

**EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE NEWCOMER YOUTH
IN A NEW BRUNSWICK HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY CLASS:
A CURRICULUM CRITIQUE**

by

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ABSTRACT

Using critical discourse analysis, autoethnography, and qualitative interviewing methodologies, I examine the New Brunswick high school Modern History 11 curriculum and the experience of four Syrian newcomer youth who have encountered it. The thesis draws from a range of theoretical traditions, including critical race theory, performativity and gender theory, postcolonial theory and Foucault's ideas about the relationship between power and knowledge. Through my experience teaching the curriculum, I argue that it is Eurocentric and white supremacist, militaristic, and patriarchal. The existing curriculum emphasizes the history of European war, especially the two World Wars, which are sanitized and glorified, and valorizes military experience. I subject the History 11 curriculum document to a critical discourse analysis and compare these findings alongside the perspectives of Syrian refugee newcomers who have personally experienced war. I describe how four Syrian refugee youth experience a New Brunswick curriculum that portrays war as a geopolitical inevitability and technical problem without adequately considering its human consequences or moral dimensions. I consider how working critically with social studies curricula can enhance education about war for all students, suggest curricular reform that would encourage a commitment to peaceful conflict resolution, and recommend educational practices that focus upon possibilities for building awareness, empathy, and compassion among students from distinct cultures with widely divergent stories to tell.

DEDICATION

For my daughters, Jessica, Alysha and Emma: You can do anything you set your mind to.

Thank you for your patience, compassion, and love.

For my husband, Jeff: You have been a constant support and encouragement while I walked and stumbled through this journey.

For my parents, Bill and Mary: thank you for cheering me on through my entire writing process.

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I respectfully and peacefully acknowledge that my learning at the University of New Brunswick happened on the unsundered and unceded territory of the traditional lands of Wolastoqiyik.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I was helping one of my History 11 students with his English Language Arts poetry assignment about his home country, Syria. He wanted to share a memory with me. He informed me it was a funny story, but sad. I listened. He told me about his new phone, purchased in Turkey after his family had fled there from the war in Syria—a race to safety, but he leaves that part out. He hated Turkey. Students were mean to him in school: “it was very bad.” Every day kids would kick him, hit him, and pull his hair, and every day he cried. He just wanted to go back to Syria to see his best friend, his cousin. He missed his home. At twelve years-old he set out alone to walk from Turkey to his home in Syria. He was stuck at the border for more than 24 hours; but was eventually released and managed to find his cousin. They were excited to see each other and stood outside a store checking out how great the camera was on the new phone my student had bought in Turkey. He laughs. It makes me smile. He reminds me that the story is funny, but also bad. I pay attention. He and his cousin looked at the sky through the lens of the camera. They see a plane. He said it took them a few seconds to realize the plane was bombing. Suddenly, he and his cousin were thrown through the air by an explosion. He shows me the scars under his hair on the back of his head from the shrapnel. He still smiles. I don’t know what to say.¹

This story resonates with me; it echoes some of the violence and trauma I have experienced in my life. My own exposure to brutality and trauma came through domestic violence. This is the experience that inspired me to become a critical educator for peace.

¹ Italicized parts of the text signify excerpts from my personal journals.

Sharing my story has been healing for me over the years. It has helped me understand the power relations that are often invisible and unspoken in a marriage. I learned firsthand that “storytelling can provide a sense of hope, belonging, and meaning” (Deutsch et al., 2014, p. 708). Spending time with newcomer students in my classroom has given me the opportunity to form relationships of trust and storytelling with them. Many of the newcomer youth I have taught have shared their memories of life before and after coming to Canada. I have heard numerous accounts of pre-migration experiences of war and post-migration experiences of marginalization in new and unfamiliar schools and communities. These stories have affected me deeply.

Koreen Geres (2016) argues that the telling of stories is an effective way to build community among refugee youth as well as between these young people and their peers in the country that is providing refuge. Sharing personal stories helps to create relationships and support systems (East et al., 2010). My pedagogical approach has always featured story telling. I strive to make my classroom a space of trust that is conducive to stories, and I often share stories to illustrate new concepts or ideas. To introduce myself in history classes, for example, I provide groups of students with some of my personal documents—photographs, certificates, clippings, school projects and other primary sources—and I ask them to piece my life together. Each group interprets the documents, and hence my story, differently; I help them fill in the gaps. In this exercise, I try to demonstrate the complexity of historical narratives and model the sort of openness and vulnerability we will need to share as we build our community of learners. This is the beginning of the process which Leah East, Debra Jackson, Louise O’Brien, and Kathleen Peters (2010) describe as the creation of “an atmosphere of acceptance in a

suitable environment to enhance the comfort and safety of the storyteller” (p. 19). Even the physical environment of my classroom is designed to be comfortable, open, and welcoming. And I develop many of the activities within it specifically to foster empathy. I often wonder about the thoughts and feelings of the Syrian youth in my classroom. I try to imagine how challenging it would be to learn about a society and culture that is radically different from those I have known. Then I remember that this challenge most likely pales in comparison to those that these students have already surmounted. They are here because of war and displacement. Like me, the Syrian students in my classes are survivors of violence.

Canada is presented as a place of sanctuary for these students, and yet adjusting to life here comes with an abundance of obstacles and difficulties. In my community, Fredericton, New Brunswick, citizens and permanent residents of Canada have made impressive efforts to welcome Syrian newcomers and to ease the stresses of daily life in an unfamiliar society. For example, the Multicultural Association of Fredericton (MCAF) *First Fredericton Friends* program brings together volunteers and newcomers with the intention of establishing connections and helping newcomers settle into the community. MCAF also offers language programs and educational support for youth transitioning into the public-school system.

My efforts to welcome newcomers have occurred predominantly in the context of the high school classroom where I am responsible for teaching history. Autoethnographer Carolyn Ellis has highlighted the “epiphanies,” or moments of awakening, that can occur when one is immersed in research (Ellis et al., 2008, p. 262). Deep engagement in teaching, I would argue, can produce such moments as well. For me it was teaching

history, specifically the grade eleven Modern History course, that brought me to the revelation, or, as Glenda MacNaughton (2005) has termed it, the “epistemological shudder” (p. 110) that our educational tools and pedagogical practices are profoundly inadequate both for newcomer refugees, and for the Indigenous and settler students in the educational community they have joined.

The focus of my thesis is the New Brunswick Modern History 11 course. Teaching this course has become deeply problematic for me. In my research, I “turn my reflexive gaze on [the] discourse” of the Modern History 11 curriculum, which is laid out in the *Curriculum Guide* (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012). I examine its “taken for granted” assumptions in a new light (Charteris, 2014, p. 105). In this light, I argue, its Eurocentric and white supremacist, militaristic, and patriarchal values are vividly on display. I analyze the Modern History 11 curriculum, reflect on how it might be revised, and consider creative and critical ways teachers might work with it. I provide a detailed examination of the curriculum utilizing the approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This is accompanied by a qualitative autoethnographic account of my experiences in teaching the course, and of my observations of the responses of Syrian refugee newcomer students to it. These observations are recorded in the teaching journals I have kept for the last several years and have also been elicited through more recent interviews with the refugee newcomer students I have taught in this class. The course focuses on histories in which the societies and ancestors of these newcomer students have no place. It shapes a depiction of war and the military that is incommensurable with the lived experiences of war carried by refugee newcomers. As I interrogate the curriculum’s portrayal of power relations, Eurocentrism

and white supremacist, militaristic, and patriarchal values, I argue that it reproduces a “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 13-14; MacNaughton, 2005, p. 27) conceived to justify and perpetuate a bellicose, corrupt, racist, and ultimately unsustainable status quo.

Positionality

Critical scholarship assesses the complexities of power and considers how it is embedded in the research process (Pollack & Eldridge, 2015). It is crucial to be as open about my positionality—linguistic, ethnocultural, socioeconomic, and gendered—as possible. This reflexivity is a prerequisite to the sort of “pedagogical witnessing” that Zembylas (2006) commends as a means of opening “new critical spaces that can sustain the connection between bearing witness and political transformation” (p. 324). I am keenly aware of my position as a white female settler educator and researcher, and of the hazards and responsibilities of researching and writing about the experiences of othered people, such as Syrian refugee youth. My awareness of my privilege has become more acute through my experience as a teacher of racialized newcomer and Indigenous youth, especially in the Modern History 11 course. I have realized, in this context, that what I am asked to teach implicates me in the legitimation and perpetuation not only of the settler-colonial status quo in Canada, but of the predominantly white Euro-American domination of racialized Others worldwide.

This thesis is one aspect of my resistance to this complicity. By revealing the mechanisms of power operating, often imperceptibly, within the curriculum and in the classrooms in which it is taught, I suggest strategies for unmasking and subverting these mechanisms. I am determined that neither my research process, nor its final product, reinforce the otherness already imposed on Syrian newcomers by the dominant society.

One safeguard against this hazard is vigorous self-awareness. This means checking myself—my attitudes, opinions, assumptions, and ideological biases—as I attempt to understand and render the experiences of these individuals not as others, but as fully human beings. I actively examine my own emotional responses, reactions, and personal beliefs as the research process proceeds through autoethnographic journal keeping.

Equally important, it seems to me, is to ensure that the students I teach, interact with, interview and write about, are not positioned as research *subjects*, but as active participants in the research process. Their stories are every bit as important as my interpretations of them, and I do my best to represent them faithfully. In particular, the Syrian newcomers who took part in the interview aspect of this study have helped to determine the path it takes. I have tried to ensure that these young people understood what my research is about, why I approached it the way I have, and how I planned to carry it out. I informed them, at every stage, about the rationale for and status of the research as I continuously checked back with them on my interpretations of the data collected and their perspectives.

Context: Canada and Newcomer Refugees

Canada, a wealthy nation well equipped to accommodate refugees and favoured with a geography that may protect it from some of the most serious ravages of war and climate change, is likely to continue to offer sanctuary to those whose homelands have been affected by war. Perhaps, the most vulnerable population of youth in the world today are those whose families have been displaced by war and natural disaster. War and climate change, and the struggles for diminishing resources that environmental catastrophe will continue to engender, is sure to significantly swell this population

(Carvalho, 2015; UNHCR, 2020). Between 2015 and 2017 the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) assisted with the relief and relocation of nearly 70 million refugees (UNHCR, 2018). Canada has resettled more than 84,000 people, of which 43% were youth 17 years of age and under (Government of Canada, 2017). Between 2011 and 2016, 2,630 Syrian refugees moved to New Brunswick, with 445 settling in Fredericton (Statistics Canada, 2016). Nearly 44% of this Syrian population is under the age of 15. The influx of Syrian refugees is one aspect of a global flow of population from south to north. The presence of these racialized and colonized peoples will increasingly disrupt the white Eurocentric colonialist narratives of Western education systems. There is an increasing need for educators to be prepared for a culturally diverse population of refugee students displaced by war. Understanding these young people and helping them succeed, academically and socially, is imperative for newcomers, for the society they have joined, and for teachers like myself.

Context: New Brunswick History Curriculum

In high school social studies classrooms throughout New Brunswick, all youth, including Syrian newcomer youth, are presented with a compulsory grade eleven history curriculum which I argue is both white supremacist and dominated by military history. Although it may be impossible to teach high school history without teaching about war; it should be possible to teach war history critically. In my eight years of experience as a social studies educator, however, I have found that both the curriculum itself, and the pedagogical practice I have observed and even practiced myself, promote an uncritical historical examination of war. This uncritical stance takes place in spite of critical analysis claims within the *Curriculum Guide* (2012). I demonstrate the uncriticality of

these putatively critical claims in detail in my thesis. As well, I demonstrate how the shortcomings of teaching a war-dominated history curriculum uncritically become particularly apparent in ethnoculturally diverse classrooms. Fostering a critical approach that problematizes war and violence seems all the more pressing in these settings, where many newcomer students carry recent memories of military violence. For the Syrian students in the classes I teach, war is often the dominant feature of the immediate personal past, the “force,” as Chris Hedges (2003) has termed it, that literally brought them to where they are (p. 22).

The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) begins with the declaration that the course is “designed to highlight significant events in Western Modern History which are to be critically examined based upon three criteria: historical knowledge, historical thinking, and making connections” (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012, p. 2). My analysis of this claim exposes the limits of “critical” examination as conceived in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012). The importance of critical thinking is emphasized in the introduction of the *Curriculum Guide* (2012), yet the historical material that comprises the content of the curriculum, and the prescribed outcomes and suggested strategies designed to guide engagement with this content, has the effect of constraining critical analysis to a narrow (and ideologically safe) range of possibilities. To this point, the curriculum’s explicitly Eurocentric focus is itself a major problem. History is much larger and more complex than the carefully abridged and manicured story of modern Western Europe and the Canadian connections presented to New Brunswick high schoolers. In a Truth and Reconciliation era, (See <http://www.trc.ca>) the curriculum reflects the persistence of deeply embedded

Eurocentric and white supremacist values which has the effect of marginalizing, distorting, and excluding other histories.

The selected “significant events” of this official Modern History 11 curriculum, moreover, are chiefly violent ones, with war figuring disproportionately. The curriculum begins with an exploration of the European Enlightenment—dwelling on its preoccupation of ideals of human progress and perfectibility—and ends in the war-torn twentieth century, without ever examining Europe’s betrayal of these ideals. Post-Enlightenment, the curriculum considers the French Revolution, especially the Reign of Terror (pp. 23-27), and then, following a unit on industrialization, offers extensive coverage of the two World Wars (pp. 33-46), the Holocaust (pp. 47-49), and the Cold War (pp. 50-52). Just as history is far more than the West, it is also immeasurably more than violence and terror, battles and wars, monarchs, prime ministers, generals, and soldiers. It is possible to critically interpret this official militarized curriculum; however, I have seen little evidence of this in practice. As with the implementation of many curricula, it is less complicated to take up the material as presented due to the constraints and challenges of everyday teaching such as: supervised duty, extra help, record keeping, home contact, and extracurricular supervision. Curricula impose outcomes that must be met, and provide a roadmap to help educators deliver. In my conversation with teachers, and in the context of my own teaching, I have observed that even teachers well aware of the shortcomings of a curriculum take the main route mapped out.

In the Modern History 11 curriculum, war is portrayed primarily as an inescapable feature of international politics and as a technical problem, rather than as an ethical quandary, human catastrophe, or complex social phenomenon. For example, in the

unit on the First World War, students are required “to know and understand that mechanized/industrialized warfare led to an increased level of destruction” (p. 38) yet nowhere are they invited to consider the opposition to the war—the widespread revulsion, resistance, and revolution it provoked—or to investigate the extreme lengths to which all the belligerent states resorted to enforce compliance and crush dissent, measures such as conscription, anti-sedition laws, and the deportation and imprisonment of government critics (Hochschild, 2011; Keelan, 2020). The Modern History 11 curriculum focuses instead on the machinery of war, recommending that students learn about the technology of killing: “the machine gun, the tank and poison gas” (p. 38). The impact of these killing machines on actual human bodies is not addressed. Rather, the curriculum suggests that teachers help “make life in the trenches come alive” for students by feeding them “hardtack bread or beef jerky (available in most grocery stores)” as they take up being soldiers by eating and writing fictitious letters home to loved ones (p. 38). The sanitization of war is evident here. The curriculum steers teachers and students away from a forthright inquiry into the ethical complexities of war and its human and environmental consequences through its reinforcement of the conception of war that students are apt to acquire from the mainstream media and popular culture. On the one hand, war is sanitized, romanticized, and made acceptable, even desirable (especially for men), while, on the other, it is depicted as an inevitable tragedy that requires the selfless sacrifice of countless human beings every generation or two to protect “our” freedoms. It is not presented as an avoidable atrocity perpetuated by a rich powerful minority which deceives and exploits in its greed for wealth and power (Hedges, 2003). Peace and

peacemaking hardly register in a curriculum dominated by war and war-making (Finley, 2003).

My teaching experiences with the Modern History 11 curriculum have led me to question its suitability for all students, and, in the case of this study, for newcomer refugee students in particular. The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) is preoccupied with European history, while neglecting European colonialism and imperialism and the racism embedded therein. Although the competition for overseas empire is mentioned as a cause of the First World War, and there is some material in the *Curriculum Guide's* (2012) appendix about European colonialism in Africa, Europe's expansion into and exploitation of huge expanses of the Americas, Africa, the Middle East, Oceania, and Asia between the mid-eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries (the period covered by the curriculum) is largely absent. Indeed, the curriculum offers no opportunity for New Brunswick students to learn that their own country is a product of European settler-colonialism, or that the land occupied by their province was stolen from its original Wolastoqiyik and Mi'kmaq inhabitants. The marginalization of this central aspect of modern history is troubling. It is a kind of Eurocentrism that largely erases the extensive and deliberate imperial projects of European nations, projects that ranged from the exploitive to the explicitly genocidal. This erasure sustains white supremacy. This skewed, long-standing narrative constructs a West versus the rest binary reproducing the social, cultural, and linguistic hierarchies that acted to legitimize imperialism in the first place (Said, 1978). Such narratives, as Edward Said (1978) writes, have functioned as "ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them") (Said, 1978, p. 43). The narrative set forth in the

Curriculum Guide (2012) follows the Orientalist script. It silences and represses alternative or competing narratives, while at the same time positioning Western European history as normative – the historically progressive standard against which all else is to be judged (MacNaughton, 2005). In this respect, the Modern History 11 curriculum reflects a dominant “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 13-14; MacNaughton, 2005, p. 27) in Canadian society. It is thus a component of what Said (1978) broadly referred to as “cultural imperialism,” taken up and re-conceived by Marie Battiste as an explicitly educational strategy which she terms, “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste, 2013). Battiste (2013) defines cognitive imperialism as the “white-washing” of “the mind” in the cause of “forced assimilation” (p. 26). And while she applies the term to the settler-colonial education of Indigenous Canadian youth specifically, the process is also at work with respect to Syrian newcomers. The Modern History 11 course marginalizes their histories as well, and hence reinforces their subordination in a society in which they are already positioned as Other.

Research Questions

In this study, I ask (1) how do Syrian newcomer refugee youth interact with the History 11 curriculum? (2) what do the stories of these young people reveal about their experience with the curriculum? (3) what can they tell us about the history we teach and how we teach it, particularly when it comes to the history of war? (4) how might an approach to modern history grounded in the principles of decolonization and peace education better serve all of our students?

This research is timely and relevant, in part, because it engages with the contemporary conversation about the meaning of Canada itself. The nation has enjoyed a

reputation as a force for peace in world affairs which works through international institutions to solve conflicts and facilitate reconciliation. This reputation, of course, has always been problematic. It is belied first and foremost by the nation's foundational and ongoing dispossession and oppression of Indigenous peoples. This oppression, as Jenny Burman (2016) points out, is obscured by multiculturalism, which "acts as a salve or alibi for ongoing settler colonialism" (p.362). Canada's reputation has been further tarnished in recent years by Canada's contributions to the imperialist interventions of the United States—in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya for example—and through Canadian arms sales to countries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia (Engler, 2019; McKay & Smith, 2012).

The Modern History 11 curriculum reflects and shapes an image of Canada more consistent with what historians Ian McKay and Jamie Swift (2012) have called a "warrior nation" (p. xi) than as a constructive, humane, multilateralist, peaceable participant in world affairs. This militarization of the Canada's history and of its contemporary role in the world must be countered by public education focusing on peace-making. Peace education is antithetical to militarization (Finley, 2012). I believe that this responsibility is not being met in New Brunswick History classrooms. In these spaces, young people learn to view armed conflict as unavoidable and engagement in war as admirable. The interrogation of the morality of war is not encouraged; its brutal reality is scrubbed clean and romanticized. The recent calls by many legislators and citizens to confront Indigenous protests arising from the Canadian state's violation of ancestral Wet'suwet'en territory with armed force indicates something of the poverty of our education system when it comes to peaceful conflict resolution.

Theoretical Framing

This thesis is informed by a variety of theoretical traditions including (1) critical race theory, (2) performativity and gender theory, and (3) Foucauldian and postcolonial theory.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) considers the forms by which systems of racism are socially constructed by analyzing the practices and policies that marginalize racialized minorities (Schroeter & James, 2015). Multiculturalism is now the primary ideological context within which racism and colonization operate in Canada. Jennifer Simpson, Carl E. James, and Johnny Mack (2015) contend that Canada's multiculturalism is a construction that serves to "systematically deny, reject, and minimize" (p. 287) the persistence of colonialism and racism in Canadian society. Multiculturalism privileges culture over race, thereby cloaking the way power relations are racialized (Simpson et al., 2015). But multiculturalism is embedded as the dominant national discourse; it is normalized and ingrained, its ideological roots invisible. Canada prides itself on offering "the promise of happiness" to all of its citizens, but the tolerance and acceptance presumed to arise from official multiculturalism actually serves to obscure systemic racist oppression, particularly of Indigenous peoples (Burman, 2016, p. 362). New Brunswick, for example, proudly proclaims its multiculturalism when promoting itself as Canada's only bilingual province, but its public educational institutions nevertheless largely disregard the languages, histories, and ways of knowing of its original Wolastoqiyik and Mi'kmaq peoples. This is precisely what Battiste (2013) meant by "cognitive imperialism" (p. 26). The dominant narrative of New Brunswick serves both to obfuscate

and perpetuate the cultural, economic, and political hegemony of the English and French majority and the systemic operation of white supremacy in the province. As Gillborn (2006) puts it, multiculturalism is “a slogan, evacuated of all critical content, ritually cited but leaving untouched the deep-rooted processes of racist oppression and exclusion that currently shape . . . education systems” (p. 27).

Christopher Martell (2013) argues for the utility of critical race theory (CRT) in education: “teachers must critique the traditional teaching of social studies by teaching race-conscious history” (p. 66). Race-conscious history can disrupt the discursive dominance of multiculturalism by spotlighting the stories that are excluded from its cheery depictions of inclusion and harmony. Teaching this kind of subversive history is made difficult, however, by curricula designed to reproduce the multiculturalist narrative, as is the case with Modern History 11. In the *Curriculum Guide*, multiculturalism is promoted as an exceptional Canadian achievement. The *Guide* invites teachers to draw attention to it by “making connections” between historical examples of ethnic nationalism and contemporary Canadian society. Multicultural Canada, in this way, is construed as the pinnacle of enlightened social progress. This is not the sort of “race-conscious” analysis that Martell commends. The curriculum, indeed, makes no provision for a critical examination of multiculturalism. This, coupled with its Eurocentrism, substantiate Gillborn’s (2014) CRT inspired observation that education is “one of the principal means by which white supremacy is maintained and presented as normal in society” (p. 37).

A more global and critical approach to history education is needed to disrupt this sort of indoctrination. This is one aspect of a broader and more radical process of

educational reform suggested by CRT. The Modern History 11 curriculum, for example, could be made to feature narratives of European revolutions and wars, and the various forms of European colonialism and imperialism—including the settler-colonialism that constitutes the nation of Canada. It could be made to highlight European ethnic cleansing and enslavement, and the agency and resistance of the racialized and Indigenous peoples who have survived for centuries, and continue to survive, in the face of European conquest and domination. Another enterprise consistent with CRT would involve the full inclusion of racialized newcomers in all Canadian classrooms. Educators must work harder to facilitate understanding and acceptance across the lines of language, ethnicity, race, culture, class, gender, sexual identity, and ability. Not only curricula, then, but classrooms themselves must be globalized. This requires honest and open communication between teachers and racialized students. As Sara Schroeter and Carl E. James (2015) maintain, it is “important to obtain feedback from these students about their experiences in Canadian schools and create opportunities in the curriculum in which all students can engage in discussions about identity, difference, and culture” (p. 20).

CRT has helped me better understand the racial politics of my own educational community. It has complemented the increasing sensitivity to this level of politics I have acquired through the experience of observing and interacting with newcomers as they negotiate educational environments dominated by native-born white Canadians. Sometimes, newcomers are overtly rejected by these Canadians, but more often, prejudice and exclusion operate more subtly. The dynamics of exclusion prompt some newcomers to violate their own cultural traditions and their family’s authority in an attempt to fit in. The refusal of one of my students to wear her hijab at school is a good

example. Such challenges have prompted me to reflect on the curricula I work with, my approach to teaching it, and the classroom environments I help to create.

Performativity and Gender

Gender, according to Judith Butler (1999), is not a product of biology, physiology, or of nature in any sense. It is learned, much as we learn a role in a play (p. 187). Gender is a *performance* that we learn to enact, scripted by our social environment, which, in turn, is shaped by families, schools, churches, medias, laws, governments, and popular cultures—by societies in general.

The Modern History 11 curriculum is patriarchal insofar as it privileges depictions of the performance of aggressive masculinity. The emphasis throughout is on the exercise of power and authority by great men and the impact of their decisions on ordinary men, especially soldiers. This is particularly the case in the final two units of the three-unit curriculum: “War and Violence” and “Triumph and Tragedy,” where students learn about the “power relationships and rivalries between European nations” that led to the First and Second World Wars and the Cold War (p. 33). The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) suggests exercises in which students play the male leaders of competing European nations such as Lloyd George, Kaiser Wilhelm, Winston Churchill, Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin (p. 33). It also recommends an activity in which students adopt the “perspective of the [male] soldier in the trenches” (p. 38). The ways in which violence and militarism depend upon and call forth a particular performance of masculinity is nowhere considered. The curriculum, on the contrary, reproduces conventional notions of performing masculinity (a masculinity that hides stories of homosexuality) through military violence. It focuses on white men and their challenges and triumphs. The lives

and voices of others, including women and those from other cultures—especially the cultures of those Canada have construed as enemies (Afghan cultures for example)—are largely omitted. Such representations have the effect of reproducing a hierarchy of power that valorizes militaristic maleness. Unpacking the gender bias embedded in the curriculum is not my primary focus; but it is impossible to analyze the consequences of militarized education without being sensitive to its gendered dimensions.

Foucauldian and Postcolonial Theory

The refugees at the center of my inquiry are Syrian Arabs—an ethnocultural designation that places them squarely within the population of “Others” identified by Said’s (1978) foundational postcolonial text, *Orientalism*. The modern history of the region of the Middle East that became known as the nation of Syria in 1945 is one of conquest, colonization, and subordination. Before the First World War, Syria was a colony of the Ottoman Empire. After 1918 it was governed by the French Mandate. Between 1945 and 1991, it was a site of Cold War struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States. Since 1991 the Syrian state and society have been subject, in various ways, to the dictates of neo-liberal global capitalism (Fisk, 2005; Bacevich, 2016). The interference of contending regional state actors—Israel, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia—have also helped to shape Syria’s recent history. The civil war that has uprooted the young people who find their way to my classroom is far from a strictly internal affair. The tensions that led to armed struggle in Syria are deeply rooted in the global and regional geo-political and economic struggle for dominance involving the United States, Russia, China, and their allies and surrogates: Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran (Phillips, C., 2018; Abouzeid, R., 2019). All this is to say that colonialism and

neocolonialism have profoundly influenced life in Syria—delimiting possibilities, foreclosing options, creating opportunities, and even dictating the prospects for survival itself for millions of Syrian citizens.

Syria's story is all too familiar the global history of decolonization and neocolonialism. Algeria and Vietnam come immediately to mind as former French colonies that suffered both disastrous civil unrest and brutal counterrevolutionary intervention by Western imperial powers. The most pertinent question for my purposes, however, involves the meaning of all of this in the lives and minds of the newcomer youth in my classrooms. These young people, like many human beings, were made utterly dispensable in the global context of geopolitical competition for resources, influence, wealth, and power. Nothing in the Modern History 11 curriculum illuminates this reality. Syria, indeed, appears nowhere in its pages. Imperialism is construed solely as one of the causes of the First World War, which is itself construed as a strictly European affair. Not only does the Modern History 11 curriculum fail to explain the subordination and oppression of Syrian and other colonized people, it fails to even acknowledge them.

The Modern History 11 curriculum thereby functions to fashion histories of non-European people as different and ultimately inferior by using European whiteness as the invisible norm against which all others are compared (Parkes, 2007). In Foucauldian terms, the curriculum operates to support a “regime of truth” contrived to create and govern ideas of what is normal and desirable and what is abnormal and undesirable in society (Foucault, 1977, pp. 13-14; MacNaughton, 2005, p. 27). Societies require regimes of truth in order to function. But uneven power relations within and between societies

mean that regimes of truth benefit some more than others. What passes as true is often dictated by power. The dominant regime of truth in contemporary Canadian society, for example, is derived from Enlightenment ideas about objectivity, secularism, individualism, competition, and the privileging of reason over emotion. Yet this regime also valorizes a system of capitalist market relations by which a minority of privileged, predominately white, mostly male people, maintain their wealth and power at the expense of a large majority of underprivileged and disproportionately racialized peoples.

One of the fundamental premises of postcolonial theory is a notion of truth that emphasizes impermanence and contingency. Truth is situated in place and time and is shaped by a politics of knowledge (MacNaughton, 2005). This means that what is generally regarded as true and authoritative is not timelessly or universally correct but is constructed within a historical context by the dominant culture. It is thus open to critique and revision. Postcolonial theory has sought to provide the conceptual tools that can make this sort of critique common practice (Willinsky, 1998). Such practice, however, has not traditionally been possible in educational institutions, which have generally functioned to indoctrinate students in dominant regimes of truth. Educators who have embraced the insights of postcolonial and other critical discourses now seek to interrogate the true and the real by “creat[ing] and sustain[ing] critical reflection and activism” in their classrooms (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 3). Skills of critical reflection allow individuals to question the taken for granted assumptions constructed by the regime of truth in which they live and work. This enterprise is about challenging power. Questioning truth regimes (Foucault, 1977; MacNaughton, 2005) inevitably leads to questioning the conventionally understood reality of societies—societies which, in the current historical context, are

characterized by inequality and exploitation. Inequality and exploitation are ultimately sustained through the force—economic, juridical, and military—of the state. Creating an equitable and just classroom environment for all learners, then, implicitly destabilizes capitalist/colonialist regimes of truth by suggesting that a community can actually be fair and equitable. Critical pedagogy in history, furthermore, can help young people begin to recognize that truth is never pre-existent or absolute; it is always a production, an invention, of human beings constrained by language and regulated by power. This insight is as applicable to history curricula as it is to any other program of knowledge. Interrogating curricula, then, is a critical practice that, potentially, disrupts the interests of power sustained by regimes of truth disseminated in educational institutions.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This thesis engages with two distinct and complementary scholarly literatures: one focused on the decolonization of education, the other on its demilitarization through peace education. The first of these is a relatively recent, and rapidly developing field of research and critique; the second is a well-established scholarly tradition. Studies in both decolonization and peace education typically combine two approaches. First, they critically analyze existing silences and biases in school curricula and pedagogies. Second, they recommend new educational materials and practices in the cause of decolonization and demilitarization respectively. In both cases critical analysis is coupled with creative advocacy. Additionally, this study draws upon the research on collective memory and “dangerous memory” conducted by Michalinos Zembylas and Zvi Bekerman (2008). This research suggests possibilities for utilizing student narratives as a way to confront colonialism and militarism in the classroom. Zembylas and Beckerman’s (2008) research into memory work as a critical pedagogical practice may be especially useful in diversified school environments that include refugee newcomers, settler Canadians, and Indigenous Peoples.

Decolonizing Education

A comprehensive consideration of the extensive and recent scholarship on the decolonization and Indigenization of education in Canada is beyond the scope of this study. My intent is to highlight some of the work I have encountered that is most applicable to this research project. The Eurocentrism of the Modern History 11 curriculum is emblematic of the colonialism embedded in Canadian educational systems.

In the *Curriculum Guide*, for example, the French Revolution is presented with no mention of the revolution of the enslaved in the French colony of Haiti; industrialization is presented with no mention of the colonial expansion that provided the mineral wealth, slave labour, raw materials, and agricultural commodities that made industrialization possible; the two World Wars and the Cold War are presented with little attention to the fierce competition for the resources of the global south that fuelled these conflicts. As Marie Battiste (2013) contends, “the modern [Canadian] educational system was created to maintain the identity, language, and culture of a colonial society while ignoring the need to decolonize” (p. 30). The Modern History 11 curriculum serves this long-standing practice by privileging European heritage, culture, and history over all others, while largely omitting Europe’s violent subjugation of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, Africa, the Middle East, Oceania, and Asia.

Most of the literature on the decolonization of education in Canada focuses exclusively on the marginalization and misrepresentation of Canadian Indigenous histories, cultures, languages, and knowledge systems by settler educational institutions (Battiste, Bell, and Findlay, 2002; Battiste, 2013). This critical literature calls for more than the mere inclusion of Indigenous histories and traditions. Such educational reforms are insufficient. In the words of Battiste (2013), “the ‘add and stir’ model of bringing Aboriginal education into the curricula, environment, and teaching practices has not achieved the needed change, but rather continues to sustain the superiority of Eurocentric knowledge and processes” (p. 28). What is needed, Battiste (2013) argues, is a more incisive and thoroughgoing critical approach that exposes the Eurocentric assumptions at the very foundation of Canadian educational systems and illuminates the “multiple

strategies” of “cognitive imperialism” that flow from these assumptions (p. 33). Battiste calls for an educational transformation that liberates all students—whatever their ethno-cultural background—from colonialism. This transformation, she insists must be led by Indigenous people, and must begin by confronting “the hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism in the modern curriculum” (p. 29).

Battiste views this project as an:

opportunity [for] Canadians to rededicate themselves to protecting First Nations knowledge and heritage, redressing the damage and losses of First Nations peoples from their language, culture, and properties, and enabling First Nations heritage and knowledge to offer Canada . . . a chance to create an authentic educational system which comprehends an inclusive view of humanity. (p. 177)

Two recent contributions to the conversation about the challenges of decolonization for Canadian teachers and curriculum developers—specifically with respect to history—are Samantha Cutrara’s (2018), “The Settler Grammar of Canadian History Curriculum: Why Historical Thinking is Unable to Respond to the TRC’s Calls to Action” and Lindsay Gibson and Roland Case’s (2019) “Reshaping Canadian History Education in Support of Education.” Both articles begin with a recognition of the urgency of the decolonization enterprise, an urgency intensified by the 2015 Calls to Action of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). The TRC enjoins Canadian history educators to include “curriculum about residential schools [as] part of a broader history education that integrates First nations, Inuit, and Métis voices, perspectives, and experiences; and builds common ground between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples” (TRC, 2015, p. 239). Significantly, the TRC calls for more than merely the

inclusion of content about Indigenous histories and cultures. Such content must be accompanied by instruction in Indigenous ways of knowing. Historical systems of knowledge crafted in the wake of the Western Enlightenment can no longer supply the exclusive or most authoritative approach to understanding the Canadian past. The TRC is clear on this point: “the education system itself must be transformed into one that rejects the racism embedded in colonial systems of education and treats Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems with equal respect” (p. 239). Cutrara (2018), and Gibson and Case (2019), offer contrasting views of how to best implement the TRC’s epistemological recommendations in history courses.

This debate is central to my research as it speaks to the putative benefits and shortcomings of the Historical Thinking Benchmarks developed by Peter Seixas. As Cutrara (2018) points out, Seixas’s conceptualization of historical thinking has been influential in Canada, often used to “frame the study of history” in numerous history curricula (p. 255). This is the case for the New Brunswick Modern History 11 curriculum which is built upon the historical thinking benchmarks developed by Seixas and his colleagues. Peter Seixas and Tom Morton (2013) point out that “historical thinking is the creative process that historians go through to interpret the evidence of the past and generate the stories of history” (p. 2). The historical thinking benchmarks have contributed significantly to high school history curricula. Specifically, Seixas and his colleagues have shifted high school history away from its traditional preoccupation with an authoritative chronology of factual information, significant events, and great men deemed to have shaped progress and nations. Rather, Seixas (2006) argues, the teaching of history ought to result in the cultivation of skills necessary for critically evaluating

interpretations of the past. It should empower students “to navigate a rapidly changing, fractured, globalizing, and diverse society” (as cited in Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 266); there is no body of settled upon historical fact.

“The very notion of history as a settled body of conclusions distorts the nature of the discipline” (Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 254). As Gibson and Case (2019) observe in their summation of, and in support of, Seixas’s historical pedagogy: “instead, students must be taught to think historically by interpreting historical evidence, challenging problematic assumptions, and identifying the perspectives inherent in the historical narratives they encounter” (p. 254). “This is especially important,” they add, “for overcoming the discriminatory views about Indigenous Peoples that students have encountered in school, society, and the media” (Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 254). It is in the context of addressing prejudicial views of Indigenous People that Cutrara contests historical thinking benchmarks. For Cutrara (2018), the historical thinking approach advocated by Seixas and taken up within Canadian history curricula serves to “impose,” as she puts it:

a settler grammar over the study of the past in such ways that widens the gulf between Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems, lessening the space available to develop the respect, openness for truth, and room for relationality needed to develop relationships of reconciliation. (pp.253-254)

Cutrara (2018) views Seixas’s ideas about historical thinking as derivations from a Western epistemology that is irreconcilable with Indigenous ways of knowing and thus not workable in the context of decolonizing education. Cutrara’s stance is disputed by

Gibson and Case (2019), who believe that historical thinking “can usefully advance the reforms called for by the TRC” (p. 254)

I consider some of the particulars of this debate in my critical analysis of the Modern History 11 curriculum. While this course is not a history of Canada, and so cannot be expected to redress the inadequacies of Canadian history education as identified by the TRC, Modern History 11 could nevertheless provide support for the TRC process through a more thorough and critical examination of the history of European colonialism and imperialism. Modern History 11, that is, could explain the consequences of the European colonial project for Canada, as well as illuminate the global reach, complex diversity and correlations, and world-historical significance of European colonialism and imperialism. The historical thinking “benchmarks” set forth by Seixas (2006) and delineated as the pedagogical objectives of Modern History 11 in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) are well suited to this task. The historical content of the course, however—a content confined largely to the internal and military affairs of Western Europe—cannot be reconciled with the imperative to decolonize. The content, moreover, is an inadequate vehicle for advancing the historical/critical thinking of our students.

Peace Education

The goal of promoting peace through education and recognizing peace as a fundamental human right are longstanding human aspirations. John Dewey’s ideas about peace education were prominent following the First World War (Howlett, 2008). “Peace education has a long history in the West,” note Kyuchukov and New (2016), “traceable to Dewey’s pragmatic thinking about how to establish harmony in classrooms as a means of

overcoming social conflict and cognitive confusion” (p. 636). International conferences and organizations have also had a long history, not only of mediating and settling armed conflict, but of working to create the circumstances that make war obsolete. Education has figured prominently in these efforts. In 1981, the United Nations General Assembly declared September 21 the International Day of Peace (UN, n.d.). On the same day in 2019, UNESCO hosted a discussion titled, “Building Just and Peaceful Societies: UNESCO’s Contribution to a Culture of Prevention” (UNESCO, 2018). Peace education continues to be a top priority for the United Nations and for international civil society in general. There is broad agreement in these circles that lasting peace will require a significant cultural shift globally, and that education is essential for the development of such a culture of peace (UNESCO, 2008, pp. 4-5). Young people need to understand the high costs and questionable benefits of military violence. They need, moreover, to understand the processes and principles of peace-making in their own daily lives—skills and values best learned in educational environments of nurture and respect.

Angelica Padilla and Angela Bermudez (2016) are particularly well placed to address the challenges of peace education for Social Studies teachers. Their work considers high school history education within the society of Colombia, which, until recently, had experienced many years of civil conflict. Teaching history can lead either to the legitimation or de-legitimation of political violence. Padilla and Bermudez prefer the latter. They want education in history to “project a peaceful future,” even though it must begin “from the standpoint of a past and a present . . . marked by violence” (Padilla & Bermudez, 2016, p. 189). They analyze three Columbian high school history textbooks created to work in conjunction with the official curriculum and consider these texts in the

light of an alternative account of the decades of civil war in Columbia called, “*Basta ya! Colombia: Memorias de Guerra y de dignidad*” (“Enough Already! Memories of War and Dignity”). This report, produced by researchers for the Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica (Colombia’s Historical Memory Center), attempts to do justice to the density and complexity of the recent history of conflict in Colombia and to give an even-handed account of the interests and ideologies of conflict actors. It emphasizes the scale and specifics of the war for civilians and combatants alike.

Padilla and Bermudez (2016), not surprisingly, find the textbook and curriculum rendering of Colombian political violence to be deeply flawed. They are rigidly chronological in structure; they support the perspective of only one participant in the struggle, the Colombian government; and they pay scant attention to the experiences of civilians or to the human suffering caused by the conflict (Padilla & Bermudez, 2016). The official curriculum and textbooks, in short, propagate the dominant triumphalist narrative of Columbian state power and attempt to conscript the “collective memory” of the conflict in the service of this narrative. The goal is to foreclose the possibility of critically understanding the recent history Colombian political violence. The official portrayal “marginalizes the victims’ experience and voice, making it harder to understand the magnitude of the emotional, physical, social, cultural and economic damages endured by the civilian population” (Padilla & Bermudez, 2016, p. 211). In Colombia, as in New Brunswick, the curriculum is constructed to serve a dominant narrative, a narrative that normalizes war as an inevitable feature of society, necessary for and central to the progress of the nation. For Padilla and Bermudez, the only ethical response of educators to this problem is critical analysis and critical pedagogy. Educators must offer counter-

narratives to such official histories and expose the ideological assumptions behind them. These narratives must illuminate the atrocities, the brutality, and the destructiveness of war, while nurturing a commitment to human rights and nonviolence as an alternative.

A report by Emily Graham (2014) for the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) explores how the “military ethos” can find its way into the lives of youth through numerous channels (p. 1). Militarization can enter schools through career days, activities and resources that influence educators (such as those provided locally by the Gregg Centre of the University of New Brunswick and nationally by the Canadian War Museum, Veterans Affairs, and the Canadian Legion), as well as through the uncritical teaching of state-mandated militarized curricula. Graham (2014) provides a useful definition of militarization: “To become militarised is to adopt militaristic values and priorities as one’s own, to see military solutions as particularly effective, to see the world as a dangerous place best approached with militaristic attitudes” (p. 1). While the Modern History11 curriculum may not be as overt in its promotion of military values and solutions as is the case in Colombia, it certainly qualifies as militarized according to the criteria advanced by Graham. It prioritizes war technique—objectives, technologies, and strategies—while marginalizing war trauma. It celebrates war heroes—generals, politicians—while war’s victims and resisters—conscripts, civilians, and conscientious objectors—remain anonymous. Article 29.1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts that a basic priority of education is the preparation of students for active citizenship in “free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes, and friendship among all peoples” (Graham, 2014, p. 4). Militarized curricula undermine these objectives by reinforcing the notion that violence is a viable and

effective solution to conflict. This assumption benefits those who profit from state-sanctioned violence—police forces, military commands, security contractors, generals, politicians, weapons manufacturers and profiteers, among others—but not those who will bear the brunt of it.

Collective Memory and Dangerous Memories

Zembylas and Bekerman (2008) suggest possibilities for disrupting the colonialism and militarism endemic in history education by drawing upon the experiences of refugee newcomers. These researchers invoke Maurice Halbwachs' concept of "collective memory," which they describe as "collectively shared representations of the past" (p. 126). Collective memory, when reified in the curriculum, serves inevitably to buttress dominant regimes of truth. For Zembylas and Bekerman, however, collective memory and the dominant narratives it supports are always vulnerable to destabilization by "dangerous memories" (p. 125). Dangerous memories are defined as those that disturb existing understandings of the past: "The *danger* is in the practice of remembering the past in new ways that are disruptive to taken-for-granted assumptions" (p. 127). Dangerous memories can create openings in collective memories that maintain dominant regimes of truth by allowing for the insertion of alternative narratives.

Zembylas and Bekerman's (2008) qualitative study considers two dominant national/historical narratives as disseminated in high schools over a five-year period. The authors examine the ways in which teachers and students work with memories to understand the past. Data was collected through interviews, observation, and discussion. The research considers how educators respond to "dangerous memories," how such

memories might disrupt dominant narratives in productive ways, and how they might facilitate alternative, insurgent narratives with the potential to foment ideological change. Zembylas and Bekerman conduct their analysis in the context of two deeply divided societies: Cyprus and Israel/Palestine. The high schools researched are Greek Cypriot and Jewish Israeli. The dominant historical narratives propagated in both schools are the foundational narratives authorized by each state. The vulnerability of these narratives to “dangerous memories” differed. In Cyprus, the authors find “that despite the powerful hegemonic workings of collective memories, there might be openings for dangerous memories to subvert the status quo” (p. 140). Such openings are less likely in Israel, however, where “hegemonic powers work tremendously hard to sustain [both] past traumas (i.e., the Holocaust) [and] present essentialist meanings about memory and identity” (p. 140). The authors nevertheless advocate the embrace of dangerous memories by educators and students even as they recognize that this alone will rarely be sufficient to uproot, or even significantly unsettle, embedded hegemonic national/militaristic discourses. They insist that seizing such opportunities can create new prospects for “widening memory to include the Other’s memory.” When individuals are able to “witness” the suffering of others, they conclude, the tight “holding” of their own histories will loosen (p. 145).

Zembylas and Bekerman (2008) write that “a critical engagement with testimonial narratives[of dangerous memories] means that teachers and students have to decide how to become critical witnesses of these testimonies (rather than merely spectators, consumers or tourists) and consider how these testimonies change (if they do) their feelings about the (marginalized) Other” (p. 147). Perhaps the testimonial narratives of

Syrian newcomers can provide opportunities for critical witnessing in the classroom. Perhaps the promise of such opportunities, moreover, amounts to more than the challenging of habitual emotional responses to the Other. Indeed, such testimonial narratives may contain memories that are dangerous to the Eurocentrism and militarism of Modern History 11. The stories of Syrian refugees might prompt students to wonder why their modern history course is largely silent when it comes to the postcolonial Other. Such stories might call into question the ways in which war is represented in this course, a query that could lead to critically examining the way dominant historical narratives are constructed in the first place.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This first part of my study begins with a critical discourse analysis of the *Curriculum Guide* for Modern History 11. The second part is an autoethnographic study of my experiences. I then describe a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews with four Syrian refugee newcomers about their experiences with the Modern History 11 course. I end the chapter with a discussion of how I engaged in member-checking with the study's participants.

Curriculum Analysis

My inquiry begins with the critical discourse analysis of the New Brunswick Modern History 11 curriculum. In this initial section of the thesis, I elaborate and substantiate my arguments that the curriculum (1) is problematically Eurocentric and white supremacist, (2) is militaristic in that it is dominated by military history which sanitizes and glorifies war, and (3) is patriarchal, most explicitly in its valorization of militaristic ideals of heroic manhood. This phase of my research draws upon the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as articulated by scholars Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Gunther Kress. CDA is not a self-contained or coherent methodology. "As much theory as method," Fairclough (2001) explains, CDA is best understood as a "perspective on language and more generally semiosis...as one element or 'moment' of the material social process" (p. 1). Language, such as that which comprises the text of the curriculum document, is analyzed within "broader analyses of the social structure" (p. 1). Fairclough (2001) notes that CDA functions in a "dialogical relationship with other social theories and methods" (p. 1). It is common for researchers to forge "co-engagements," as

Fairclough (2001) calls them, between CDA and other approaches. As Majed Harb (2017) has recently put it:

there is no particular methodology to conduct CDA, any methodology that may result in clarifying social meanings or hegemonic features included in discourse could be useful, that is because...the purpose of CDA is not to study language [per se], but rather to highlight these meanings and features. (p. 61)

The openness and flexibility of CDA is particularly useful for my purposes. My analysis of the discourse of the curriculum includes my examination of how relations of power are structured and legitimated within the text of the *Guide*. It also draws upon recent work on the decolonization of education, and features reflections derived from my experience of teaching the curriculum many times, and my own ethical-political perspectives on ethno-nationalist exceptionalism, military violence, and masculinism. In this respect, I fashion a co-engagement between CDA and autoethnography that will optimally serve my research agenda.

CDA focuses particularly on the “relation between language and power” (Wodak, 2001, p. 2), and is explicitly concerned with demonstrating how language produces and reproduces the ideology that sustains the prevailing power structure. CDA practitioners, as Wodak (2001) asserts, would uphold Jürgen Habermas’s contention that “language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power. In so far as the legitimations of power relations, . . . are not articulated, . . . language is also ideological” (as quoted by Wodak, 2001, p. 2). Wodak (2001) clarifies the point with her observation that “CDA may be defined as fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of

dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (p. 2). This is precisely my objective in my analysis of the curriculum document. I argue that the course it lays out serves to reinforce the dominant ideology of Euro-Canadian society yet functions in a somewhat opaque fashion. The Eurocentric and white supremacist values embedded in the document is obscured by its promotion of multiculturalism; its militarism is muted by the pretense that military violence is a common-sense response to conflict between nations, necessary and inevitable. The document’s patriarchal values are mystified by the implicit claim that it was white men who made the history that is significant. The measure of significance of a historical phenomenon, finally, is the degree of upheaval—or “change,” inevitably represented as progressive but entailing great violence and suffering nevertheless—that its male agents produce.

Autoethnography

The second part of my study draws upon autoethnographic methodology. Here, I present my observations of and reflections about students’ experiences in response to my presentation of the grade eleven history material. Critical autoethnography aspires “to understand the lived experience of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 20). As Ronald Pelias has memorably put it, autoethnography “lets the heart be present” (Ellis et al., 2008, p. 257). At the documentary core of this part of my project are the journal entries I have made in the last three years of teaching (2016-2019). I began keeping school journals with the idea that they would help me chronicle and reflect upon my teaching. I had no notion, when I started jotting down notes about my interactions with Syrian newcomers several

years ago, that I would be drawing upon them for academic research. The journals contain many of the stories newcomer refugee youth shared with me, my reflections about these stories, and, more generally, my impressions of how these young people have responded to my teaching and adjusted to their new educational and cultural environment.

The journals therefore comprise narratives, my own and my interpretations of those offered to me by others. This part of my thesis, accordingly, involves the interweaving of these narratives in an attempt to make sense of Syrian newcomer refugees' experiences with the New Brunswick History 11 curriculum. In addition, I supplement the narratives in my journals with new narratives. These new narratives were communicated to me in semi-structured interviews and conversations I had with the four Syrian newcomers who have previously shared stories with me. In these interviews, which were quite conversational, I asked about their recollections of pre-migration experiences in conjunction with their post-migration experiences of encountering the Modern History 11 curriculum in the classroom. My notes reflect what was shared by the participants, and the feelings and hunches that their stories elicited for me (Trahar, 2009). My intention in these interactions, above all, was to listen with my heart as I attempted to cultivate the sort of "empathetic connection" extolled by Pelias (Pelias, 2004, p. 1). The words of Neil Turok resonate with me as a classroom teacher, and as a researcher: "As we link our intelligence to our hearts, the common ground might be an understanding that we are all part of something greater than our differences" (as cited in Battiste, 2003, p. 12).

As a privileged, white, female settler teacher researching the experience of newcomer students in my History 11 classes, I am the outsider. The Syrian youth who come to my classroom as refugees from war are insiders of their own experience (Reed-Danahay, 2017). In this research enterprise, as in my teaching practice, I sought to learn with and from them. I have found little hesitation among refugee newcomers to share stories of their experiences. Such stories have often been volunteered to me unsolicited. I have never been in a war zone, yet I have been traumatized by violence in the context of an abusive marriage. My own experience with violence, then, gives me some appreciation of the senselessness, the randomness, and the brutality of violence, as well as the frustration and hopelessness that attends its subsequent erasure and/or sanitation. Goodson (2019) enjoins autoethnographers to take “what we have learned from our individual stories to provide compassion with generosity to the varying levels of trauma that the individuals before us in the classroom have experienced” (p. 2). Despite the significant differences in our experiences of trauma, I have found that being mindful of my own traumatic past has helped me approach newcomer refugees with openness and empathy.

My primary autoethnographic research goal is understanding the experiences of the Syrian refugees who participated in the study. I also assess the efficacy of narrative itself, both as a research tool, and as a means of building empathy in the classroom. In their narrative research, Hristo Kyuchukov and William New (2006) have adapted principles of narrative therapy to educational practice. Originally developed by David Epston and Michael White (1990), narrative therapy focuses on the individual stories of those traumatized by violence as a way to overcome their emotional detachment from

traumatic events. Kyuchukov and New (2016) explore the efficacy of this kind of narrative work with Bosnian refugee children living in Chicago and for young Syrian and Afghan refugees in Germany. Their work demonstrates that the mindful, iterative interpretation and reinterpretation of the personal past through narrative can help refugee youth make sense of their histories while imagining positive and productive futures in the host society (Kyuchukov & New, 2016).

While an in-depth evaluation of narrative as a pedagogical tool is beyond the scope of this research project, I do offer some preliminary observations about this topic. Narrating difficult memories, especially with the support of an empathetic listener or group of listeners, can allow people to work with the past in creative and constructive ways. Such work is intentional insofar as the narrator consciously engages with their own story, rather than remaining captive, often unconsciously, to a painful past (Kyuchukov & New, 2016). In the interview process, I was careful to consider the extent to which the mindful interpretation of the personal past through narrative can help refugee youth make sense of it. I am also interested in the possibility that the sharing of narratives can build empathy, connection, and understanding, both among refugee students and between them and their Canadian classmates. I wonder, finally, about the potential of refugee newcomer narratives as vehicles for “dangerous memories” that could offer critical pedagogical opportunities for classroom teachers. While I do not expect to be able to offer any definitive conclusions in these matters, I do hope that my research might point the way to further inquiry along these lines.

Data Collection

My original plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews with current and former high school students, however the restrictions dictated by the onset of COVID-19 in New Brunswick made this difficult. It proved impossible to have current students participate in this phase of my research. The high school was closed due to the pandemic, so I had no ability to work through the Guidance Office to contact students and parents to gather the permissions necessary to conduct research with current students. Consequently, I reshaped the research to work with high school graduates who had come to Fredericton from Syria and participated in Modern History Curriculum 11 with me. I began reaching out to this smaller group of prospective participants upon approval of my project from the Research Ethics Board at the University of New Brunswick. Initially, I used social media platforms such as Messenger and Instagram, and then obtained their email addresses so I could fully explain my research and invite them to participate. Four of the five former students I contacted agreed to take part in the study. Within a week, schedules were set for the interviews. In person meetings were precluded by the pandemic, but I hoped to interview participants through a digital platform that would allow us to see each other. Only one of my participants was able to access the technology necessary for this, however, so three out of the four interviews took place over the phone. All interviews were audio recorded. I transcribed the recordings and emailed them to the participants so they could correct, revise, or add as they saw fit. I then scheduled a follow-up discussion with each participant to further verify and clarify their responses. Only one student changed a transcript, by adding a comment. In order to protect the identity of the participants, I use initials when referring to them in the study.

CHAPTER 4

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the History 11 Curriculum

The New Brunswick Modern History 11 curriculum was implemented in September 2012 (NBEECD, 2012). As was the case with all high school History curricular revisions issued by Canadian provinces between 2011 and 2018, the New Brunswick curriculum was designed to teach “historical thinking” as conceived by Peter Sexias at the Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness at the University of British Columbia (Cutrara, 2018). In the first part of this Curriculum Analysis, I consider “historical thinking” and “historical literacy” as it is presented by the Modern History 11 *Curriculum Guide* (2012). These concepts define the competencies that students are meant to develop in the course. I then consider the recent critique of historical thinking by Cutrara (2018) and the response to this critique by Gibson and Case (2019). I argue that historical thinking continues to be a useful approach to developing critical thinking competencies. My evaluation of the actual content of the course interrogates its suitability as a vehicle for advancing the “skills and dispositions” identified with historical thinking and historical literacy (NBEECD, 2012, p. 1). In the second part of the chapter, my analysis identifies and problematizes the Eurocentric and white supremacist, militaristic, and patriarchal values that pervade the course as it is laid out in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012). These dominant features of the course significantly limit the possibility of cultivating meaningful historical thinking competencies.

By “Eurocentric and white supremacist values,” I mean the prioritization of Western European history within the document as both preeminent and normative. Western European “progress”—cultural, intellectual, scientific, technological, economic,

political, etc.—becomes the standard by which other histories are judged and subsequently marginalized. Eurocentrism, moreover, is implicitly racialized. It enables and authorizes white supremacy and can thus itself be described as white supremacist (Battiste, 2013; Starr, 2014). By “militarism,” I mean the attribution of inordinate significance to war and military affairs, the valorization of organized violence as a means for settling conflicts between groups and nations and, “more generally, [the endorsement of the use of] force to achieve one’s goals” and the concomitant sanitization and glorification of war and violence (Finley, 2012, p. 43). By “patriarchy” I mean the privileging of men and male-dominated institutions as the agents of history. In this context, I am particularly interested in how patriarchy, or masculinism, functions in tandem with militarism. Throughout this chapter, my examination will apply Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to unpack the ways in which unequal relations of power are shaped, perpetuated, and reflected in the *Curriculum Guide*. Eurocentrism and white supremacy, militarism, and patriarchal values are constitutive features of the neoliberal and neocolonial social order we inhabit in Canada and which our educational systems are set up to reproduce. Their power extends far beyond high school curricula and indeed are present in every corner of our discursive universe. If education is about learning to understand our world, then we must recognize the unspoken ideological assumptions that shape it. Critically analyzing the Modern History 11 curriculum is a step in this direction.

Historical Thinking and Historical Literacy

The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) explicitly links “citizenship education” to Seixas’s historical thinking concepts and the historical literacy, or “critical literacy,” that these concepts are intended to inculcate (NBEECD, 2012, p. 1). “If students are to become

individuals who will, in an informed way, be engaged and make a difference in their community and/or their world,” the *Guide* maintains, “they will need history instruction consistent with best practices and current research for teaching and learning, e.g., historical thinking” (p. 2). Historical thinking, it continues, “requires students to critically examine the past” (p. 2). This involves more than memorizing facts and acquiring knowledge, it is about learning to understand and evaluate “historical processes” using evidence. As the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) puts it: “students will need to be able to critically analyze social, political, and economic forces that have shaped the past and present and apply those understandings in planning for the future” (p. 2).

Seixas’s historical thinking concepts are organized under six headings; these are discussed by the *Curriculum Guide* in succession: “Historical Significance,” “Evidence,” “Continuity and Change,” “Cause and Consequence,” “Historical Perspective,” and “Ethical Dimension” (NBEECD, 2012, pp. 2-3, 90-91). These are not skills per se, but rather a set of concepts “that teachers can use . . . to extend and deepen the learning” of their students in the cause of acquiring historical (or critical) literacy skills (p. 2). It is necessary to understand these concepts in order to gauge the effectiveness of the course in building the skills associated with them.

1. “Historical Significance” grapples with the problem of determining the importance of a particular event or person in history. Establishing significance requires the consideration of four criteria: the consequences for people over time, the way the event was viewed when it happened, the way historians have interpreted it, and what we can learn from studying it (*Curriculum Guide*, 2012). While it is the responsibility of historians to decide what is important enough to

study; it is nevertheless the case that the significance of an event can be judged differently by different historians and students of history. Interpreters of historical significance, whether historians or not, can disagree about what is important.

“Debate and argument,” the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) maintains, are central to doing history (p. 90).

2. Making a convincing claim about the past requires the marshalling of “Historical Evidence” to support it (*Curriculum Guide*, 2012, p. 90). Hence, students must learn to examine, interpret, and contextualize different sorts of primary sources. They must learn strategies for interrogating sources of evidence. What is the source? Who is the author of the source? What is its purpose? Is the source reliable?
3. “Continuity and Change” emphasizes the evaluation of what has changed over time and what has stayed the same through the comparison of different historical trends in different periods (*Curriculum Guide*, 2012, p. 91). This includes the critical examination of what is perhaps the most controversial historical proposition: the idea of progress.
4. “Cause and Consequence” delineates the exploration of historical causation. Students are directed to “look more deeply [and] think more critically about historic events” in order to recognize their numerous precipitants, motivations, and consequences (*Curriculum Guide*, 2012, p. 91). Causes may be long or short term. Consequences may be intended or unintended. Change may unfold due to human agency, as a result of other factors, or, more likely, through a combination of the two. Historical causation, in short, is inevitably multifaceted and intricate.

5. “Historical Perspective” stresses the need to consider the point of view of the people involved in historical events at the time. Though “we can never truly separate ourselves from our 21st Century mindset and context,” we can strive to understand the “mindset and context” of historical actors (*Curriculum Guide*, 2012, p. 91).
6. “The Ethical Dimension of History,” according to the *Curriculum Guide*, is “the hardest concept for students to engage as it requires that students possess a substantial knowledge base related to the topic and that they withhold judgment as they acquire this knowledge” (p. 91). “Assigning blame” for a historical event is not the point here. Responsibility must be evaluated, rather, within the dense historical context of the event itself, while at the same time fully appreciating the present-day context that shapes the moral judgment of the examiner (p. 91).

The six historical thinking concepts are intended to provide the foundation for the construction of “historical literacy.” “Historical literacy” is defined by the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) as “critical literacy . . . informed by the six historical thinking concepts” (p. 3). When students are able to acquire a “deep understanding of historical events through active engagement with historical texts,” they are said to be historically literate (p. 3).

What are the concrete attributes and benefits of historical literacy? The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) offers a number of examples: the ability to critically analyze “written and visual texts,” an appreciation for “different perspectives on key democratic struggles,” a facility with “current issues,” an aptitude for creative and critical “problem solving and decision making,” an awareness of “stereotyping, cultural bias, authors’ intents, hidden agendas, silent voices, and omissions,” and enhanced communication skills in “a variety of modes

. . . and mediums” (writing, debating, persuading, and explaining utilizing diverse methods and platforms) (p. 4). These are the skills that constitute historical literacy.

The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) presents Seixas’s historical thinking concepts as the apex of “current best practice . . . in the field of history education” (p. 1). Despite Seixas’s own central concern with critical analysis informed by an understanding of historical context, however, there is no recognition in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) that the historical thinking concepts are themselves products of a historical context and may thus be subject to critical analysis as a historical text. Historical thinking and historical literacy, rather, are construed as timelessly authoritative and valuable. They function, implicitly, as a kind of neutral and universal ‘common sense’ around which the curriculum is organized. As Seixas himself would be the first to acknowledge, however, these concepts are as time-bound, culturally situated, and ideologically informed as any other set of ideas. This indeed, is the premise of a recent critique of historical thinking by educational scholar Samantha Cutrara.

Cutrara (2018) asks whether “historical thinking, as conceptualized by Peter Seixas,” is well suited to answer the plea of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission “to decolonize and Indigenize Canadian history and Canadian history education” (p. 253). The question is not straightforwardly relevant to my analysis as Modern History 11 is not a Canadian history course. However, Eurocentrism and white supremacy run through the *Curriculum Guide* (2012), most prominently in its treatment, or refusal to treat, European imperialism and colonialism. Cutrara’s (2018) claim that Seixas’s historical thinking concepts cannot be reconciled with the decolonization of Canadian history, then, is also applicable to European history education. Cutrara (2018) argues that “the ‘settler

grammar' of historical thinking . . . makes it unable to engage in the necessary work of challenging, transforming, and decolonizing history education" (pp. 256-257). By "settler grammar," Cutrara (2018) means the epistemological assumptions that ground the historical thinking concepts formulated by Seixas. The assumptions underlying these concepts are drawn from the Western Enlightenment and include humanism, objectivism, evidentiary empiricism, and rationalistic individualism (pp. 256-257). Because "historical thinking developed from [this] colonial epistemological tradition," Cutrara holds, it is "incongruous" with Indigenous ways of knowing (pp. 266-267). If Canadian education systems are to treat "Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems with equal respect," as the TRC's Calls to Action demand, then Seixas's historical thinking concepts must be rejected along with other legacies of colonialism (Cutrara, 2018).

The question boils down to whether or not historical thinking as articulated by Seixas and others may be useful in the praxis of decolonizing curricula and pedagogies. Do the Enlightenment assumptions and values that historical thinking is derived from—the same assumptions and values that helped to authorize centuries of European colonialism—make historical thinking incompatible with the imperative to decolonize history education? Cutrara's argument in the affirmative has recently been challenged by Lindsay Gibson and Roland Case (2019), who contend that the decolonization of history education may proceed "without radical epistemological restructuring of the discipline of history" (p. 253). "The legitimate opposition to Eurocentric dominance of history curricular[a]," they argue, "can be redressed without the wholesale dismissal of the discipline of history and its methods" (p. 254). In particular, "historical thinking," which, as Gibson and Case (2019) acknowledge, is "the most widely discussed current

interpretation of a disciplinary approach to history education in Canada,” may be productively applied “to advance the reforms called for by the TRC” (p. 254).

Gibson and Case’s (2019) argument rests on their distinction between first- and second-order considerations. The former “offer statements about how the world is and how it functions,” while the latter “raise questions about first-order statements” (p. 272). Seixas’s historical thinking concepts are of the second-order. Instead of offering “substantive answers” to questions about the world; they offer a framework that shapes the sort of questions we ask. Claims that historical thinking, as a derivation of Western Enlightenment epistemology, cannot be reconciled with Indigenous epistemological approaches to the past, confuse first- and second-order considerations:

When people speak about Indigenous ways of thinking about the past, they may be describing particular beliefs within the Indigenous worldview about the past, whereas references to the historical thinking framework identify categories of questions to guide inquiries into the past. We do not see an irreconcilable tension between the two. (p. 272)

In other words, according to Gibson and Case (2019), the Eurocentrism of Canadian history courses is not a product of Seixas’s second-order framework for inquiry, but of the first-order propositions that constitute the substantive content of these courses.

As the Modern History 11 *Curriculum Guide* (2012) states, “historical thinking only becomes possible in relation to substantive content” (p. 3). For Gibson and Case (2019), it is the substantive content of courses in Canadian history that requires reform. Historical thinking is not the problem. Canadian teachers and students need more of it, not less. The problem is that Canadian history curricula are dominated by content that

does not facilitate historical thinking. This is the argument I make about Modern History 11. In this course, historical thinking functions as a kind of window dressing. It is summarized in the Introduction to the *Curriculum Guide* (2012); and it is further elaborated in one of the appendices. But the content of the course, the historical narrative at its center, offers limited opportunity for actually practicing the sort of critical inquiry that historical thinking entails. Indeed, the content is largely indistinguishable from the content of the European history course I took in high school over thirty years ago. The emphasis on historical/critical thinking is new. The course is not, at least ostensibly, supposed to be an old-fashioned exercise in memorizing names, dates, and events. Information is supposed to take a back seat to the “skills and dispositions” students are meant to cultivate in their encounter with the course material (p. 2). But the nature of this material—its Eurocentrism and white supremacy, its militarism, and its patriarchy—raises serious doubts about the limits of the “critical inquiry” envisioned by the *Curriculum Guide* (2012). The historical content it presents to teachers and students constricts critical inquiry by confining the scope of the course to internal European politics, technology and war.

Course Content: Eurocentrism and White Supremacy

The Eurocentrism of the curriculum is easily demonstrated. Indeed, the *Curriculum Guide* itself makes no bones about this. Although the course title is “Modern History,” the *Guide* specifically identifies its focus as the “big ideas” and “significant events” of “Western Modern History” (NBEECD, 2012, pp. 1-2). The course is a survey of the history of Western Europe from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. And while one of its primary objectives is “making connections” between the historical

material it covers and the “modern day” world, there is little provision in the *Curriculum Guide* for exploring connections to non-Western history or current events (pp. 15-21). From a world-historical perspective, the most important historical process underway between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries was the asymmetrical encounter between the European and non-European world. This encounter led to the exploitation and subjugation of Indigenous peoples world-wide. It spawned racism, slavery, and genocide. It also profoundly shaped the “big ideas” and “significant events” of modern Western European history that the *Curriculum Guide* features. Yet the *Guide* barely mentions European imperialism and colonialism. Students learn about Western Europe in a bubble, as if its centuries long exploitation of non-Europeans had never happened, and as if this exploitation was irrelevant to the history within the bubble that the course does consider. The omission is as revealing as it is problematic.

White supremacy is a fundamental ideological source and justification for European imperialism and colonialism—capitalism, Christianity, and nationalism are some others. The Eurocentrism of Modern History 11 is white supremacist insofar as it privileges Western European history, marginalizes other histories, and almost entirely neglects colonialism and imperialism, a kind of historical “whitewashing”. The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) is a white supremacist document; its Eurocentrism is what makes it so. It is important to recognize however, that “white supremacy” does not adequately indicate the complexities of Western European racial thinking during the roughly two centuries covered by the course. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, race was not only defined by pigmentation, but also by ethnicity, language, and culture. “Whiteness,” as such, was a contested category of identity. White Europeans who

identified as Nordic, Aryan, or Anglo-Saxon, for example, considered themselves to be superior to other white European “races,” such as the Mediterranean or the Slavic (McMahon, 2016; Painter, 2011; MacMaster, 2001; Tucker, 1996). Although “white supremacy” may usefully signify the pervasive European presumption that *all* Europeans were racially superior to *all* Indigenous peoples of Asia, Africa, the Americas, and elsewhere, it does not capture the nuances of inter-European racist ideologies nor is it adequate to describe the anti-Semitism that was a central feature of these ideologies.

The first unit in the History 11 curriculum, “Rights and Revolution,” considers the French and Industrial Revolutions with an emphasis on evolving conceptions of human rights arising, first, from the Enlightenment, and second, from the response of European workers to industrialization. European progress is the central theme. The new ideas of the Enlightenment are presented as an underlying cause for the French Revolution and students are tasked to understand and explain these new ideas (NBEECD, 2012, p. 23). Suggested pedagogical strategies include an activity in which students compare and contrast the ideas of five “key thinkers”—Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Hobbes, and Voltaire—with respect to the role of government and the role of the citizen (p. 23, pp. 97-98). The assessment of significance is the historical thinking concept the *Guide* directs teachers to concentrate on in this unit. The study of the Enlightenment and French Revolution is the means by which students should acquire an “understand[ing] [of] historians’ criteria for measuring historical significance” (p. 25). The historical material, however, is presented as if its significance is a foregone conclusion. There is no intimation in the *Guide* that there were other individuals and ideas or other historical events during this era that are also worthy of attention. The *Guide* presumes the

significance of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and offers nothing to compare them to. The assessment of significance expected of students is thus not an exercise in critical thinking, but a matter of confirming judgements already prescribed by the curriculum.

The course's exclusive attention to Western ideas and achievements implicitly communicates their superiority (Willinsky, 1998). It was white male European thinkers who invented human rights and thereby laid the groundwork for the French Revolution and subsequent human progress. Students are invited to consider such contemporary statements of human rights as the UN's *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* so they can "trace" them back to the 1789 expression of Enlightenment principles, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*. Just as the historical content of the curriculum offers little actual opportunity for students to learn to assess historical significance, then, it also uncritically advances a Eurocentric interpretation of historical progress. The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) does recognize something of the complexity in the relationship between states and individuals when it comes to rights and freedoms. It offers "The Reign of Terror of Robespierre and the Jacobins" as an example of state oppression (NBEECD, 2012, p. 26). And it suggests that students compare this to other "cases in which the rights of citizens have been restricted for the stated purpose of protecting the state." The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) proposes "21st century efforts to defend democracy against acts of terrorism" for this comparative exercise (p. 26). The phrasing of the proposition, however, exposes the ideological bias that runs through the curriculum. "Terrorism" is construed in simplistic fashion: as an attack on democracy. And democracy, in turn, is construed as an exclusive

product of the Western Enlightenment. Terrorism, therefore, is anti-Western, anti-democratic, and anti-progress.

There is no indication in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) that the Enlightenment produced a system of knowledge that responded to and coexisted with other systems of knowledge (and continues to do so), such as Islamic and Confucian epistemologies or Indigenous knowledges. A decolonized historical account of the Enlightenment would recognize that it occurred during a time of rapid European colonial expansion in the Americas, Africa, and Asia and that this context played a crucial role in shaping Enlightenment ideas. It would acknowledge, moreover, that Enlightenment ideas—about, for instance, nature, the individual, race, and progress—facilitated and legitimized European colonialism. It would critically examine Enlightenment ideas and illuminate the fact that they still ground Western knowledge, including the values and assumptions reflected in the course. Coverage of the French Revolution, furthermore, would include analysis of the French Empire of the late-18th century. Students would learn about the controversies over slavery that shook revolutionary France, and they would examine the consequences of the Revolution for the French colony of Haiti and the slave rebellions against French colonial rule there between 1791 and 1804 which culminated in Haitian independence as a free Black republic (Geggus, 1989, p. 107).

The course's treatment of the Industrial Revolution is similarly limited to European—primarily British—developments. Social and political change is emphasized. Teachers are encouraged, in particular, to follow the evolution of Enlightenment ideas into the 19th century industrial period. Accordingly, the *Guide* stresses the rise of economic liberalism and the supremacy of property rights, as well as the advent of trade-

unionism (workers' rights) and environmentalism in response to industrial mechanization and urbanization. As with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the *Guide's* interpretation of industrialization "aligns" this phenomenon, in the words of Jenny Conrad (2019), "with human progress and democracy, while marginalizing and minimizing the histories of non-European peoples as uncivilized and dependent" (p.4). The section on the Industrial Revolution contains the *Guide's* first mention of colonialism: "When addressing economic contributors [to industrialization], the concept of Laissez-Faire capitalism must be examined, along with global domination by Europe (colonialism and mercantilism) during this time period" (p. 28). Unfortunately, European "global domination" is not elaborated in this section or anywhere else in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012). The perfunctory reference aligns precisely with Conrad's observation about the marginalization and minimization of non-European histories, a major problem in itself. Yet even European history narrowly conceived is distorted by the omission. The Industrial Revolution was financed by wealth that Europeans extracted from colonized lands—precious minerals and agricultural commodities—often through the labour of enslaved human beings who were themselves commodified. The mechanization of production in Britain began in the textile mills, where cotton, harvested largely by slaves in the American south, was manufactured into cloth. This is what initiated industrialization. And European producers depended increasingly on the colonized world not only as a source of labour and raw materials, but as a market for their finished products. Colonial exploitation, in short, both created and sustained the Industrial Revolution. It provided the investment capital, the raw materials, the cheap labour, and, eventually, the consumers, that made it all possible. Aside from the single parenthetical

mention of “colonialism” in this unit, however, teachers will find no indication that industrialization had anything to do with the world beyond Europe.

Unit Two, *War and Violence*, is divided into two subcategories. The first, “Nationalism and Negotiation,” deals with the rise of ethnic nationalism in Europe and the great power politics of European states in the years between the unification of Germany in the 1860s and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 (pp. 33-37). The second, “Destruction and Disillusionment,” is confined to the Great War in Europe and the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. The focus throughout is on the nature and exercise of state power, nationalism, economic and military competition between states, diplomatic crisis, foreign policy, military technology, and armed conflict (pp. 38-41). Suggested learning strategies include an examination of the concepts encapsulated by the *Guide* in the acronym, M.A.I.N., which stands for “‘Militarism,’ ‘Alliances,’ ‘Imperialism,’ and ‘Nationalism’” (p. 34). Again, while imperialism is mentioned, there is no explanation of its meaning, scale, or consequences, no acknowledgement that this era saw the expansion of European domination and the competition for empire reach its height, no reference to the fact that the British Empire stretched from Canada to New Zealand, and included India, Australia, much of Africa, and parts of the Caribbean, South America, and the Far East, or that other European powers—France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Russia, Portugal, and Spain—had their own colonial empires.

The *Guide* dwells on the concept of “power potential” as a way for students to understand what makes a nation influential. “Geographic factors, natural resources, alliances, national borders, industry, and socio-psychological factors,” as well as “military might,” are advanced as the “ingredients of power potential” (p. 36). The

fundamental connection between these “ingredients” and the nation’s control of people, land, and resources in colonized spaces beyond its own boundaries is nowhere recognized. The single exception to this unit’s glaring disregard for imperialism and colonialism is an optional exercise contained in Appendix H of the *Guide*, which calls upon students to examine three short excerpts from primary sources dealing with “the partition of Africa” (pp. 99-100). The first two are from British arch-imperialists Lord George Curzon and Cecil Rhodes. They reflect the cultural and racial chauvinism that constituted imperialist ideology. The last is an excerpt from “The Coming of the Pink Cheeks” by Chief Kabongo (as told to Richard St. Barbe Baker) (pp. 99-100). This testimony, which expresses the incredulity of an African tribal leader when informed that the land of his people now belongs to the English King, is the single non-European voice (or reference to a non-European voice) in the entire *Curriculum Guide*. It is presented without commentary. The contextual information that might have helped teachers and students make critical sense of this exercise does not exist in the *Guide*, nor do the three pages of “Teaching and Learning Resources” (Appendix J) for this unit point to any outside source devoted to European colonization and empire (pp. 105-108).

The second part of this unit, “Destruction and Disillusionment,” likewise presents a truncated rendition of the First World War and is preoccupied with Western Europe, and yet the origins of the war, its conduct, and its culmination with the Treaty of Versailles, were global phenomena. The outbreak of war cannot be understood without understanding the history of the rivalry for overseas empire between European nations (Storey, 2014; Gerwarth & Manela, 2014). The war itself was fought not only by white Europeans, but by millions of volunteers and conscripts from colonized territories;

racialized native troops and workers from India, Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and the Far East were crucial to the war efforts of all of the belligerent powers (Dendoovan & Chiens, 2008; Fogarty, 2008; Winegard, 2011). Arguably, the most important issue to be worked out at the peace table at Versailles was the disposition of European colonial ‘possessions’ following the war. American President Woodrow Wilson’s call for national self-determination along ethnic, linguistic, and cultural lines was, for the peoples of the colonized world, a legitimation of long-standing aspirations for independence. Following the war, colonial empires began to disintegrate, in part because of nationalist movements inspired by Wilson (Manela, 2007). None of this, however, is alluded to in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012). The Eurocentrism of the curriculum at the present historical moment was obvious to my Syrian students, all of whom were aware that the Treaty of Versailles carved-up the Middle East, previously controlled by the Ottoman Empire, into territorial “protectorates” administered by France and Britain. The borders set forth at Versailles became the borders of the independent Middle Eastern nations—such as Syria—that emerged following the Second World War (Fisk, 2006).

The final unit, “Triumph and Tragedy,” continues the Eurocentric bias already well established in the course. As with World War I, the *Curriculum Guide*’s portrays the Second World War as an exclusively white European affair. There is no mention of China or Japan or of the war in the Pacific, much less Japan’s position as an anti-imperialist power dedicated (at least rhetorically) to liberating Asians and other colonized people from European and American domination. Students are expected to learn about ideology—“Communism, Stalinism, Fascism, National Socialism, Democracy and

Totalitarianism” (p. 43)—but, as the list of ‘isms’ suggests, ideology is largely portrayed as something foreign and malign. There is nothing to prompt teachers or students to link “democracy” to any of the ‘isms’ associated with putatively democratic nations, such as capitalism, racism, colonialism, or imperialism. The first part of this unit, “Totalitarianism and Total War,” is followed by “Crimes Against Humanity,” in which students confront genocide, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust. International history does make an appearance here. The failure of the Western allies, including Canada, to provide refuge to European Jews in the 1930s and forties figures in the *Guide* as a precursor to the creation of international institutions and agreements—the UN and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in particular—committed to preventing genocide (p. 47).

“War by Proxy,” the final part of this unit, provides some selective coverage of the Cold War. The nuclear arms race, the Truman Doctrine, the Berlin Blockade, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and McCarthyism are all recommended as topics for classroom investigation and discussion (pp. 50-52). Aside from the reference to Cuba, however, the enormous impact of the Cold War on the non-Western world is entirely neglected. Remarkably, the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) never explains what “war by proxy” means or mentions who the proxies were through which the war between the global superpowers was fought (North and South Korea, Cuba and Iran, North and South Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and the Afghan Mujahideen, the Nicaraguan Contras and the Sandinistas, to name a few). Nor does the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) indicate that the proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union was often superimposed upon and conflated with the struggles of colonized peoples for self-determination in such places as India, China, Malaysia, Kenya, Guatemala, Algeria,

Cuba, Chile, and Vietnam (Westad, 2007).

Willinsky (1998) has observed that, “much of the knowledge achieved through conquest and colonialism was understood to legitimate the political and cultural domination of imperialism. The resulting perspective on the world formed an educational legacy that we now have to consider” (p. 3). The curriculum for the New Brunswick Modern History 11 course is part of that legacy. Its Eurocentrism reflects the dominant Canadian “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 13-14, MacNaughton, 2005, p. 27). The modern history of the colonial powers of the West—especially Great Britain—is represented in the curriculum as if colonialism never occurred. Other histories, especially the histories of the colonized people on whose backs European “progress” was built, are disregarded. The triumphalist narrative of “democracy” and “progress”—the terms themselves euphemisms for “capitalism” and “development”—requires the exclusion or marginalization of these histories. The ethno-cultural diversity of New Brunswick high school classrooms makes the Eurocentrism of Modern History 11 even more troubling. In the words of Jenni Conrad (2019) the course has the effect, of “sustain[ing] a collective dominance by making ‘us’ the center of world history but also different from everyone else in world history” (p. 6). The consequences of this are profound. “What happens,” asks historian Ronald Takaki, “when someone with the authority of a teacher describes our society and you are not in it” (as cited in Finley, 2003, pp 10-11)? The “us” and the “Other” sit beside one another in my classroom. But it is only the history and culture of the Euro-Canadian “us” that is taught, learned, and affirmed in Modern History 11. The “Other”—non-European newcomers and Indigenous Canadians alike—are expected to

accept and internalize this history, to make it their own. This is what assimilation looks like in a “multicultural” Canadian high school.

Course Content: Militarism and Patriarchy

One need not look any further than the titles of the units and sub-units in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) to gain a sense of the preponderance of the history of war and the military in Modern History 11. Of the ten such titles in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012), seven explicitly signify that organized violence—preparation for war, armed conflict itself, or genocide—will be the major topic for that part of the course. “War and Violence,” “Nationalism and Negotiation,” “Destruction and Disillusionment,” “Triumph and Tragedy,” “Totalitarianism and Total War,” “Crimes Against Humanity,” and “War by Proxy,” together comprise over two thirds of the course content. The disproportionate focus on war is, of course, a venerable tradition in history education. Great men and the great tasks they performed—military, political, and diplomatic—was the standard fare of history classes for much of the 20th century. Even now, the history shelves in mall bookstores are crowded with entertaining popular nonfiction portrayals of soldiers and generals, battles and wars. The academic discipline of history has changed dramatically in the last fifty years, however. The political, military, and diplomatic history of nations has been eclipsed, among professional and academic historians, by social and cultural, often transnational, history with an emphasis on the exploration of race, class, and gender (Maza, 2017). While the *Curriculum Guide*’s (2012) claim to “inform readers of current best practice evident in the field of history education” (p. 1) may have some legitimacy with regard to the theoretical foundation provided by the historical thinking concepts, it is inaccurate when it comes to the actual content of the course. In this respect it is a

throwback, a traditional rendering of European great power politics—a story, primarily, of nations and the men who led them and fought for them.

The militarism promoted by the course is problematic not only because it is out of step with the contemporary discipline of history, but also because it reinforces the power binary of Eurocentrism with what Laura Finley (2003) describes as an “us-versus-them, in-group versus out-group” mentality (p. 10). In *Modern History 11*, the democratic-progressive Western European/Euro-Canadian “us” is repeatedly pitted against a hostile tyrannical-atavistic foreign enemy/other, over which “we” triumph. The dichotomy is enhanced through the persistent glorification of the “us” and the concomitant dehumanization of the “other.” The world is thus portrayed in Manichean terms, an arena of struggle between good and evil, “our” way of life and “theirs.” Militaristic education, in this sense, works in tandem with Eurocentric education to foster a world view dominated by binary oppositions. Militarism pushes this dualistic logic further by demonstrating that the ultimate, indeed inevitable, means of overcoming this opposition is through military force. War, then, is not only a sometimes necessary evil; it is an indispensable good, essential for human progress. This illusion is not produced and sustained by schools alone, of course. Militaristic values and assumptions are disseminated through multiple social and cultural channels: sports, video games, movies and television, journalism, politics, nationalistic rituals, remembrance ceremonies, and the public relations work of military institutions themselves (Hedges, 2002). At the center of this ideological work is the sanitization and romanticization of military cultures and the violence they purvey. As W. Varney (2000) writes, socializing youth into militarism involves making war “seem logical, necessary, ‘natural,’ and even fun” (as cited in

Finley, 2003, p. 2). This requires the presentation of an “unbalanced, even false picture of war” (Yarwood and Weaver, 1988, as cited in Finley, p. 2). “The old Lie,” as Wilfred Owen famously called it, of war’s heroism, its grandeur and glory, is thus perpetuated (Owen, 1921).

Unit Two of the curriculum, “War and Violence,” recommends that teachers and students use the study of the First World War to engage with the historical thinking concept of perspective taking: “It is important when students are studying an historic event to understand all perspectives associated with the event and what informs these perspectives” (p. 39). The content offered by the *Curriculum Guide* (2012), however, allows for only a limited number of perspectives on issues that do not lend themselves to critical thinking about the First World War or war in general. Teachers and students are directed, for example, to examine the “power potential” (pp. 34-36) of the European nations engaged in the war. The *Guide* suggests that students form small groups, each “representing” the leadership of “countries with a vested interest in preventing (or initiating)” war in a “mock peace conference” in 1914 (pp. 33-34). The perspectives students learn to represent, in this exercise, are those of national political and military leaders. In order to do so they are asked to understand their nation’s “power potential” relative to other nations, and to employ the “generic use of force continuum” (pp. 35-36). The latter, the *Guide* informs us, is the range of options “typically exercised” (p. 35) by nations to exert power over other nations. These begin with “asking nicely,” proceed through “positive,” “negative,” and “diplomatic” sanctions to the “threat of force,” and culminate with “military action” (pp. 34-35). The *Guide* suggests a similar exercise in which students portray members of national delegations to the negotiations at Versailles

in 1919 (p. 39).

It is important to note the limited spectrum of perspectives solicited by these activities; students role-play powerful white European men and try to imagine the national interests of the societies they lead. No other societal agents or interests are deemed significant enough for inclusion. Nations are conceived as monolithic, and their representation by a privileged elite as unproblematic. Voices of dissent are excluded. These exercises shed no light, for example, on the vocal and multifaceted resistance to the war by feminists, socialists, trade unionists, anarchists, and religious groups (Hochschild, 2011). Antiwar movements sprang up in all of the belligerent nations, and in every case, were met by vigorous state suppression (Hochschild, 2011). Likewise, the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) does not acknowledge the increasing unwillingness of young men to volunteer for service, the widespread opposition to conscription, the frequent avoidance of the draft, the persecution of conscientious objectors, the spontaneous outbreaks of peace between enemies on the front (such as the famous Christmas truce of 1914), or the eventual refusal of many thousands of troops to fight at all (such as the 1917 French army mutinies) (Hochschild, 2011; Wiltsher, 1985). The perspectives of the millions who opposed the First World War—including the millions of Russians who put an end to their country’s war-making through revolution—are not even hinted at in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012).

Students are expected to “know and understand that mechanized/industrialized warfare led to an increased level of destruction,” and to “comprehend the effects of war on individuals and societies,” but again, the curriculum content does not foster a thorough, or critical, engagement with these issues (NBEECD, 2012, p. 38). The

Curriculum Guide (2012) suggests exploring “the impact” of changing military technology— “the machine gun, the tank and poison gas”—on “the warring parties and on war in general” (p. 38). This inquiry, however, has less to do with the “impact” of modern weapons on human bodies and minds than with their consequences for military tactics and strategy. Students are meant to understand World War I as the first “modern” and “total” war, yet are given little opportunity to grasp what this actually meant for the individuals engaged in it. Two of the primary source documents noted in this unit—Erich Maria Remarque’s novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Fred Varley’s painting, “For What?”—do have the potential to spur critical discussion in the classroom. Both convey the brutality, waste, and futility of the war. But there is no attempt to facilitate the development of this potential in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012). *All Quiet on the Western Front* is mentioned as a possible resource for helping students understand life in the trenches, but the exercise involving eatinghardtack bread and beef jerky while writing letters home is a much more developed suggestion. Varley’s “For What?”, a depiction of the gathering of dead bodies in a bleak bombed out landscape, is suggested as an image to compare to Norman Wilkinson’s “Canada’s Answer”, which portrays Canada’s powerful fleet sailing determinedly toward Europe in 1914. The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) notes that the paintings reflect changing perceptions of the war. There is no attempt, however, to position these sources as a spur to critical analysis, either of World War I or of war in general. The Remarque and Varley sources, in a sense then, are the exceptions that prove the rule. A knowledgeable and enterprising teacher could deploy them critically, but the great preponderance of the material supplied in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) supports a decidedly uncritical interpretation of the history of war.

The First World War continues to figure prominently in the final unit of the curriculum, “Triumph and Tragedy.” Here, the material presented is intended to facilitate historical literacy in the area of “causes and consequences” (*NBEECD*, 2012, p. 44). Students are expected to compare and contrast the causes and consequences of the two World Wars. They must comprehend the concept of total war and explain its applicability to the World Wars and to more recent conflicts (Canada’s intervention in Afghanistan is recommended). And they must “analyze and explain which World War was more significant for Canada” (pp. 44-45). As a historical thinking concept, “Cause and Consequence” should operate, like historical thinking in general, as an avenue for the cultivation of critical thinking. In the *Curriculum Guide*’s (2012) elucidation of the historical thinking concepts (Appendix C), teachers are warned against allowing students to settle on the “easy answer” when grappling with questions of historical causation (p. 91). Causation is complex; it requires students to “look more deeply [and] think more critically” (p. 91). Yet in its own interpretation of historical causation, the *Guide* articulates and validates “easy answers” repeatedly. This is particularly evident in its summary of the causes of the two world wars. Both are presented as justified responses to “German expansion, nationalism, and economic rivalry” (p. 44). This simplistic rendering is highly contestable, especially in the case of World War I. Listed among the specific causes of the Second World War, furthermore, is the “appeasement” of Germany by France and Britain in 1938 (p. 44). This, once more, is an “easy answer” to a complex and much-debated question.

Spoon-feeding teachers and students “easy answers” and comfortable narratives is antithetical to the stated purpose of Modern History 11. It does not serve critical and

historical literacy; it stifles it. Learning to appreciate the complexity and ambiguity of the past is a crucial objective of the historical thinking concepts. Approaching history through these concepts ought to instill humility about the confidence with which one can interpret the past, and skepticism about historical narratives that purport to be authoritative. The concepts introduce us to historical interpretation as an intrinsically dynamic, fluid, incomplete, and perspectival enterprise. Recognizing and learning to work with this reality is, as the *Guide* itself suggests, crucial for active and informed citizenship. Political discourse, corporate and social media, and popular culture are awash in facile, unsubstantiated, biased interpretations of historical phenomena and current affairs, all of which claim to be correct and well founded. Citizenship requires the critical evaluation of this ever larger and more confusing universe of information and opinion.

The *Curriculum Guide*'s (2012) elaboration on the significance of each World War for Canada occasions a digression into Canadian nationalism. The myth of "Vimy Ridge as a nation-building event" (p. 45) is recited uncritically. This "standard version of Vimy," as historians Ian McKay and Jamie Swift (2016) explain, "is a highly dubious, mythologized narrative. It is akin to a fairy tale for overaged boys who want their history to be as heart-thumping and simplistic as a video game" (p. 7). The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) proceeds to sketch the familiar story of the war-fuelled Canadian rise to nationhood. The "sacrifices" of Vimy led to "Canada's involvement in the Treaty of Versailles . . . [and its] growing international reputation" (p. 45). These gains were consolidated in the Second World War through "significant increase in Canadian military power and contribution to the war effort" (p. 45). "Canadian soldiers," the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) reminds us, "liberated German occupied countries." Canada goes on to be

“one of the first countries to join the United Nations” (pp. 45-46) and to play a significant and constructive role in international affairs through its participation in the “Korean Conflict, Peacekeeping Missions, [and] Afghanistan” (p. 46). Even Canada’s refusal to give sanctuary to Jewish refugees from Hitler’s Germany is pressed into the narrative of Canada’s “coming of age” through war. This episode is recounted by the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) complete with a sober reminder that “the study of history should include ‘the good, the bad, and the ugly’” (p. 47). “The ugly,” however, comes across as little but a fleeting lapse in the progress of the Canadian nation, a blunder amply atoned for in subsequent years: “While Canada and other nations were not accepting Jewish refugees at this time, Canada has acknowledged the harm caused by these actions and, for example, has posthumously awarded Honorary Canadian Citizenship to Raoul Wallenberg (a Swedish humanitarian who secretly rescued Hungarian Jews during the war)” (p. 47).

The curriculum not only ignores the histories of non-European others, it offers little to elicit an awareness of the humanity of 20th Century European enemies of Canada and the West. Aside from the single reference to *All Quiet on the Western Front*, there are no sources listed that would illuminate the wartime perspectives of citizens of Germany or the Soviet Union. The Nazi Holocaust is, justifiably, accorded significant attention. But the mass killing of civilians by the “Western democracies”—through, for example, strategic bombing, or, more horrifically, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—is not touched upon. The “nuclear threat” (p. 50) is a major topic in the final section of the course, “War by Proxy,” but the details of its emergence are absent from the *Curriculum Guide* (2012). Indeed, the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) warns teachers that it is “not advisable” to cover “the origins of the Cold War but rather to highlight that the

United States and the Soviet Union *emerged* as rival superpowers” (my emphasis; p. 50). The “nuclear threat” is then subtly attributed to the Soviet Union. Students are expected to “know, understand, and be able to demonstrate how the nuclear threat was the defining element of the Cold War” and to “understand western society’s response” to this threat (p. 50). The threat of nuclear war is thus implicitly deemed to emanate from the non-western enemy, a dubious historical proposition at best, and one which the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) seeks to reinforce by having students view “Duck and Cover” videos instructing North American school children about how to protect themselves in the event of a surprise Soviet attack. Exercises in “perspective taking” are confined to “our” side in the Cold War section. Teachers are invited to have students pretend to be an advisor to United States president Harry Truman, a task for which they “will need to understand the ‘big picture’ of communist expansion in Europe and Asia.” Another suggestion is to assign students to “write a journal as a West-Berliner” during the Soviet blockade (p. 51).

The militarism of the curriculum has the effect of naturalizing and sanitizing war in general, and of glorifying the role of Canada and the Western allies in the wars of the 20th Century. The historical content furnished by the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) tends to foreclose critical analysis more than it enables it. It truncates the development of historical (critical) thinking about war by confining inquiry to a narrow, ideologically orthodox, range of options. There is no question about who the “good guys” are in Modern History 11. And there is no question that the blood spilled by Canadians—for liberty, justice, freedom, democracy, and civilization—was justified in the cause of saving the world from tyranny. The course’s militarism ultimately serves the cause of Canadian nationalism and exceptionalism. Rather than helping students think carefully

and critically about war—and solving problems violently more generally—it contributes to militarist ideology. Through this lens, as McKay and Swift (2016) have put it, “war is [made to seem] fundamental to human flourishing” (p. 10). In the *Curriculum Guide* (2012), it is also made to seem fundamental to Canada’s “coming of age” as a nation, and also to the coming of age of the millions of young Canadian men who fought (p. 10).

The patriarchal discourses in the curriculum are tightly woven into its narratives about war. The disproportionate depiction of military history is at the same time a disproportionate depiction of a history dominated by men. There is a single tokenistic attempt to include women in this history. The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) suggests having students “discuss the impact of the First World War on the status of women” (p. 39). “What lasting results,” it asks, “occurred in women’s rights and what were temporary results” (p. 39)? War figures here, once more, as the trigger for progress. The decades-long suffrage movement in Canada, Great Britain, and the United States is overlooked. Democratic rights for women, rather, spring from the crucible of war. Women “earned” their right, in this view, by supporting their male warriors. As McKay & Swift (2012) explain, women “have a place in the ... ‘muscular universe’ of warriors to the extent that they support their men in the noble task of freeing their sisters from the depredations of the enemy” (p. 272). First World War propaganda, like that of all modern wars, was thoroughly gendered. Women of the democratic West subjected to the lurid tales of “the rape of Belgium” were just as invested in the “crude binary” of chivalric allied heroes versus diabolical German rapists as anyone else (p. 273). The women who worked in the factories and on the farms that their fighting men had left would undoubtedly “repeat with gusto [the same] clichés as their fellow citizens about “our troops...fighting wars on

behalf of womankind” (p. 273). The gendered distribution of labour was largely restored following the war. Women went back to women’s work. The vote, however, was bestowed to some women by grateful nations in recognition of wartime service.

The military, historically, has been one of the most gendered institutions in Canadian society. War has counted as a domain almost entirely reserved for men. The persistent masculinism of violence is demonstrated in contemporary Canada and elsewhere by the massive disparity between the number of men and the number of women who commit violent crimes. The male propensity for violence, for resolving conflict through physical force, is shaped by society and culture. Public schools have a significant role to play in inhibiting the socialization of this propensity. Modern History 11, however, is far more likely to affirm the attractiveness of violence, especially for young men. The curriculum reinforces the notion of the military, and of war, as testing grounds in which males prove their manhood. The military ideal of manhood valorizes physical combat as the epitome of male self-realization. It privileges decisiveness and combativeness over deliberation and negotiation. In its endorsement of “dominant aggressive masculinities” (Davies, 2005, p. 357), the curriculum leaves “little space,” as Lynn Davies (2005) puts it, “for democratic critical pedagogy” (p. 359). The curriculum might have encouraged a critical exploration of the gendered nature of military violence and an inquiry into the consequences of this in contemporary society. Students might have critically analyzed portrayals of war in textbooks, for example, and in popular culture.

Possibilities such as these can only be a part of Modern History 11 *despite* the curriculum. Educators would need to teach the course ‘crooked,’ veering away from the

map laid out in the *Curriculum Guide* (2012). Teachers would need to seek other sources than those recommended by the *Guide* (2012). The BBC's "World Wars in Depth" series, Veterans Affairs Canada's World War websites, and the Canadian War Museum's online exhibits do not serve critical history. The battle maps, campaign details, tales of heroism, and virtual trench tours that resources like these provide only reinforce the mythology of war. Sadly, this sort of deviation from the curriculum does not seem to happen. In my experience, the curriculum is taught 'straight.' When educators do stray from it, it is generally in a direction that only further glorifies soldiers and the military. For example, the majority of educators in my History Department have taken part in the "Lest We Forget" project. This project, located on the Library and Archives of Canada website, was inspired by an Ontario high school teacher and is heavily promoted by The Gregg Center for the Study of War and Society at the University of New Brunswick. The Gregg Center's website features an education portal offering resources and professional development for Canadian teachers which is used by most of my colleagues who teach Modern History 11. The "Lest We Forget" project employs students to write biographies of Canadian soldiers who participated in the First World War. The project allows students to work with primary source documents—military records, newspaper accounts, obituaries—yet a critical aspect is absent. As its title suggests, the enterprise is one of patriotic memorialization. The image of the military is burnished as honourable defender of the nation; war is naturalized, a tragic but nevertheless redemptive and regenerative "trial" for men and nations alike; and soldiers are lionized as heroes rather than mourned as victims. As McKay & Swift (2012) observe, "one traditional function of the hero has

been to serve as a role model for masculinity” (p. 272). The “Lest We Forget” project, like Modern History 11 in general, provides plenty of these.

I began this critical discourse analysis of the New Brunswick Modern History 11 *Curriculum Guide* (2012) by summarizing and evaluating Peter Seixas’s historical thinking concepts. As with other provincial high school history curricula, the New Brunswick Modern History 11 curriculum is putatively designed to facilitate the development of the critical and historical thinking competencies linked to Seixas’s concepts. This, I argue, is a worthy objective. As Gibson and Case (2019) have suggested, historical/critical literacy is indispensable for preparing student-citizens to interrogate the narratives and assumptions that shape the world for all of us. Building these skills enhances our capacity to question and disrupt the “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 13-14; MacNaughton, 2005, p. 27) that are presented to us as settled and authoritative, but which so often serve to obscure and legitimize arbitrary and unjust relations of power (Foucault, 1977). The ability to think, read, regard, and argue carefully and critically is a prerequisite for informed and engaged citizenship. Our students need to learn to navigate and analyze the discursive apparatus that upholds the social order they inhabit. This is the first step to challenging and changing it.

My analysis of the discourse of the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) deploys some of the same tools of critical thinking the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) espouses. The irony here, of course, is that this analysis has demonstrated that the *Guide* (2012), and hence the course curriculum, is deeply flawed as a vehicle for advancing the objective of historical/critical literacy. Even as the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) embraces the rhetoric of critical historical analysis, it presents a historical narrative, or series of narratives, that are disturbingly

problematic on historical, as well as political, grounds. In this respect, the *Curriculum Guide* (2012) functions as a component of the discursive apparatus that historical thinking ought to empower students to examine critically. It reproduces a particular (and familiar)—Eurocentric and white supremacist, militarist, and patriarchal—“regime of truth” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 13-14; MacNaughton, 2005, p. 27). The effect of the content of the course, as such, delimits and inhibits the development of the very skills the course proclaims as its pedagogical objective. Critical analysis, rather, is confined to a truncated, ideologically safe, zone of historical inquiry (European, military, male-dominated). In this way, empowerment is confounded by indoctrination.

In the next chapter, I will approach the Modern History 11 course from a radically different vantage point: that of four Syrian refugees who have taken the class. Their experience as students in the class, and my experience as an educator of these students, will form the basis for my autoethnographic reflections that follow.

CHAPTER FIVE

Weaving Stories: Autoethnographic Reflections

My experience teaching the Modern History 11 course began when I was an intern. My supervising teacher implemented the new curriculum during the 2011-2012 school year when it was rolled out as a “pilot” course. I have taught the course steadily since then. It was in the fall term of 2015, the term when Syrian refugee newcomers first arrived in my classroom, that I experienced what MacNaughton (2005) has termed an “epistemological shudder” (pp.109-110). My thinking, that is, was disrupted by an awareness of “unexpected meanings of ways of knowing” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 109). This shift led me to question the curriculum and, ultimately, to critically examine the course for my Master’s thesis. In this chapter, I will articulate aspects of my experience of teaching this course since 2015. The experience as I recount it is a product of memory and of the informal teaching journals I kept between 2015 and 2019. I quote directly from these journals in the autoethnographic account that follows.

The journals document my insights and reflections, and many comments and stories shared in the classroom by my students. Some of the student comments were recorded at, or very near, the time they were recounted and thus were documented more or less verbatim. Others are recollections of statements and stories noted by me after class, and sometimes at home after the school day had finished. Everything in the journals—my commentary and reflections and representations of students’ words —was compiled before I began research for this MA thesis. I kept the journals with no notion that I would one day draw upon them as a primary source for this research. For me at the time, the utility of the journals lay in the satisfaction the writing gave me as a chronicle of

my work as an educator and as a record of the brilliant, funny, profound, and sometimes tragic things my students would say. The journals also served the practical purpose of allowing me to document and reflect upon my pedagogical practice: what worked, what did not work, what would I use again, and how might I do it better next time around? I also wrote poetry in my journals, and I begin three of the four sections in this chapter with a poem. When these poems were written, I had an intern teaching in my classes. This gave me the time to observe and reflect in a different way; poetry is what emerged. All of the students whose words are used in this thesis have given their consent for me to do so. I also received ethical approval for this study from University of New Brunswick's Research and Ethics Board.

In this autoethnographic reflection, I have supplemented material from the journals with the responses of former students of mine to questions posed in qualitative semi-structured interviews. Each of these recently graduated individuals are Syrian refugee newcomers who took Modern History 11 with me. For the interviews, I created a series of questions (see appendix A) intended to encourage students to discuss their experiences before and after their arrival to Canada. The questions also concern the material taught and discussed in the grade 11 Modern History class. While the questions provided a template for organizing our interviews, the interviews were informal and conversational. In some instances, research participants answered questions out of order, and sometimes one question would elicit a response to several questions. I have woven the interview data with my journal entries, recollections, and current reflections to create the autoethnographic account that follows. The material is organized around the themes in my research data that emerged as the most prominent and relevant to my thesis. I

discuss these in the following four sections: 1) making connections, 2) oppression and freedom, 3) dangerous memories, and 4) educating educators. While attending to these themes, I also emphasize the observations of my research participants that are pertinent to my arguments about the Eurocentrism and white supremacist, militaristic, and patriarchal values promoted in Modern History 11.

Findings: Making Connections

The importance of the relationship between educators and newcomer students repeatedly became evident during the interview process. The following journal entry was written in 2015, elicited by my first encounter with Syrian students in my Social Studies classroom.

September 2015, Journal Entry:

He picked a seat at the front of the class, in the corner against the wall. I watched him as he leaned into the wall, hoping that it would envelop him – take him away somewhere that he would not be noticed. Although he had little knowledge of the English language, I spoke to him each day – trying to comfort him. Trying to let him know that I would be his advocate – that things will be okay. I was naïve – of course things were not okay for him. One day he did not show up for class. I tried to find out why, and to see how I could help him. I learned that he didn't want to come back to that class; he didn't like it. I felt defeated. How was I going to be able to help him and the other newcomers to our school?

Becoming a compassionate and responsive teacher of Syrian refugee newcomers presented me with the steepest learning curve I have encountered as an educator. From my place of privilege, I believed I was informed about what had happened in Syria. But the impressions I had gleaned from the mainstream media taught me nothing about what

people who lived through the civil war had actually experienced. When I pondered the glimpses of the lived experience of fear and violence my refugee students revealed to me, my own memories of fear and violence came storming to the surface. This shocked me. I struggled to keep these feelings safely locked down, but found them pouring into my work as a teacher. It was at this level—our common experiences of fear and violence—that I most related to my newcomer students. This was the channel through which my empathy flowed. I believe there was something in my caring for these students, and in the vulnerability that this caring elicited in me, that allowed them to feel safer as our relationships deepened. Journaling my thoughts and feelings about these relationships as they began to develop in 2015 was itself a kind of unwitting autoethnography. As Boylorn and Orbe (2014) observe, autoethnography “invites readers into the lived experience of a presumed ‘Other’ and to experience it viscerally” (p. 15). Journal keeping helped me “read,” or interpret, the “presumed ‘Other’” in my classroom. This ‘Other’ now no longer feels distant from me, or even particularly ‘Other.’ The refugee newcomers in my classes taught me as much as I taught them, and in the process, we became friends. I have become a confidant, an advisor, an interpreter, and a supporter for many of these students, and am now acquainted with many of their families. We have shared meals, and stories, and exchanged information about life in Canada.

“I feel like a teacher should always understand their students,” declared IA in her interview with me: “We have a lot of responsibility growing up . . . teachers need to understand us because we have a lot going on. Some teachers would say they understand you, but they didn’t really understand – it wasn’t you though – you figured it out really quick” (IA, personal communication, April 28, 2020). I am flattered that IA thinks I

“figured it out.” She affirms my conviction that a teacher’s relationships with students is absolutely crucial for educational success. I am a compassionate educator. I strive to build the “empathetic connection” with my students that Ronald Pelias (2004) argues is necessary to create “space for dialogue” (pp. 1-2). Another way of thinking about this connection is through Gadamer’s concept of “horizons of understanding” (Bresler, 2006, p. 26). As an educator, I strive to be fully aware of the circumstances—of background, culture, ideology, gender, language, education, etc.—that delimit my personal horizon of understanding and the horizons of understanding of others. Transcending these horizons, seeing beyond my own range of vision, is a dialogic process through which I work to open myself to the horizons of others (Clark, 2008). Teachers and students have the possibility of doing this together in classrooms. The “fusion of horizons” between and among us is education. We learn to see and listen to the experiences and interpretations of others, sometimes very different from our own, with more empathy and discernment.

In my journal entry of October of 2016, I wrote about the process of becoming more connected to my students. Connection, especially emotional connection, presupposes some form of mutual understanding. And language, of course, is the medium through which mutual understanding, by and large, must develop. Simply communicating with Syrian refugee youth was, and continues to be, a significant challenge.

October 2016, Journal Entry:

I have a handful of Arabic words that I can say – “madrasa” for school, “sabah alkhyr” for good morning. Of course, the first time I said good morning in Arabic, students were confused, they did not know what I was saying. With their help, and after a few tries I got it – there was lots of laughter. My students had the chance to teach me- I think today

really helped me build stronger relationships of trust with our newcomers.

I worked hard to help my Syrian students comprehend my English-language classes. Team teaching with resource educators was one way I tried to make instruction and discussion more accessible. I created vocabulary charts for each lesson. I used images to illustrate key terms and concepts. And used Google-translate to navigate between English and Arabic. I had students explain ideas with pictures. Communication became a cooperative enterprise which, at its best, involved the entire class. Arabic-speakers and English-speakers searched for words together. I taught myself Arabic words (some of my English-speaking students did the same). My pronunciation was terrible, but my effort was appreciated. One student taught me how to spell my name in Arabic. I was struck by the frequency and depth of the humour and empathy that would erupt in the classroom through the simple exercise of making meaning. As a social process, translation and interpretation require trust, and when trust is established, insight and empathy seem to follow. Nevertheless, as Grace Feuerverger (2011) explains, lack of proficiency in the language of the host culture tends to produce not only the feeling of inferiority for newcomers, but material forms of deprivation and disempowerment as well. If knowledge is power, as Foucault (1977) maintains, then the most fundamental knowledge is linguistic. In David Corson's (1993) words, language "is the vehicle for identifying, manipulating and changing power relations between people" (as cited by Feuerverger, 2011, p. 368). I like to think of my classroom as a trusting, friendly and relaxed environment for negotiating linguistic and cultural difference, but most spaces in the High School are not so accommodating. In the cafeteria, the students who speak Arabic as their first language sit together, separate from the others.

The barriers to mutual understanding between my Syrian students and I were linguistic and cultural, and perhaps most profoundly, experiential. The hardships of war and displacement were shared by all of my Syrian students. These were experiences that I could only imagine. This journal entry reflects my anxiety about teaching the history of war to students who knew war viscerally and had survived its madness.

September 2015, Journal Entry:

They sat at the front of the class next to each other. I have to try harder so that they would understand that I was there to help. I need to find a way to show them that I care. How do you teach students that just escaped war about war and violence in a History class in Canada? This makes no sense to me.

I was nervous about teaching Syrian refugee newcomer students about the military history that figures so prominently in Modern History 11. These students had fled their homes because of war. They had firsthand experience of its waste, brutality, and senselessness—all aspects of war that are glossed over by the curriculum. How would they respond to this content? Syrian newcomers shared many stories with me personally and with our classes. Some were happy stories of life before migration, stories of hometowns and schools, friends and families. Others were difficult, painful stories of fear and powerlessness in the face of random violence, or of strength, resilience, and luck in the flight to safety. Some were stories of displacement, alienation, and hardship in places where Syrians were unwelcome. These narratives were shared with the expectation that I would listen carefully. And the narrators themselves listened carefully when they shared their stories. Personal stories “hold meaning and value to the storyteller and the listener” (East, Jackson, O’Brien, & Peters, 2010, p. 19). There is potential for healing

and learning, for the expansion and fusion of horizons, for all participants in such interactions.

Findings: Oppression and Freedom

Another dominant theme in my journals and interview conversations was the radical difference between the pre-migration and post-migration lives of Syrian students. Canada figures in the following journal entries not only as a place of safety, but as a place of freedom and opportunity. I wrote the poem, “Clouded,” as I watched my students pay attention to the lesson of my intern teacher. I wondered how they felt about the refuge they had found, what they felt about Canada.

March 2017, “Clouded”

*The flag hangs contented at the front of the class
Amidst the internal wars of our youth.
The unrest in their minds churn like a whirlwind of leaves,
Staggering through the day.
Empty eyes searching for meaning.
Souls sift and seek a new place to settle.
Composed bodies changing masks to fit in.
Shuffling from class to class at the sound of a bell
Like Pavlov’s dog
Salivating for something sincere.
What is the guiding force toward healing?
To restore and ground
To the earth?
The flag hangs contented at the front of the class.*

Here, my ambivalence about my country is clear. The flag hangs motionless, self-satisfied. But my newcomer students are in turmoil. They want more than the flag. Some of my journal entries describe interactions with students in which they speak about differences between the Middle East and Canada. What it is possible to do and say in these two very different parts of the world was often the central theme of these interactions.

May 2017, Journal Entry:

He (MJ) shared with me today about the lack of freedom he had in Syria. He told me that you cannot say anything negative about the government or you will end up in jail for many years – then he compares it to free speech in Canada and how lucky Canadians are. He told me you cannot have a free life in Syria because the government won't let you. He said you don't have the freedom in Syria whether you want to be a soldier or not – he said that when you finish school you have to join the army or pay every two years. Then he said in Canada you can make your own choice. In school, some teachers used to give the answers to the students whose parents work at the school or are police, but other students got a hard exam. In Canada, all the students are the same and teachers don't cheat. He said he liked that. I think he must be happy here, sounds like he may be ready to learn and trusts the teachers here. But when he talks about the struggles in Syria. I can't help thinking that he wants to tell me more.

The four participants in this study have all been to at least one other country after fleeing the war in Syria and before coming to Canada. And all have stories of discrimination and suffering in these initial places of refuge. The following excerpts speak to this.

March 2017, Journal Entry:

When he (MJ) was living in Lebanon, he had no freedom because he was from Syria. He could not leave his home after 8pm. He told me that if the Lebanese people or police saw you after 8pm walking in the streets you would go to jail or be sent back to Syria. He could not study in Lebanon because of racism. He used to go to school only for two hours a day and he said teachers were very bad. They would not teach the students from Syria.

He said that working was difficult, he could not get good paying jobs because he was from a different country. Still, at twelve years old he had two jobs – he worked 6 days a week for 8 hours a day and made \$100 for two weeks of work. He sighed and said there was nothing he could do about it. “They ignored us.” Living was expensive in Lebanon. Rent was high and food was costly. Many people did not have work and the government did not help anyone.

Memories of oppression and racism seemed especially bitter in the testimonies of IA, the single female participant in my research. In the entry below, I recorded her story of struggling with racism in a Jordanian school. The school tried to address this problem by segregating Syrian refugee students from Jordanian students. The story makes me alert to how wrong it is for ‘us,’ in the so-called “West,” to conceive of “Arabs” or “Muslims” in homogeneous, monolithic terms.

November 2018, Journal Entry:

We are talking about World War I. IA wanted to share some of her stories of war from when she lived in Damascus. The war started in Syria when she was just 9 years old, almost 10. She remembers the exact date when her family bought plane tickets and moved to Jordan. It was September 12, 2012 and she was 11. Her father was pulled over by the official men, government secret police. “They thought he was suspect; they made him stand outside, and away from the car for a long time, long enough to scare him.” This was the day they bought tickets to leave (on the next day). She says that Jordan was not a good place. They had to stay there for four years. They did go to school but had to change schools a lot because the students were racist toward them because they were from Syria. They ended up in what she called a split school where students from Jordan

went in the morning and then Syrian students went in the afternoons, she said this was better but there was still a lot of racism when the transition happened (other students leaving and them showing up). It was really hard to make ends meet in Jordan. They had to pay rent but could not work without a special permit, which they could not buy because they had no money. So, in order to pay the rent, they worked “secret jobs.” If you got caught, you would pay a big fine or be transferred back to Syria. She shared a story about her older brothers and uncle in Jordan. She said police in big busses would try to pick up workers that were working in secret. “You know, like when farm animals are collected in a truck? Like that, collecting people.” Her family members almost got caught once, but they ran and made it back home. She giggles when she talks about how one of her brothers (who I had taught the year before) jumped over a fence and fell. An old lady saw him and laughed. IA found humour in this story. She says she is happy here, except for what happened to her parents last year. That story is for another time.

These students compare their early experience in refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey with their experience of Canada. And all agree that life in Canada is better. They see Canada as a place of freedom, safety, and opportunity, and seem committed to making it their home. I hope Canada proves worthy of their great hopes for it. Their faith is a bit disconcerting for me. I am keenly aware of the historic and continuing flaws and failures of this country. Yet the more I learn of the tyranny, fear, and suffering they escaped, the more I appreciate their sense of relief and optimism. TA was emphatic about how happy he was to be living in Canada. It is much better, he says, than living in Lebanon, where his family first found safety. But he misses his family and friends in Syria: “In Syria I used to go with all my friends outside; but in Canada I don’t

have a lot of friends to go outside with, and just like the culture is a little bit different” (TA, personal communication, May 4, 2020). Although he has some Syrian friends here, it can be difficult for them to connect because of regional and cultural differences. His comment again reminds me of the complexity of all societies, and of the dangers of reductionism when it comes to generalizing about national or ethnic groups. “You don’t understand how his life is different from me,” he observes rhetorically, “you don’t understand him really good, because sometimes the language is different – even if it is in Arabic, it is different” (TA, personal communication, May 4, 2020).

AK believes that Canadians in general do not like Arabs. Education, according to AK, is the only way to alleviate the ignorance that creates this prejudice: “I think it would be a good idea to tell people in the class, so people understand because lots of people think that Middle East people are not nice and they don’t like them” (AK, personal communication, May 7, 2020). AK’s anger and frustration were evident during the interview. He has experienced racism at school since migrating here. A particular sore point for AK is the way Canadians tend to perceive the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and Israeli oppression of Palestinian people. People “do not know the real truth,” AK proclaims, “they only believe what they want.” “They think what they see on news is right– like what Palestine did to one Israeli guy, but they don’t know that in one hour Israel kill 100 of them: Palestine people. How can they [students] learn?” (AK, personal communication, May 7, 2020).

IA was inspired by the history of the women’s liberation movement and feminism. This topic is not in the curriculum, but I devoted time to teaching about it, nevertheless. I am no longer surprised by the depth and pervasiveness of ignorance about

feminism among Canadian-born students, a product of misinformation and complacency. Yet even the most misinformed of these students have an opinion about it. For IA, learning about feminism was a revelation. It is telling that this topic is the one that had the most impact on her: “I remember the feminist movement because I really cared about how it happened. How a woman went from owning and having nothing and works toward being equal to men, because that’s the way it should be. In some parts of the world they don’t even know what feminism is. Do you remember that I made an entire essay about it?” (IA, personal communication, April 28, 2020). The three male students I interviewed said nothing about gender, masculinity, or patriarchy.

Findings: Dangerous Memories

The concept of “dangerous memories” occurred to me over and over again as I reviewed my journal entries and conducted my interviews (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008). The memories that refugee students shared with me were “dangerous” in the sense that they unsettled my thinking, not only about 11th grade history, but about education itself, and even, more broadly, about war, peace, healing, and the reconciliation of differences. Would these memories be as destabilizing for others as they were for me? Could these memories be deployed as testimonial narratives in the classroom to unsettle and disrupt course content, and thus educate and fuse horizons? The poem below arose from reflecting upon what my Syrian students have shared about war.

April 2017, “Humanity”

His weary eyes conceal the torment.

I will never understand.

What is behind those eyes?

He is the same as the rest of us.

Different experiences.

*News of violence and death.
He watches for his family on T.V.*

*War.
Killing human beings.
The stories his face can tell.
The atrocities his eyes have seen.
The ones that look to me for knowledge.*

*He is safe now.
But people don't understand.
He lets me in a bit.*

*War.
Pushing him away from a place he still calls home.*

This poem reflects my sense of the incommensurability between my students' understanding of war and my own. I am grateful not to have seen "the atrocities" he has. I wonder, nevertheless, how people like me and others, can learn from his experience. Can he teach us about war? Would this be healing for him? Can the process help us imagine, and work toward, a world without war? The excerpts from my journals which follow all concern war as experienced, and war as taught in the classroom. They contain my record of the memories of my Syrian students which, for me in any case, have proven to be "dangerous."

February 2018, Journal Entry:

Why does the curriculum even mention the Reign of Terror? It almost always ends up in a conversation about the Guillotine. It came up today. A newly arrived [Syrian] student asked a question about it in class. He put his finger up to his throat and ran it across in a slicing motion, making sure that he knew what we were talking about in class. I shook my head yes. He pointed to his eyes and told me he saw this back in his country. I don't like this curriculum. Why did we talk about that? What was I thinking?

This student's disclosure shook me up. Bresler (2006) states that, "authentic,

meaningful engagement with a story involves getting inside it and letting it get inside you, internalizing as well as analyzing it” (p. 28). This story definitely got inside me, and it is still there. As the journal entry suggests, my first response was to worry that talking about the guillotine had triggered a traumatic reaction in this student. But the student did not appear to be offended or distressed by the material about the Reign of Terror. He gave no indication that it bothered him. On the contrary, he seemed to simply want to communicate to me that he understood what the guillotine was about. This was familiar territory for him. He had witnessed decapitation. I was the one who was shocked and disturbed. The episode points up the difficulty of fusing horizons when the life experiences of interlocutors—to say nothing of culture, language, etc.—are so radically different. How can teaching the history of violence, in this case, the history of mob violence, political persecution, and judicial murder in France over 200 years ago, compare to the lived experience of violence, the witnessing of decapitation held in the recent memory of a refugee student?

It quickly became clear that many of my Syrian students wanted to share their stories of war with me. They seemed to seek out opportunities to do so. I feel like this was a way for them to help me understand who they are. They wanted me to really see them.

October 2017, Journal Entry:

AK and MA came by my room today at lunch. I was sitting at my desk eating. They said hi and then just stood there. I wasn't sure what they wanted so I started a conversation with them. I asked them about their day, about how school was going. Then they told me they wanted to tell me a story. They told me a story of the start of the war when people

were protesting on the streets every night. People would go out in groups and yell about how the government was wrong. They told me that there were always government people with guns watching. Then they tell me that on one particular night the government police just started shooting at people's legs. AK's uncle was shot in the legs right in front of him. He said he was so lucky that he didn't get hit too. It was the weirdest thing. They just wanted to tell me this. Maybe they were talking to each other about their lives back home and felt like they needed to share it with me. I wonder if sharing their stories helps them feel better, relieves stress? I never really know what to say when students feel inclined to share these stories with me. I just listen. I try not to look shocked (although I am). I feel the heaviness they hold and maybe I just absorb some of that for them. The more I think about it, the more I connect it with today's lesson about Revolution. That has to be it.

Syrian students often linked their personal experience of war to their personal experience of learning about war in the classroom. Sometimes the material I covered in class would elicit a response that a student would share with me. In the following entry, I recount an interaction with a student moved by an image I projected in class—Dorothea Lange's iconic photo, "Migrant Mother"—to talk about the privation and fear she and those around her suffered during the war in Syria.

April 2019, Journal Entry:

IA stayed after class today because she wanted to share another story with me. She is in grade 11 and is from Damascus. I feel like I am making more connections with my Syrian students. She is excited because her older sister, brother in law, and two young cousins passed an interview and found out they are moving to Fredericton – she hopes in the summer. She has not even met her youngest cousin, who is now 3. She is happy that she

has learned English and that it feels good to understand English. She tells me more about her life in Syria. I have already heard some of this, but I listen. She tells me she has lots of memories and totally feels what the person in the photo was feeling. She wishes she could talk more about other wars besides WWI and WWII in History class. "I do like talking about my experiences in war – talking about something that happens to you makes you feel less stressful." Sounds like healing to me. She says that people here need to hear the real story of what happened to her – "not in the news, that is fake." She describes the nightmares she still has: "You never forget this – any little sound can terrify me." The sounds of bombs when she would sit on her father's knee in the basement were the worst: "unimaginable – the feeling of hearing the sound of a bomb is just so awful." She tells me about the snipers on high buildings shooting at people: "You can hear the sound of the bullet; I know you don't know what I mean – the sound." She remembers parking the car and crossing the road to get home. Her dad would say, "1,2,3, all of you put heads down, and run." One time they got a phone call and were told to turn the car around. Just as they did, a bomb exploded in the street where they would have been. She said it was scary. I never really know what to say after hearing these bits and pieces of her experiences. I empathize with her and let her know how sorry I am. I tell her that I think war is horrible and that I cannot imagine what she has been through. She tells me that it is okay. She tells me that she likes to share her stories of what happened to her with me because it is "less stressful." I know the feeling, sharing my stories helps me feel better too. It is healing for both of us. But I also think of her words: "You never forget this."

Another powerful memory was shared by AA during our interview conversation.

For me, this story underscored the fact that those most vulnerable to the trauma of modern war are children.

I (AA) was almost 14, I was playing soccer with my friends. This was the last time I played soccer. You know we played on the ground around the neighborhood, where you see a ground with no trees, just like it sounds. That's where we played soccer. I was with 10 of my friends and we played for a few hours and it was getting dark. We saw a car parking close to the soccer game, the ground there. And it was making sounds. This story was in 2011 when the war started in Syria. We heard some sounds from the car, like just noise sounds. We didn't pay a lot of attention to it and we didn't care, we kept playing. And when we decided to leave the playground we were in, and that car explode. You know like we couldn't hear anything for almost 10 minutes and the dust, and the fire, and people screaming around there. Some people got injured from it. So after, we found out that the car was put there on purpose. The army put it there in case people were protesting or meeting there or doing anything illegal. And then you know to kill them. And that time I was with my friends there and it was a bad experience. And just a few minutes when we were leaving, if we stayed, we would be all gone. That was the last time I played soccer. I never play here. I have friends. They play, and I watched a few times, but for me playing? No. (IA, personal communication, May 2020)

What strikes me here is how such a significant part of this student's youth—playing soccer—was stolen from him by military violence. Generals, politicians, soldiers, they all know that the violence they inflict takes a massive, brutal, toll, and that this toll is borne

disproportionately by civilians, many of them children, who want nothing to do with war. And yet they foment, perpetuate, and enable this violence. I think of Canada's sale of weapons—killing machines—to Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the Philippines. How many children will be traumatized by Canada's weapons? I am reminded of a story from AK which I recorded in my journal in 2017.

December 2017, Journal Entry:

He (AK) told me a story after class today about having to hide in the basement for many days. Many people from the neighborhood were all in the same basement shelter. The bombing outside was not stopping. They had no food, water or a private bathroom. He sighed. He said the first time the bombing stopped some people went outside to try to get food, but they were killed as soon as they went outside. They had to wait longer. He remembers when he had to take a turn to go outside to try to find food. He motioned his arms and body as if he had his back up against a building and was scurrying along it. He had to be careful not to get shot.

These war stories stand in stark contrast to the narratives of war contained in and recommended by the *Curriculum Guide* (2012). For one thing, they come from the perspective and reflect the experience of civilian youth. The *Curriculum Guide* (2012) takes the perspective of the authoritative, objective, and fully adult expert, commenting after the fact. Students are encouraged to adopt the same perspective, as a way to learn how historians work and think. With the exception of the exercise in which students pretend to be a “soldier in the trenches” eating beef jerky and hardtack bread, they are encouraged to think like a state, weighing “power potential,” national interests, and grand strategy (all in the absence of learning anything about the colonial and imperial projects

of the states they study). The war stories of the Syrian refugee students in this study speak of paralyzing fear, of hunger and darkness, danger and unpredictability. They speak of atrocity and brutality—legs shot out, heads severed from torsos—of the terrifying sounds of bombs and bullets and the visceral stress these sounds produce. They evince the utter randomness of modern military violence, and the absolute powerlessness of the human bodies swept up in it. This is antithetical to the portrait rendered in the curriculum of Modern History 11, where part of the ideological work of the curriculum is to impose sense on the senselessness of war, to give it some redemptive meaning and purpose.

The memories of my refugee students are “dangerous,” above all, because they expose the absurdity of this presumption. For the victims of war, there is no making sense of the senseless. Is this not the horizon of understanding we should seek to explore when we learn about war? My students’ stories also expose the lie that personal agency—usually depicted in the form of masculine martial prowess—can facilitate survival (and victory) in combat. Survival, these stories suggest over and over, is entirely arbitrary—a matter of chance, not choice.

I remember there is one time. I think 3 days the government – no people could go outside, and you didn’t even sleep, you just hear the shooting. They didn’t even stop for even one second. I remember a video that you put up for us and you show like how they fight. I remember that story. And when I hear the bombs, I remember how the bombs like, how the sound of it – yeah – but that is fine – there is nothing you can do – it’s fine. (AK, personal communication, May 7, 2020)

The video AK refers to a clip from the 1979 film version of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Screening this was an attempt to destabilize the curriculum's sanitized construction of the First World War. The movie is realistic in its portrayal of the horrors of war. It was obvious to me while interviewing AK that it disturbed him, despite his insistence that it was "fine." He was upset by class discussions of Second World War bombing as well, especially the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (again, I was teaching outside the curriculum, which does not include the atomic bombing of Japan): "I was like not excited about what you were saying about like the bomb that happened, because I see too much of that. I saw too many people dying from war" (AK, personal communication, May 7, 2020).

Another participant, AA, acknowledged that some Syrian students might have difficulty dealing with a class dominated by the history of war:

I don't know about people if they get phobia about bad things, sometimes you get students when they see blood they throw-up or they pass out. For other students, maybe they have phobia of the war and they don't want to hear about it anymore or about guns or explodes or they can't watch the things (AA, personal communication, May 2, 2020).

AA went on to discuss the triggering effects of fireworks for people traumatized by war: "Some people scream when they hear fireworks because they think it is a bomb" (AA, personal communication, May 2, 2020). He also commented on the fear of the police among Syrian refugees: "The sound of a police car made some people run; others have a phobia of the word 'police'" (AA, personal communication, May 2, 2020). For AA himself, however, learning about the wars of the twentieth century was not a problem.

His familiarity with war, he claimed, was an advantage here: “It was like same life I lived before I moved from Syria, like a true story like when you watch a movie about a true story and how you feel different when you watch a movie that is fake” (AA, personal communication, May 2, 2020).

TA also draws a connection between the war stories of history class and the war stories of contemporary Syria. For him, learning about war was “okay because the people can understand me because I come from the war and when you teach them the war, they will think about us” (TA, personal communication, May 4, 2020). “You see what I mean?” he continues, “the people they will understand me” (TA, personal communication, May 4, 2020). As Canadians learn about war, TA reasons, they will be more apt to empathize with people like him who “come from war.” The course’s focus on war was also useful for Syrian students, TA continues, because it shed light on what their families who remained in Syria were going through but refused to speak openly about: “We talk with them [our relatives] every day. But they don’t give us exactly the life in Syria. So, when you teach about WWI, I can see exactly how they live” (TA, personal communication, May 4, 2020).

Two of the four refugees I interviewed commented on Adolf Hitler. AA remarked that Syrians believe that “Hitler used people as soap after they burned them” (AA, personal communication, May 2, 2020). AK offered an opinion about Hitler which was informed by the struggle between Israel and Palestine. He broached the topic nervously, aware that it was controversial. “I don’t know if you know about Palestine and Jewish people there,” he began, “for all Arabic and Middle East people, they don’t like Jewish people because they are killing the people in Palestine for a long time. That’s why we

know all Jewish people are not good. For Arabic people, we don't like [to] kill" (AK, personal communication, May 7, 2020). AK made sure I understood that he does not agree with people killing people, and that he does not think Hitler was "good," yet the unequivocal demonization of Hitler in his history class frustrated him. "He [Hitler] knows these people [Jewish people] weren't good," AK declared. What he learned about Hitler and the Holocaust in Syria, AK made clear, was different than what he was taught in Canada. "The only thing I know is that Jewish people, they kill too many people from the Middle East, you know because they are strong and rich. Every day, every day, they are killing people from Palestine. They can bomb in Jordan, bomb in Syria. Nobody cares you know" (AK, personal communication, May 7, 2020). AK's outrage about the Israeli oppression of Palestinians and military domination of the Middle East is expressed in anti-Semitic terms. He conflates the policies of the state of Israel with Judaism as a whole, an egregious and pernicious error.

AK's anger arises from personal experience, however, and it is not confined only to Jews or Israel, but extends to Russia and the United States as well, nations which also intervened militarily in the Syrian civil war:

They bomb everywhere. They bomb and kill anyone. You don't see the news how I see it. They contact us; I have family there in Palestine, in Jordan, and Syria. They see it from the news. It's really crazy. I don't know what they want from the Middle East. What can we do? I was there. That is why I went to Jordan, because every day they bombed us, like 80 to 100 bombs every night, every night, every night and we didn't know. We was waiting just to die. We didn't know which bomb would come to my house and we will die. So, one day my father said we

can't stay here anymore – not working, not going to school. We didn't have any money because we lived 2 years without a job. We thought we would just go for 2 or 3 weeks and go back. I left my clothes. I didn't take all my stuff. We left it at my house because we thought we would go back. I think we have been out more than 7 years, out of Syria, yeah (AK, personal communication, May 7, 2020).

I can sense the anguish arising from AK's powerlessness, an anguish that must be shared by many people in the Middle East. As a privileged white settler-Canadian, I have enjoyed a degree of freedom, a range of choices, a measure of power over my own destiny, that most people in the world are deprived of. The choices for AK's family in a Syrian war-zone had diminished to two: stay or go. Each carried enormous risks of death, injury, mutilation, imprisonment, and family separation. This horizon of understanding is a difficult one to imagine, much less to really see and feel. I am left with humility, and gratitude, and a determination to contribute, in the small ways I can, to equity, justice, and peace in this world, and to educate others to do the same.

Findings: Educating Educators

From the beginning, my association with Syrian refugee students has been an education for me. Reading my journals and having interview discussions drives home just how much I have learned from them. At times, newcomer stories speak directly to my own education as an educator and to the need for education among teachers in general. This theme is reflected in the poem, "Alone: An Observation," written as I imagined the thoughts of the refugee students in my classroom as they tried to absorb the lecture of an intern teacher.

March 2016, "Alone: An Observation"

*The murky corners of the room are closing in
Like taking a final breath after falling overboard
No one left to see with their own eyes
Articulation gone – only a mumbled utterance that no one will hear
Stories diminish, and memories weaken,
Promises unfilled and hopes not shared.
An interlude of time.
A silent smile transfers from thoughts to face
At a moment of destitute
Forgotten and Alone.*

I am struck by how dark this poem seems. I imagine the mental world of my Syrian students in bleak terms. The only ray of hope is the smile emerging from unknown thoughts. I cannot remember my mood at the time I wrote it. But I am more hopeful about Syrian newcomers now.

While all agreed that Canada was a safer place to be, all of the newcomers who participated in my research also had stories about facing discrimination and racism here. Sometimes, as the following journal entry illustrates, this seems to have been a product of impatience and insensitivity.

October 2018, Journal Entry:

TA came for help today at lunch. Even though I only teach him history, I was helping him with an English Language Arts assignment. I encouraged him to talk to his LA teacher and explain that he is struggling to keep up. He told me that he had, but that his teacher said that if he didn't understand then he should not be in the class; he should be in a lower level. This educator did not help him. It infuriates me. If the educator took time to get to know him, they would realize that he is a smart student and wants to learn, but this teacher shut him down because he struggles with the language. Taking a lower level may close off opportunities for university. I think some of our educators need to be educated.

The prejudice of educators can also be more overt and cruel. In this entry, I write about

witnessing a refugee student being physically shoved and verbally berated by a teacher.

March 2019, Journal Entry:

Today at lunch I was at the student run café with several educators when a student I taught History 11 (LM) last year came in. It was nice to see him! I know that his attendance and work ethic has drastically improved over the past year. We chatted about school and he was proud of his accomplishments. He has only been in Canada for 3 years. He was waiting to see one of his friends. He waved at his friend (who was cooking) to see when they could hang out. One teacher told him he had to leave. He tried to explain that he was waiting for his friend. The teacher then pushed him toward the door. He was upset and angry and tried to reason with this teacher who wouldn't listen to him. He said that it was because he was from Syria. This teacher raised their voice and told him to get out and slammed the door in his face. My heart was racing, and I felt nervous. It was very upsetting to see how terribly an educator could treat a student. I should have said something, but I needed to be sure he was okay. He was very upset and angry and insisted it was because he was not white. He told me that this teacher taught him last semester and he just knew. Racism at its finest, in the hallways where education should be happening. I remember the feeling when my ex-husband raised his voice at me, and I felt powerless and hurt. Trauma takes years of healing. And this student has enough healing to do, enough to think about, missing his home, family, and having seen things that most could not imagine. I couldn't let him walk away. I sat with him for most of the lunch break, chatting with him. I shared my pizza with him. I wanted him to feel okay before he had to go to his afternoon classes.

The newcomer youth in Jan Stewart's (2011) study are unanimous in their

dissatisfaction with the way they are treated by many teachers. Students cite instances of discrimination and abuse much like what I witnessed with respect to LM above. Stewart (2011) finds that the prejudice of teachers is often compounded by stubbornness and laziness. Many teachers simply refuse to do the work necessary to begin to understand and accommodate newcomers. Bigotry is easier. So, teachers complain about newcomer youth being placed in their classes, or wonder aloud in class about why an immigrant would even “bother coming to this country” (p. 75). Educators, Stewart (2011) insists, must be “willing to adapt and modify their curriculum to meet the changing demographics of the Canadian classroom” (p. 79). This does not mean making the curriculum less challenging; it means finding “a different way to teach the material to different people” (p. 79). I could not agree more. The episode I observed also points to the reluctance of educators – in this case myself – to speak up when they witness injustice. Schools need to cultivate anti-racist cultures that encourage educators and administrators to communicate about such things openly and without fear of reprisal.

In her interview with me, IA made some specific recommendations for changing the Modern History 11 course. “History talks way more about the military and the weapons,” she states, “than the people, their emotions and how war affected them. In order to have peace and not start another war, people need to understand what war is like from the peoples’ perspectives” (IA, personal communication, April 28, 2020). History is important, IA continues, but only when it is relevant. Anyone can learn about the two world wars from the internet, she says. But the lessons from these wars that students really need to learn is how to not start another one, “cause people still don’t even know what peace means and how to even make it” (IA, personal communication, April 28,

2020). IA argues that history needs to be linked to contemporary events. If we are to learn about war—and IA believes it is essential that we do—we should learn about current wars and contemporary violence in historical context. “I don’t want kids of 2070 talking about the war in Syria,” IA proclaims, “I want people to talk about it right now. So, History is important but when I was sitting there in the class, no one talked about my country and we were talking about a war that happened 200 years ago; I felt left out” (IA, personal communication, April 28, 2020).

IA’s complaints are about the remoteness of a Eurocentric, white supremacist, militarist, patriarchal high school history class. The history of war she experienced in the class leaves out the people. The history of war teaches nothing practical about how to prevent war. The history of war is chronologically and geographically distant; it does not illuminate contemporary conflicts, especially those raging now in the places my refugee students still call home. “Remoteness” also serves to describe the fundamental problem with many of the educators my Syrian students have encountered in Canada. These educators remain emotionally remote, and hence unable to begin to empathize with, or imagine the horizons of, their newcomer students. This distance leaves plenty of room for racism. I suspect that the two sorts of remoteness, one curricular and pedagogical, the other emotional and relational, reinforce one another. Teachers who approach their pedagogy as a predominantly technical enterprise, those for whom teaching is merely a matter of transmitting information and meeting outcomes prescribed by the curricula, are also the ones most inclined to teach war as a merely technical problem, eliding its enormous emotional and moral dimension.

The four sections of this chapter, “Making Connections,” “Oppression and Freedom,” “Dangerous Memories,” and “Educating Educators” offer different accounts of and insights about educational experiences—those of Syrian refugee students and my own, their teacher—in a New Brunswick high school. In contrast to the critical discourse analysis of the previous chapter, a tightly focused examination of a single text, this autoethnographic inquiry is expansive and multifaceted. The focal point is a particular course, Modern History 11, but the comments and observations range widely in time and space—from pre-war and wartime Syria, to Middle Eastern refugee camps, to Canada, from the personal past of myself and my students, to the historical past discussed in our class. And it reaches well beyond the bounds of strictly empirical research. As Boylorn and Orbe (2014) state, critical autoethnography “asks deep questions and demands rigorous considerations” (p. 114). The “depth” of autoethnography has less to do with probing for some empirical ‘truth,’ however, than in deeply exploring the experiences of the researcher and of research participants through communicative interaction. “The heart,” as Pelias insists, is front and center in this process. There is no effort, as such, to detach emotion from experience in pursuit of some kind of illusory ‘objectivity.’ In this autoethnographic phase of my research, I do not aspire to definitive conclusions, but rather to evocative ‘leadings’ that may point the way to better ways of understanding, and ultimately to better ways of educating, *all* of our students.

Imposing structure upon this enterprise seems almost arbitrary. The autoethnographic material here spills out of its containers. Nevertheless, the sections I have designated do attempt to illuminate distinct themes that became evident both in my reflections on the journal record I kept while teaching the course, and in my interpretation

of the responses of Syrian refugees to my interview questions. “Making Connections” considers the challenges of forming relationships with students who fall within the category termed the “presumed Other” by Boylorn and Orbe (2014). As with other educational researchers (Deutsch et al., 2014; East et al., 2010; Geres, 2016), I have become convinced of the indispensability of forming empathetic relationships with my students, and of encouraging such connections among students more widely. Such connections have proven to be critically important in the case of Syrian refugee students, not only for their classroom engagement and educational success, but also for this autoethnographic research. I have been struck, again and again, by the honesty, openness, and trust demonstrated by these students as they shared their stories with me. This attests not only to my efforts to form relationships of trust, but to the willingness of my Syrian students to become part of such relationships. The result, for all of us, has been the expansion and “fusion” of our “horizons of understanding” (Bresler, 2006, p. 26). This, I would argue, is of inestimable educational value in and of itself.

The “Oppression and Freedom” section is my attempt to do justice to a theme repeatedly raised by my research participants: the sharp disparities between their experiences in wartime Syria and refugee camps, and their experiences in Canada. The eagerness of my Syrian students to talk about their lives, it seems to me, may also be related to the sense of emotional release they feel here. After years of privation, danger, fear, stress, and uncertainty, these young people feel safe, and free to do and say pretty much what they will. As they have compared their past lives to their present lives in conversations with me, I have sometimes detected a kind of exuberance in the sharing of their stories. Such emotion, however, was in all cases tempered by expressions of

yearning for the comforts of a home that no longer exists, for family, friends, and the familiar routines and patterns of life before war. The relief of finding safety in Canada, moreover, was also accompanied by a recognition of the challenges of making a life here. The language barrier, the struggle to find employment, and prejudice and racism, were all topics broached by research participants. It is clear that these students were acutely aware of their Otherness in their new country; hence the sentiment, expressed by several of my participants, that sharing stories might help their classmates understand them better. These students are not only earnest in their desire to expand their own “horizons of understanding” (Bresler, 2006, p. 26)—the exigencies of exile and adaptation, after all, has already required this of them—they are hungry to provide native-born Canadians with opportunities to expand theirs.

If the second section, “Oppression and Freedom,” was necessitated by the testimony of my research participants—a category of inquiry arising from the grassroots, so to speak—the third one, “Dangerous Memories,” was imposed upon their testimony by me. I have been fascinated, since reading Zembylas and Bekerman (2008), by the possibilities of deploying “dangerous memories” in the classroom to “disrupt,” as they put it, “taken for granted assumptions” (p. 127). There are plenty of the latter, as my critical discourse analysis demonstrates, in *Modern History 11*. These assumptions at once reinforce, and are reinforced by, the “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 13-14; MacNaughton, 2005, p. 27) disseminated by the course curriculum, a series of narratives and directives that take Eurocentrism and white supremacy, militarism, and patriarchy for granted as the natural and inevitable organizing principles of society—sanctified by history itself. White male Europeans, the curriculum implicitly maintains, were, and are,

the prime movers of historical progress, and war is an inevitable and necessary means by which progress is preserved and advanced. The testimonial narratives of Syrian refugee students trouble such assumptions both by decentering Eurocentric discourses and by refuting the mythologies of militarism.

The final section, “Educating Educators” explores the responses of the participants to questions about what could be better, both in History class and in high school in general. The recommendations are straightforward. Educators should work harder to form empathetic relationships with Syrian students. The alternative is complacency, ignorance, insensitivity, and even racism—all of which have been experienced by Syrian newcomers at my high school. The other suggestions concern teaching history. History classes should be more relevant, more contemporary, and more global. All of the students should see themselves in the histories we teach. And history, as IA so perceptively points out, should be people’s history. This is the history, IA suggests, that can offer practical ideas about making the world a better place.

In the concluding chapter that follows, I elaborate further on how educators can better accommodate refugee newcomers. I also return to the potential of utilizing “dangerous memories” in the classroom as a means both of destabilizing dominant “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 13-14; MacNaughton, 2005, p. 27), and of fostering a classroom culture of empathy and understanding.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions and Recommendations

I have described the “epistemological shudder” that prompted this inquiry (MacNaughton, 2005, pp. 109-110). Nothing in my subsequent research has altered the destabilization of the educational assumptions that this shudder produced. My critical analysis of the New Brunswick Modern History 11 curriculum has deepened my conviction of its profound inadequacy. Its Eurocentrism and white supremacy, its militarism, and its patriarchal bias is far more than a troubling hypothesis for me now; it is a demonstrable conclusion. The curriculum should be discarded entirely, or radically subverted through critical teaching. The damage created by teaching it ‘straight,’ moreover, is not confined to the Syrian newcomer students who initially sparked my concern; it is experienced by all students. All will absorb the ideologies of Eurocentrism, white supremacy, of militarism, and of patriarchy that the curriculum reflects and disseminates. The exclusion of racialized others, of women, and of peacemakers and other dissenters distorts history for everyone. The disproportionate focus on wars between white Europeans, coupled with the erasure of the history of the violent exploitation of Black and brown people through colonialism and imperialism, promotes ignorance, confusion, and prejudice for all. The depiction of war as necessary, and in some measure clean, glorious, and redemptive, predisposes all students to accept its obscenity. The failure to question the masculinist mythology of violence leaves all students vulnerable to its lies.

In addition to critical analysis, I also considered these issues through a much different mode of inquiry. In my autoethnographic reflections, I strove to accurately

represent the stories and insights that Syrian refugee newcomer youth have shared with me and to elaborate on the thoughts and feelings these interactions elicited. This methodology approaches the problem of white supremacy, militarism, and patriarchy in Modern History 11 more obliquely than critical analysis, but illuminates these issues nevertheless. More important, the autoethnographic aspect of my research helped clarify my ideas about how educators might act to disrupt dominant discourses and discursive practices. How can we decolonize and demilitarize our courses and make our classrooms welcoming and inclusive spaces for learning not only history, but empathy, respect, and peace-making? To begin to consider this issue and others, I will consider what my research has taught me about the questions I posed at the beginning this study.

Conclusions: Responding to My Research Questions

My first two research questions specifically concern the experience of Syrian refugee students with Modern History 11. These are most effectively discussed together. My third and fourth research questions attempt to draw concrete suggestions from these students about improving the curriculum and enhancing pedagogical practice. I will consider these separately.

(1.) How did Syrian newcomer refugee youth interact with the History 11 curriculum?

(2.) What do the stories of these young people reveal about their experience with the curriculum?

The History 11 curriculum evoked memories of war among the four Syrian refugee newcomer youth who participated in my study. That students connected specific lessons to their personal experiences is not surprising. All students learn by processing new information through the prism of previous knowledge and past experience. Unlike

their non-refugee counterparts, however, war and displacement are a formative experience for Syrian refugee students. One of my persistent worries has been that the war history in the curriculum would trigger traumatic memories of war experience for these students. Neither my teaching nor my research has borne out this worry. The student who responded to learning about the guillotine by explaining that he had witnessed decapitation is a case in point. His purpose seemed simply to communicate that he understood the discussion about the French Revolution. This was far from the only time that a recollection of shocking violence was shared with me in matter-of-fact terms. Trauma can be deeply internalized and its symptoms and effects difficult to detect (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). And I have no doubt that the refugee newcomers I have worked with have been traumatized. Each of them acknowledged the reality of war-induced trauma. Yet I was struck by their demeanour of stoicism or nonchalance. I would like to think this is an indication of resilience.

Students shared stories with me with the expectation that I would listen and understand. As Kyuchukov and New (2016) and East et al. (2010) have maintained, when refugee youth recount stories, and these are heard and understood, new perspectives are produced for sharers and listeners that can facilitate healing and resilience. The fact that newcomers have so readily shared their stories with me suggests that I have had some success in creating a classroom environment conducive to respect and trust. But making space for fusing horizons through storytelling has little to do with the curriculum. While the war stories of Modern History 11 seem to have sparked the impulse to share among Syrian refugee students, actually doing so was made possible by the “atmosphere of acceptance” in the classroom (East, et al., p. 19). All of the participants in my study have

personal knowledge of war and violence that is far more thorough and visceral than anything taught in the course. All of them were willing, even eager, to share this knowledge. All of them carry memories that are potentially “dangerous” in that they have the power to make us understand military violence in a way that is personal, immediate, and graphic in a class in which the curriculum makes it impersonal, remote, and sanitized. Perhaps this remoteness, and the curriculum’s misleading representation of war, contributed to my students’ desire to share their war stories.

IA reports that for her, the sharing of stories was cathartic and healing, but also hints at the deceptiveness and evasiveness of the curriculum’s treatment of war:

I don’t know if you remember from the class, but whenever you mentioned anything about me being from Syria, I got the opportunity to talk about it right away. I wanted to talk about it, and I wanted to share. I don’t mind sharing with people because in order to heal you have to share them. Cause I still have the trauma from the war and that’s why I love to share. Some people don’t talk about it; it’s like different kinds of people dealing with trauma. So, for History class, I feel the things we covered weren’t even [happening] anymore. So, nothing about it made my feelings or made me emotional or brought me down because I have been through so much worse than what we cover in History class. Because people think this is what war is, just being awful. It’s so much more than be awful. It’s so much more than being depressed. It’s sad. It’s just a lot. I lived through it (IA, personal communication, April 28, 2020).

Because of their distance, the war stories of History class were remote to IA, and therefore did not make her outwardly emotional or bring her down. War as represented in

class was “just awful,” as IA puts it, but for her the actual experience of war was much worse than “just awful.” IA and other participants were well aware of the tension between their memories of war and the dominant representation of war served up in history classes and in popular culture more generally.

Recommendations: What Can Educators Do?

(3.) What can Syrian refugee newcomers tell us about the history we teach and how we teach it, particularly, when it comes to the history of war?

All of the research participants argued that learning about war in one form or another was a necessary part of learning history. Yet all qualified this argument in various ways that reflected their ambivalence about how war is taught. Even though AK believes Canadians should learn about war to learn about those who, like he and his peers, have been victimized by it, he also insists that this learning should be in the cause of peace. “From grade one I knew the stories of World War I and World War II from my grandfather,” AK declared, “everyone knows that story” (AK, personal communication, May 7, 2020). Rather than dwell on what AK considers the distant past, he suggested that students learn about contemporary war and violence so they can work to prevent it: “So, if we try to teach about that, so people understand, so people will be safe. We don’t need new wars you know” (AK, personal communication, May 7, 2020). Educators must teach students that peace and life are more important than violence and death. As AK struggled to elaborate on this point, dangerous memories of his violent past crept into his narrative:

Even if you have to go to the war, go without harm, try to be nice. Because for many people the war is not their business; they don’t need the war. All the wars, now and before, too many peoples be killed, they don’t need the war. Try to be

safe because when the bullets come, or when the military comes, you don't know if they are good. There are hundreds of people sitting right there and they just bomb them, or they shoot at them. That's not nice. You [the military] should go and see who is not a good person and take them to jail, you don't have to go and kill everyone. I think that is what happens everywhere. If you are in the military, you go and kill everyone, and you don't care. That is the thing that people should understand. . . . I think you could teach about peace and how to not just be about money or oil, or not for whatever, like I'm going to kill that guy because he is poor and not strong. Nobody understands that they will live forever. They will live for 60, 70, 80, 90 years and die old. So why people want war? It is crazy (AK, personal communication, May 7, 2020).

AK's expression of outrage about the indiscriminate killing he witnessed is a far more truthful and powerful description of modern war than anything contained in the curriculum. This is what "people should understand," AK proclaims. AK's frustration stems from the radical disconnect between war propaganda—the propaganda in the curriculum and the propaganda pervasive in our culture—and the reality of war that he knows firsthand. The former represents war as necessary, the military as heroic, and its killing as carefully targeted and entirely justified. But AK knows this is a lie, that no one "need[s] the war," and that militaries "go and kill everyone" and "don't care."

AK also knows something of the geopolitics behind the wars of the Middle East. He realizes that these wars are "about money or oil." This is a more sophisticated understanding of the causation of war than is conveyed by the curriculum. In Modern History 11, the wars of the twentieth century are ultimately presented in simplistic moral

terms: “we” (Canadian good guys) were forced to fight “them” (bad guys) to save freedom and democracy from totalitarianism. Whether or not my Syrian students accepted this facile explanation of the two World Wars and the Cold War, their view of more recent conflicts in the Middle East indicates that they are well aware of the complex, and often cynical and venal, motivations of war-makers. Here are AA’s comments about the 2003 US invasion of Iraq: “It has been almost fifteen years when the US went to Iraq and killed the president [Saddam Hussein] and stole all the oil and shoot so many people. This is the history they should know. People don’t know the truth about it. Saddam protected his people and was the only president who protected Palestine” (AA, personal communication, May 2, 2020). The participants in my study were unanimous in their call for high school history to focus on more recent and relevant conflicts. This may reflect their sense of the curriculum’s oversimplification of the wars it does attempt to explain. My refugee students are children of war, and give every sign of having been exposed to sophisticated arguments about the complex politics of the Syrian conflict and those in the region at large at an early age. The “history they should know,” as AA put it, would not be a self-serving winner’s history, but a history that critically considers multiple points of view.

Critical history, however, is only one part of challenging the ubiquitous militarism of our society and culture. IA expresses something of the scale of the task that faces those who seek to create a more peaceful world:

The TV shows and news, everything has to change for you to be able to know exactly what war is like because that people get the wrong ideas from the social media, the news, and like the TV shows and the movies. No one focuses on wars.

Even if you change, no one will know what war is. It's so many, so many things that need to change, cause it's not just History class that is abandoning us and not talking about us. It's everyone in the world. I definitely think that sharing stories is a good idea (IA, personal communication, April 28, 2020).

IA thinks “sharing stories is a good idea” because it is a way to be heard and affirmed in a world that has “abandoned” her and millions of other refugees. It is easy, now, to forget how lucky IA is, to forget about the countless civilians fleeing war zones in the Middle East and Africa—many of them children—drowned in their flight across the Mediterranean Sea, or of the countless civilians who were killed before having the opportunity to flee, or of the millions who continue to languish in refugee camps. IA believes that if people “know what war is,” then it will be harder to look away from, to not talk about, to abandon, its victims. I believe she is right about this, and she is also right that “everything has to change.” High school history class ought to contribute to, rather than inhibit, this possibility.

(4.) How might an approach to modern history grounded in the principles of decolonization and peace education better serve all of our students?

Femi Otitoju (2019) explains that “we are all the product of the society we live in and thus we all have unconscious biases that we need to be aware of and check against” (as cited in Charles, 2019, p. 4). Reflecting on “assumptions, histories, thoughts, beliefs and privileges is a way of becoming consciously aware of how Eurocentric frames have influenced us all as individuals and as a society” (Starr, 2014). Battiste (2013) holds that “this process of self-reflection is a way to contest the complacency and complicity that support the ongoing ignorance and racism of Eurocentrism” (Starr, 2014). This kind of

introspection is crucial, but as Battiste (2013) also argues, it is far from sufficient. We must also challenge the systems and discourses that continue to impose “Eurocentric frames.” “Designing meaningful education in Canada,” Battiste (2013) contends, “must begin with confronting the hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism in the modern curriculum” (p. 29). The New Brunswick Modern History 11 curriculum is part of the “modern curriculum” Battiste critiques. It is one component of a much larger ideological apparatus that reproduces and legitimizes the Eurocentrism and white supremacy, patriarchy, and militarism endemic in Canadian society and in the West more generally. Rejecting Modern History 11, and other such curricula, is thus one aspect of the critical project of dismantling the ideological apparatus of racism, colonialism, patriarchy, and militarism that perpetuate the material conditions of social injustice in Canada and beyond. (Ladson-Billings, 1998). I recommend two ways to implement this rejection. The first is to teach the curriculum so ‘crooked’ that its ideological function is exposed and subverted. The second is to discard the curriculum entirely, and create an altogether new course.

I have some experience with the first of these options. My teaching of Modern History 11 has been a little more ‘crooked’ every time I have offered the course. This critical teaching, however, has been more instinctive and haphazard than reasoned and systematic. Learning to recognize and unpack the ideological baggage of the public educational system I am a part of has been a gradual but steady process in the ten years I have been a teacher. It began with vague feelings of uneasiness and evolved into an organized program of critical research. I now fully understand what is meant by the statement that curricula provide “a way of identifying the knowledge we value [and]

structure the way in which we are taught to think about the world” (Charles, 2019, p.3). And I have concluded that the knowledge deemed valuable and the way of thinking about the world commended by the curriculum of Modern History 11 is pernicious. Teaching it ‘crooked,’ in the wake of this thesis, will entail a more comprehensive critical engagement with the course than I have attempted in the past. Decolonizing the curriculum, subverting its embedded patriarchy, and critically confronting its entrenched militarism will involve making the curriculum itself the focus of the class’s learning. The problematic topics and narratives advanced by the curriculum can, in this way, be decentered, and education made to revolve around the interrogation of how and why these topics and narratives were privileged, and what was erased in the process.

Battiste and colleagues describe “the task of decolonizing education [as] require[ing] multilateral processes of understanding and unpacking the central assumptions of domination, patriarchy, racism, and ethnocentrism” (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002, p. 84). The enterprise is considerably more involved than reciting a canned historical narrative in lectures and having students read about and remember it. A decolonizing pedagogy would push students toward a more sophisticated kind of learning. High school students, I am confident, would rise to this challenge. A central dimension of decolonizing education simply involves teaching about colonialism. There is nothing especially complex about this. In Modern History 11, the topic could be introduced alongside the French Revolution through a unit on the slave revolts in the colony of Saint Dominque that led to the founding of the independent Black republic of Haiti in 1804. The educational potential of teaching the curriculum ‘crooked,’ however, lies as much in critical engagement with the existing curriculum as it does in replacing its

problematic content with alternative historical facts, interpretations, and narratives. Of course, countering Eurocentrism and white supremacy, militarism, and patriarchy entails learning new histories. Placing European history within a global context that foregrounds colonialism and imperialism, considering the histories of the colonized and enslaved, attending to histories of war resistance, learning women's histories and histories of women's struggles, and examining the profuse history of dissent from the colonialist-capitalist status quo, all of these are crucial objectives in the critical pedagogy I envision. But what if learning new histories is made even more useful and powerful by learning them in a different way? Posing these histories in opposition to those of the official curriculum within a critical framework that interrogates what it emphasizes and what it marginalizes seems to me to be an especially promising way of teaching 'crooked.'

This approach is consistent with the critical pedagogical recommendations of a variety of researchers who have studied Eurocentrism and white supremacy, militarism, and patriarchy in the public schools. Marcelo Diversi and Claudio Moreira (2013) suggest challenging notions of "Us over Them, the invaded, the conquered, the perspective of the helped, the Other, and the role of the military in the world" (p. 471). Robert Parkes (2007) recommends examining curricula as postcolonial texts. "Redressing the neglect of historical representation," he argues, "opens new possibilities for History curricula as critical pedagogic practice" (p.384). Elie Podeh (2002) has developed an analytical framework that helps students explore how ideology shapes the courses they take. It considers such criteria as stereotypes, blame, and bias by omission, and is especially suited to considering questions "about the nature of war, the way it is presented in narratives, and the messages embedded in the curriculum" (Leahey, 2012, p.

144). Steinberg and Kincheloe (2001) suggest ways of destabilizing patriarchal ideology by shining a light on its pervasiveness in curricula. An examination of course content, they argue, will reveal how conventional gender norms and stereotypes are naturalized, thus obscuring gender's operation as a "structural system of power and domination, and masculine identity [as] a socially constructed agent of power" (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001, p. 24).

The most fruitful approach to 'crooked' teaching, these scholars suggest, is teaching *against* the curriculum. This form of oppositional pedagogy can educate students in the very skills of critical analysis that the Modern History 11 *Curriculum Guide* invokes, but that its content so abysmally fails to support. Rather than attempting to inculcate critical thinking by considering remote historical questions—such as why “mechanized/industrialized warfare led to an increased level of destruction” in the First World War (*Guide*, p. 38)—students will critically examine the curriculum itself. Why would it, for example, ask such an inane question when it could be asking students about opposition to the war, or the Russian Revolution, or what was happening in the colonies of the various belligerent powers, or about what the whole thing actually accomplished? Students will learn that every choice to include something in a curriculum is also a choice to exclude many other things. How are such choices made? What criteria needs to be met for inclusion? Who decides? Who produces the curriculum? To what purpose? What predispositions and biases are reflected in it? Who is the target audience? What determines how historical phenomena are interpreted? Is history about the past, or is it really about the present? Struggling with questions such as these—questions outside of and in tension with the curriculum—holds far more promise for building historical and

critical literacy than anything offered in the curriculum itself.

Dangerous memories may have an important role to play in this sort of critical pedagogy. They serve, as we have seen, as potentially powerful agents of destabilization. And while the critical force of these memories was not clearly understood by my refugee newcomer participants, my sense is that they would have been willing to share them more frequently, and more intentionally. More research is necessary here. I am keenly aware that the sharing of war stories by traumatized youth could awaken or intensify trauma, either in the sharer or the listener. But the testimony of all my participants suggests that this danger is outweighed by the potential benefits of healing and offering new horizons to the class in general.

Teaching ‘crooked,’ of course, may not produce the historical knowledges and sensibilities that the educator intends. Teaching against the curriculum, indeed, offers education in critical thinking that could, potentially, be turned against the agenda of the educator. Nothing would prevent students from deploying critical skills against the alternative histories offered as more salutary interpretations than those of the curriculum. For me, however, students deploying critical skills against alternative histories would also be a positive outcome. Properly understood, history is always uncertain, complex, and contested. The version of the past we favour is always shaped by our values and predispositions in the present. I can easily imagine students from military families vigorously opposing my own emphasis on peace education. The conversation that such dissent would spark, however, would provide a welcome learning opportunity. In the end, opinions about history are like opinions about current politics. They are open for debate. What is important is that debate be reasoned, and positions backed by solid evidence. By

the same token, it is crucial that all participants in debate be open to persuasion. On these grounds, I believe that sensible, progressive, even radical positions, will eventually prevail.

Finally, it is important to recognize that whether educators teach Modern History 11 ‘crooked,’ or replace its curriculum with an entirely different one, the effort must be a transparent and interactive one. We must recognize that possessive individualism, whatever its role in the dominant culture currently, has no place in educational practice. Teachers do not ‘own’ the courses they teach, nor is their approach to teaching them ‘private property.’ Teaching ‘crooked,’ then, should be discussed and debated within Social Studies departments. Critical analysis of curricula, and best practices for employing critical techniques in pedagogical practice, should be a permanent topic of conversation among educators. And critical initiatives—from rethinking a curriculum to inviting a controversial speaker to the classroom—should be supported by colleagues and administrators. Educators in the Social Sciences and Humanities need to learn, collectively, that critical engagement with every curriculum is a prerequisite for teaching it effectively. The notion that one’s job is merely to transmit prescribed information must be laid to rest once and for all.

The idea of decolonizing education has gained some significant traction within educational institutions of late, but actually implementing the changes that decolonization entails will require sustained cooperative effort that goes well beyond discourses and good intentions. Professional development must offer more than “quick fix training days” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 193). Educators working together in “critical knowing communities” have the potential to contribute to subversive education by “fuse[ing]

research, policy formulation, . . . professional learning, . . . and pedagogical innovation” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 90). Decolonization, then—like critical teaching more generally—can only proceed as a social process that includes students, administrators, community members and leaders, as well as educators. This enterprise has, and will continue, to provoke disagreement and controversy. Such is also the case for the other critical projects I recommend in this thesis: demilitarization, dismantling white supremacy, and teaching as feminist praxis. The discussions that these topics provoke are sure to be contentious. Some educators may respond to my recommendations defensively. Some may resist change. McNaughton’s (2005) vision of “critical knowing communities” is a promising approach to developing critical pedagogical practice among politically/ideologically diverse groups of educators (p. 188). Empathy and respect between students and educators, and also between educators, must be at the forefront not only of our pedagogy, but of our efforts to reshape it.

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APPENDIX A

Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews and Topics of Conversation

1. Tell me about where you were born. What about where you grew up? How was that?
What kinds of people lived there? What languages did people speak?
2. Tell me a story about your life in Syria that is meaningful to you.
3. Describe the schools you attended before you moved to Canada. What was education like and what did you learn? What was your favourite subject?
4. Did you live anywhere else after you left Syria and before you came to Canada?
5. When did you move to Canada? Who was with you when you moved here?
6. Are you happy living here? What do you miss about your home and community in Syria?
7. How long have you lived in Fredericton, New Brunswick?
8. What do you remember about your grade 11 History class? What are your personal feelings about learning about History in high school?
9. Do you think all students should have to take History?
10. Give me an example of something you learned in your grade 11 History class. 11. What do you remember learning about The French Revolution in History class? What was that like?
12. What do you remember learning about World War I in your History class? What was that like? How about World War II?
13. What are the topics that you think you should be learning about in a grade 11 History class?
14. What are the topics that should not be taught in a grade 11 History course?
15. What role or responsibility do you think educators should have when it comes to teaching History in high school?

16. With my research, I am working to gain insight into your personal experiences and perceptions about the History 11 course that you took. Is there anything else that you want to add that would provide me with further insight?

Curriculum Vitae

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