonialism, it was necessary to bring these realities into closer conceptual contact, given that the processes of colonialism appear as spatially and temporarily disparate, but are intrinsically interrelated. This allowed us to plan a course around the kinds of contradiction, disjuncture, and convergence that we can see within colonial and imperial relations on a transnational scale. The content of the course was planned as an introduction to the history and major features of the colonization of Canada; in other words, an attempt to explain the historical and social realities of Canadian history and the Canadian state through the lens of settler colonialism. We did not begin with the premise that capitalism determines all other social relations. Rather, we understood settler colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, for example, as some, but not all, of the constitutive social relations of capitalism, which exist in particular forms in different geographies. Likewise, diverse modes of Indigenous resistance to empire are also part of the elaboration and development of capitalist social relations, and we sought to integrate these forms of struggle into our teaching in order to not valorize the ongoing victimization of Indigenous peoples. We understand that while these relations move and work together, there are also important differences and contradictions within them and one of the most important ones is manifested in the experience of young adult refugees when they engage in a

resettlement process that presupposes the liberal democracy of Canada. In that moment, their aspirations come into conflict with Indigenous self-determination, whose negation and dispossession is presupposed by the Canadian State (Coulthard, 2014). This contradiction is vocalized by young adult refugees when they regurgitate racist tropes about Indigenous people or believe them to be, most painfully, simply gone. When we begin to address the role of resettlement education in the settler colonial project, this contradiction is unavoidable.

This took form through focusing our pedagogy on inner relations and contradictions. We framed our own thinking about curriculum design through the following questions: 1) What does it mean for Canada to be a 'settler colonial' society? 2) How does the settlement and colonization of North America relate to the colonization of other parts of the world? 3) And, how can we understand the relationships between forced displacement, migration, and resettlement in a colonized context? These questions were developed in order to explore connections between the particularities of colonization processes in Canada and the MENA region. Also, developing a curriculum that, in some way, responded to these questions allowed us to develop our own thinking and understanding of the contradictions between settler colonialism, imperialism, liberal democracy, and capitalism.

We conceptualized each lesson by introducing a disjuncture and a convergence in colonial realities, which were then articulated through a weekly theme (see Appendix A). The development of these curricular themes was informed by the main framing questions of the course and organized in such a way as to bring together geographically disparate colonial practices. For example, week four discussed the containment of colonized populations through the reservation system in North America, Internally Displaced Person (IDP) and/or refugee camps internationally, and ghettos in many urban spaces. We did this knowing that many, if not all, of our participants had passed through a camp or ghetto space in their migration to Canada. Another theme looked at land acquisition in Canada and Palestine, while another theme looked at the experience of borders and status through the lens of both contemporary migration and the Indian Act in Canada. Through this structure, we hoped to encourage participants to draw connections between their lived reality of displacement and resettlement and the colonial history of Canada and to think through these manifestations of the relations of colonialism and imperialism. It was also our hope that identifying the historical and spatial continuities and differences would provoke reflection on the contradictory social relations that constitute settler colonialism and imperialism.

Over the program's 10 weeks, we observed that participants consistently engaged with and expressed interest in the topics of each class, not only through in-class discussions, but as well in their weekly written reflections. Their interest and engagement took different shapes and forms depending on the topics and modalities through which they were presented. In fact, during discussions, participants expressed that while initially the main reason for their involvement in the course had been language learning, as the course progressed the content became the primary reason for continued engagement. Participants also built connections across weeks and were engaged in developing a more interrelated analysis of the course themes. In what follows we offer some snapshots of the course as examples of not only the non-linear and often messy ways in which engagement took shape, but also as examples of the ways in which participants were working through the social contradictions taken up through each week's content and discussion.

While there were moments of great insight, connection, and empathy during the course, there were also moments of disquiet, discomfort, and push back. Within a broader terrain of critical education, much discussion has taken place concerning how to understand and respond to students'

'resistance' in the classroom to critical or challenging content, particularly content that challenges capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Those familiar with debates concerning critical education/pedagogy, social justice education, and anti-oppressive education will be aware that there is a longstanding literature on student or learner resistance to critical content (Baldwin, 1998; Boler & Zemblyas, 2003; Kumashiro, 2002). The phenomenon of why some students experience critical education as an antagonism has justly been theorized from a number of standpoints, looking at questions of identity, class, positionality, culture, and power. In what follows, we want to explore three ways in which the learners in this anti-colonial ELL course struggled with the content, expressing differing forms of 'resistance,' both during and after the course. While the expression of resistance, that is the way in which resistance was mobilized, will likely be familiar to experienced critical educators, we want to explore these moments of resistance from the standpoint of a pedagogy of inner relations and contradictions, which turns our attention to processes of ideological mediation.

Moments of Ideological Mediation

What we witnessed in our course was the use of particular ideologies to mediate difficult dialectical contradictions presented in the course material. We discuss the specific forms of these ideologies below, but before we proceed we will say a bit about how we understand ideology, conceptually, and what role ideology plays in mediating the contradictions and disjunctures within the social relations of capitalism. Briefly, we work from the understanding of ideology as a mode of meaning making, a way of producing knowledge, that is premised on processes of abstraction and de-historicization. Ideology is, as Bannerji (2020) describes following Marx's articulation, an "epistemology that ruptures the integrity of the socially concrete at a conceptual level and posits this as a property of the social" (p. 17). In other words, ideology is more than just thought content; it is a way of producing knowledge that "de-socialisizes, de-politicizes, and de-historicizes our social understanding" (p. 17). Ideologies are based in dialectics of consciousness and being; they are able to emerge through not only abstracted modes of thinking, but abstracted modes of being in which the fulsomeness of our human, social, and material relations are happening in geographical, and sometimes even temporal, spaces beyond our immediate experience. This means that ideologies are not only epistemologies, but include an ontological dimension as well since they are foundational to our experience of being. This dialectical constitution, both epistemological and ontological, means that ideologies are lived realities and can be understood as forms of praxis (Allman, 2010). In this manner, they are not just discursively circulated, but concretized in institutional practices. The fundamental terms of a dialectical, social contradiction are those of negation; negation of self and the ability of people, both individually and collectively, to pursue their own process of being and becoming. Ideologies, as ways in which meaning is created both within and about these contradictions, play a fundamental role in mediating our consciousness of the experience of contradiction.

From the standpoint of conceptualizing a dialectical historical materialist approach to education, paying attention to the mediating role of ideology is crucial. Ollman (2003) warns that one of the pitfalls within the Marxist tradition, and dialectical inquiry more broadly, is to not pay careful enough attention to aspects of mediation in our conceptualization of a dialectical contradiction (p. 19). This amounts to a tendency to overemphasize the big picture at the expense of understanding the brush strokes. To the extent that we conceptualize critical education as having the 'right' ideas, for example by generating a particular social analysis through a consciousness

raising process, we gloss over what aspects of our social reality are hindering the development of a historicized, politicized, and socialized understanding of our world, that is a scientific understanding (Au, 2007). The limits of not fully addressing the role of ideological mediation were apparent in our experience of this ELL course and we underestimated the ways in which ideologies of liberalism mediate the resettlement processes as a whole. Unpacking this reality should ultimately move us forward in our attempts to rethink resettlement education in relation to a critique of capitalism, settler colonialism, and imperialism.

Before proceeding, we want to acknowledge that the content presented in this course would likely have been challenging to most learners. It is not conceptually easy to think across time and space, nor is it easy to think through and confront transnational relations of power. It is not only an intellectually difficult exercise, it is an emotionally difficult one that calls into question one's identity, history, previous experiences, past and future agency, and possibly extended familiar and peer networks as well as normative culture. In the focus groups following the conclusion of the course, the participants were asked to think through what they were still thinking about after finishing the course and it was in these reflections that they best articulated their continued struggle to reconcile what they had learned about the past and present of Canadian society with their own presence and interests. In the discussion below, some excerpts of these focus groups are included, with light editing for readability.

Moment #1: Blaming the Victim

One of the most common responses to being confronted with evidence of injustice, inequity, or oppression is to 'blame the victim.' In his landmark analysis of the ubiquity of blaming victims of oppression and exploitation for their own subjugation, William Ryan points out the almost banal nature of this act, so frequently executed that it has a "generic formula" that involves "justifying inequality by finding defects in the victims of inequality" (1976, p. xiii). The allocation of blame for conditions of oppression, exploitation, and dispossession is always an ideological act that, as Himani Bannerji (2020) explains, is part of concretizing social formations of race, class, and gender through material processes such as public policy, distribution of resources, or institutional mechanisms of punishment and control (p. 15-16). In this way 'blaming the victim' is not simply a discursive act. It emerges out of and reinforces material processes of dispossession and, in the context of North American settler colonialism, can be traced back to initial and ongoing colonial justifications for land theft and human bondage, including concepts like terra nullius and social relations such as private property, which, in effect, legitimize theft and dispossession through complex ideological and juridical processes (Nichols, 2019).

What is of importance here is recognizing that these adult learners, most of whom had been in Canada for less than two years and some as few as two months, demonstrated an apt ability to marshal some of the most well-worn discursive tactics for deflecting accountability away from settler colonial power relations. This too must be recognized as part of the 'resettlement' process. These tactics circulate so expansively, and on an international scale, that Vowel (2016) and Tuck and Yang (2012) have already documented and deconstructed many of them. We noticed at least three ways in which ideologies of victim blaming were mobilized by participants as they attempted to navigate the contradictions embodied in their lived realities of having been displaced by imperialism in the MENA region and relocated to a settler colonial context.

The first of these mobilizations is to pursue an equivocation around power by returning to older justifications for dispossession through conquest (Grandin, 2019). For example, one participant, in their reflection, asked the following questions:

> What is the other part of this story? Like I was thinking are there…two sides of the story always and now we hear that is like the Indigenous are being attacked and all these bad things is happening because of the colonizer and this... Are there any part that's caused this attack to the Indigenous that we don't know? Did the Indigenous also have their contribution in this problem and conflict and continuous conflict that we don't know? Are there something from their side also?   (personal communication, January 7, 2019).

This example involves attempts to rationalize the violence of colonialism by questioning if the violence itself was provoked and thus, justified. Relativism is applied to history, in which the glaring inequality between combatants is obfuscated as is the historical context of inter-imperial rivalries between European powers that both drives and is developed through processes of colonization on a global scale. A second, and similar, mobilization involves an important act of historical abstraction that de-contextualizes the signing of treaties. One participant argued, as is often argued by settler Canadians, that

> I want to know how they reach to this level to sign the treaties with... because they have their own lives and they are really good and they have their communities and traditions why they reach to this level to sign treaties? Okay. I'm in my land, in my house, in my property and somebody came with to me to sign treaty, why? Why I could sign it with them that they force them to do it and I don't buy that.

> That's why I want to know more, because I think that in this point that was their fault and because of this fault they reach to this situation now (personal communication, January 7, 2019).

There is an extensive and broad range of literature on the significance of treaty relations both historically as well as their role in the process of truth and reconciliation (Starblanket, 2019; Cardinal and Hildebrandt, 2000; Simpson, 2008, 2011; Hiller, 2016; Asch 2014; Miller 2009; Stark 2016; Coyle and Borrows, 2017) Briefly, however, the participant's comment and questioning of the conditions in which settlers came into a treaty relation with different Indigenous communities encapsulates pertinent, contentious, and ongoing processes of dispossession here in Canada. Understanding treaties as a contractual agreement, within a western legal framework, reifies treaties as static, transactional, and unchanging agreements between settlers and Indigenous peoples. In this understanding, Indigenous peoples can and are blamed for their own dispossession, without taking into consideration the historical context in which they entered into these treaty-making relationships in the first place, as well as the historical significance of treaties in Indigenous sovereignty.

A final mobilization to 'blame the victim" is to assert a 'pragmatic' like conciliation that the situation cannot be redressed and so the only option is assimilation. For example, another participant attempted to explain away the ongoing conflict of settler colonialism by shifting the onus on reconciliation to Indigenous peoples by arguing

> For so, the Indigenous people also they should merge to the society. Okay, we understand that we understand their story, we understand their case, but it's 400 years now, so it's time to adjust to the culture right?
>
> In my opinion...I mean, we don't want to disagree their demands or ignore their demands, but it's the time now to not to accept their destiny or to accept their... I mean, their current life... and of course do not deny any of their requests or any of their demands, but they, you know, I mean...life goes on. I mean now we are 2020 and their cases is like 400 years now, they for 400 years. Regardless the treaties, regardless the treatment signed between the County government and Indigenous. I mean equal. I don't know if they would accept my idea. But if you are equal just put everything besides and goes on (personal communication, January 7, 2019).

This rationalization performs a function of equivocating around power, sidestepping questions of obligation and legality, and also, crucially, asserts the terms on which reconciliation can take place. In this example, the argument that it is the responsibility of Indigenous people to give up their claims and assimilate sets the terms on which this can and should happen. This assertion that 'if you are equal' thus points to another moment in which forms of ideology begin to interpenetrate and, crucially, begin to re-inscribe liberal democracy as capable of effectively and ethically mediating settler colonial processes of dispossession.

Moment #2: Equality & Freedom

Upon learning more about the history of settler colonialism in Canada and its parallels to their own experiences in the MENA region, many of the students in the course were eager to contribute their energies to redressing injustices in Canadian society. Throughout the course they expressed disgust and dismay at not only historical occurrences but contemporary actions of the Canadian government. These desires did not abate after the conclusion of the course and in follow-up focus group conversations, many still expressed an interest in getting involved in advocacy around First Nations Indigenous Metis (FNIM) issues. Further, many acknowledged that the Canadian government takes up contradictory positions vis-a-vis immigration and reconciliation with FNIM communities. As one participated noted

> I was shocked really from this situation because all of us we know that Canada encourage people to come to live in Canada and have the Canadian citizenship and to have business here and the help people rather than here outside of Canada and all the time I hear about Trudeau in the TV. He is with human rights and like this but if when you know that the indigenous people they treated here as second citizenship it is I think that is for me like *our* countries. There is many parts, there is various citizenship and second citizenship (personal communication, January 7, 2019)

Participants acknowledged Canada as a wealthy country and were puzzled by the lack of policy solutions or political will to address the ongoing impacts of colonialism. They were dismayed that conditions on reserves could not be adequately addressed given the resources available in Canada and that massive inequalities persist in housing, education, and healthcare. While the course tried to emphasize a non-reified approach to colonialism, that is the recognition that settler colonialism is the founding *and* continuing relation of the state of Canada, participants attention was drawn most heavily to problems that could be seen as outcomes of a historical legacy of colonialism. We

were surprised that issues around land occupation, pipelines, and environmental justice did not seem to capture their attention given the obvious parallels to imperialist war and resource extraction in the MENA region.

However, this observation made more sense when we asked them to talk about how they saw themselves participating in addressing these issues moving forward. On this point they were more circumspect, many acknowledging that their responsibility as a newcomer was to better understand the situation. The course highlighted to them how much there was to learn and they felt better prepared to continue learning. When asked how this new knowledge impacted them, many discussed a future landscape in which they would be able to have agency around questions of reconciliation. The expressed form of that agency was citizenship and electoral processes. As one participant expressed,

> So, so because I am here I have to learn about this land. Yeah, and I would actually to fight with people like I mean with Indigenous people so after I said afterward I if I get a Canadian citizen, I can do it like the election or I can say like something if I maybe lets say...I don't know if I get any like opportunity to be with the other government because I know, I know indigenous people, I mean like in general I know this land for indigenous people. So that's enough (personal communication, January 7, 2019).

Despite the fact that participants had been introduced to a variety of modes of resistance and struggle, including Indigenous histories of land occupations, strike, blockades, protest movements, and policy advocacy, the participants largely saw their role as 'voting for the right people.' This position of course contradicts their dismay at the disingenuous ways in which the Canadian government has taken up causes of reconciliation, let alone decolonization.

Participants demonstrated a resilient faith in liberal governments to correct their own past atrocities and mistakes. They believed that the Canadian government, if populated with sympathetic representatives, would 'do the right thing.' In this way, it became clear to us that we had underestimated the role that ideologies of liberalism play in mediating consciousness around settler colonialism and should have paid more attention to this pedagogically. Upon increasing their awareness of the history and contemporary realities of settler colonialism in Canada, the central political contradiction of settler colonialism, which is that the Canadian state both expropriates and negates Indigenous sovereignty in order to establish its own legitimacy, became an intractable cul-de-sac for participants. There was no way to 'think their way out' of this contradiction, and their new position as soon-to-be citizens, without reverting to a reliance on liberal democratic processes of governance to provide a solution. Or, as one participant expressed "to keep educated about what's happened and to try to contribute in a positive way of finding are there still like policies and these things that can just balance the situation or the social situation in the country" (Speaker 4, personal communication, January 7, 2019).

Moment #3: Centering Individual Identity

The reliance upon notions of citizenship and electoral processes speaks to an attempt by participants to find a way to express their individual agency in relation to the new awareness they have regarding the legitimacy of FNIM claims against the Canadian state. However, citizenship within electoral democracy has limited scope; as a form of political relation, it is premised on the alienation of political power to an elected representative (Allman, 1999), but it is also a

fundamental component of the political and social reproduction of capitalism (Wood, 1995). Liberal citizenship, which in specific moments can coalesce into collective efforts, is at the same time a reaffirmation of a highly individualized form of political consciousness, one that is fundamentally premised on self-interest. Thus, not only does a reliance on liberal constructions of citizenship reinscribe the settler colonial condition, it also makes what is essentially a social contradiction the burden of individual citizens to resolve through their own consciousness, subjectivity, and agency because it is only through individual acts, such as voting, that political agency can be expressed.

It is for this reason that there is, within liberal readings of settler colonialism, such a strong emphasis on the question of identity and agency in individualized forms. Pedagogically, emphasizing the assumption of a particular identity (e.g. naming oneself as 'settler' or 'ally) as demonstrable of a particular political consciousness has been an extremely fraught endeavor. It is also very close to the surface of our awareness when we begin to understand a social contradiction. The immediate question becomes not how such a contradiction can be resolved, which is an extremely difficult question to ask oneself, but how that contradiction implicates the self. How am I involved in this? How am I culpable or colluding? What can I do that might make a difference? The participants in the ELL course were no different than the rest of us in this regard. For those who didn't try to escape the contradictions of settler colonialism and migration through the ideologies of assimilation, victim blaming, or state legitimacy, another divergent mode of meaning making emphasized the affective tension that emerges with increasing awareness of political and historical relations. As one participant expressed,

> As I said, like I take three weeks or two weeks before me just thinking yeah, I am here as a refugee or I am here like, as a[n] Israeli in Palestine? I am here like to take this land from them or take like some place from them? Or I'm here just as refugee? (personal communication, January 7, 2019).

These are difficult questions of complicity many of us struggle with and they are politically and ethically crucial questions to ask. However, when reduced to questions of identity, they also play a role in defining the terms of political struggle against colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism in crucial ways. The most interesting way in which this identity problem expressed itself in the course was by the same speaker quoted above. After posing the very real question, "am I like an Israeli in Palestine?", the speaker then considered if they were 'Canadian,' and thus culpable in a particular way, 'British,' and thus really to blame for this situation, or 'a refugee,' who is absolved of responsibility. The speaker also recounted an interaction with a particular First Nations individual to whom this question was put and who assured the speaker that refugees are not 'settlers.' He continued on to say that he would be proud to become a Canadian but that he would tell people he was not from Canada, not like the British, who stole land.

This emphasis on a liberal discourse of identity also holds the key to escaping a more radical or revolutionary political stance. In recognizing one's identity as 'settler,' we also saw participants perform a perverse interpretation of history, rendering it present in the naming of oneself, but ultimately occluded. As one participant noted,

> Yes, but so it's to reach a neutral point where you just don't hold it. You understand. So you need just to understand that is the history and what's happening is happening. Okay, and now what's happening to change it or to giving the people, the First Nation, the right. So I was thinking like after that I try to make it to accept

it or to understand it more deeper. Then who is the land is owned for who's the owner of the land from the beginning from the creation of the world like the nations? Maybe there was some people before the indigenous they came and the indigenous take their land also and this is like a continuous circle in the history. Okay. So it's happening all the time and the current, the current Canadian are not the one who invaded this country like hundred fifty years back and like we are thinking about 3-4 generation but it is also it is not the fault of the current people what's happened in the past because they were not even born okay to think or to judge them on their fault of the ancient. You get my point (personal communication, January 7, 2019).

Here, history becomes a continuous loop, in which one group of 'nations' displaces another and no one can be held to account for the sins of the father. Ultimately, this recognition that one is a 'settler' is also a reification of colonialism as a past reality and a present condition, one that is unavoidable and has limited redress. It also obscures ongoing abuses and positions those in power in Canadian society as lacking agency in relation to contemporary or historical injustices, but nonetheless recognizes some responsibility to 'understand what is happening.' Thus, becoming an 'informed citizen' without any moral responsibility to act on that information places the onus of change on individuals rather than looking at how systems are constructed to uphold, reinscribe, and concretize colonial relations of power.

Concluding Thoughts

"When we came [to Canada] we believed that this is a democratic space, that anyone can say things without criminalization, but now realizing it's not so different from our countries" (personal communication, January 7, 2019).

The participants in the ELL course struggled to resolve their own aspirational understanding of the Canadian state as a liberal democracy with the awareness that the Canadian state criminalizes and represses political dissent and uses its military apparatus against Indigenous populations. This 'de-mythologizing' of the state was also extended to their own growing awareness that many aspects of 'freedom' in Canada are premised on class mobility. When faced with these difficult realities, some students 'stepped into' the contradiction, arguing that the resettlement of refugees is part of the historical continuity of settlement in Canada and that the resulting political position for themselves was to act in solidarity with First Nations movements and Indigenous led forms of resistance. Others, however, were unable to move in that direction. While expressing that they hoped to use their vote to elect representatives that would respect treaties and First Nations, they also responded to the course in particular moments with what we can and should expect are common discursive tropes.

These common forms of resistance are so ubiquitous that Tuck & Yang (2012) have referred to them as 'moves to settler innocence.' The conceptual elaboration of this construct of 'moves to innocence,' dates back to the 1990s and to previous work examining white women in feminist movements, white people in anti-racist settings, and, most recently, settlers in colonial spaces. The major characteristics of these moves are the displacement and subjugation of the experience of oppression, so that the question of power is muted behind another relation or, in many cases, equivocated in order to produce a kind of false universalism. These moves are complex, presenting with common discursive tropes, predictable affective states, and psychically entrenched

worldviews. As Tuck & Yang point out, in the context of settler colonialism, these moves reinscribe the historical and future legitimacy of settler occupation and cast Indigenous efforts at self-determination into a 'metaphorical' space.

We recognize, however, that behind the appearance of these discourses, something else is happening. It is for this reason that we refer to these complex moments in the course as moments of 'ideological mediation.' By this we mean that as we grapple with contradictions, we process these disjunctures through socially and materially produced ideologies that operate to negate the appearance of the contradiction. For example, the affective tension of recognizing one's complicity in settler colonialism can be addressed by ideologies that legitimate colonial violence. Upon recognizing that flows of migration into Canada are part of a historical continuity of occupation and settlement, ideologies of assimilation, civil society, multiculturalism, and liberal individualism were utilized to 'negate' this contradiction. Even if, significantly, refugees are struggling under the weight of these same ideologies in different ways.

What is of particular interest here, however, is that these students demonstrated the role that these ideologies play in mediating their own experience of resettlement as well as their understanding of settler colonialism. So as students grappled with de-mythologizing Canadian history, they also grappled with the contradictory social relations that characterize migration. What they were struggling with is how to reframe their understanding of this reality away from an individualized and internalized one to a way of seeing what is systemically happening in society. This is a very messy learning process that is not and cannot simply be about generating awareness, sympathy, or reducing resettlement education with newcomers to a process of 'naming' themselves in relation to settler colonialism. The primary ideology mediating their own resettlement experience is the same ideology mediating their engagement with a critical understanding of the place they have resettled in. Without interruption, we get stuck in a loop of reaffirming the inevitably of capitalism, liberal democracy, and settler colonial relations, with all the attenuating forms of racism, ecocide, patriarchy, and heteronormativity that constitute these social formations. We also can get stuck in a space where we obscure the social aspect of these contradictions (that is the role of state and capital and our collectivized, mobilized forms of resistance) and reduce these experiences down to questions of individual identity and agency.

Appendix A

Outline of ELL Curriculum

WEEK	LECTURE CONCEPT	THEME	SAMPLE VOCABULARY WORDS	REFLECTION PROMPT
1	Framing Global and Local Contexts	Addressing National Myths	Disability, Racialized, Social Assistance, food security, precarious employment, Indigenous, Status First Nations, Non-Status First Nations, Innuit, Métis	

WEEK	LECTURE CONCEPT	THEME	SAMPLE VOCABULARY WORDS	REFLECTION PROMPT
2	Who are the Indigenous Peoples of Canada? Why Study Colonialism?	Understanding Colonialism	Colonialism, Settler-Colonialism, Resource Extraction, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Displace, Settler, Terra Nullius, Doctrine of Discovery, Turtle Island	Where do you come from and how did you get here? How is your history related to the history of settler-colonialism in Canada?
3	Trappers, Treaties, and Land	Historical Trajectory of Land and Occupation	Erode, absorb, Normalize, Ammunition, Surplus, Policy, Marginalization, Infrastructure, Water Advisory, Resource Extraction	How can an entire population be eliminated without using any weapons, or firing a shot? Where else is this happening, similar to Canada?
4	Reservations, Camps, and Ghettos	The Indian Act and Segregation	Sentence structure exercise.	
5	Residential Schools, Child Welfare, and Incarceration	Residential Schools		Write about another context (country, land, people, situation), that you know about, past or present, where education has been used as a tool of assimilation.
6	Policing, Surveillance, Status, and Borders	Borders in History and Context	Vocabulary from Thomas King short story *Borders*.	Take-home sentence structure activity; response to King (1993).
7	Women and Violence	Breaking communities through Violence Against Women	Sentence structure activity.	How is violence on the land connected to violence against women?
8	Land, Dispossession, and Imperialism	Oka Crisis and Standing Rock	Monarchy, Treaty, Declaration, Logic of Elimination, Seizure of Land, Displacement, Settlement, Settler	Why do people leave? Why do people stay? What are the different contexts or situations in which people stay or leave a land?

WEEK	LECTURE CONCEPT	THEME	SAMPLE VOCABULARY WORDS	REFLECTION PROMPT
			Colony, Colonizer	
9	War, Migration, and Settlement	Resistance and Activism		Statement of intent for postsecondary application
10	Reflections and Feedback			

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criticaleducation.org
ISSN 1920-4175

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