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Article

Ex-colonialism: Toward collaborative change in curriculum studies

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Abstract

This article seeks to bring Australian-settler scholar Simone Bignall's writing on ex-colonialism (exit-from-colonialism) into conversation with the field of curriculum studies. Specifically, ex-colonialism is discussed in relation to theories of social change in education and other frameworks for thinking about Indigenous and non-Indigenous curricular relations. Ex-colonialism posits a resolute exit from colonialism that doesn't seek the recognition of the state and demands a complete overhaul of settler-colonial social structures. Coming from an intercultural position that includes a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism and mirroring an Indigenous politics of refusal from a settler-theorized position, ex-colonialism offers settlers some agency in enacting radical anti-colonial change. Structurally, the paper unfolds as follows. First, I present ex-colonialism in brief as an intercultural framework for working toward collaborative, anti-colonial change. I then characterize four other, more popular terms in curriculum studies that can be considered representative of larger Indigenous projects of social change: reconciliation, decolonization, Indigenization, and resurgence. Next, I compare each term to the project of social change proposed through ex-colonialism. I then highlight the history of BIPOC replacement in curriculum studies and public education, linking it to the consumptive nature of neoliberal capitalism. In response, I draw on ex-colonialism's careful attention to the ethics of relation in order, ultimately, to suggest the micropolitical possibility of an otherwise to what has existed and what exists now in public schooling and curriculum.

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Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Relations in Canadian Curriculum Studies

Growing out of the historical absence of Indigenous scholars in curriculum studies (Sabzalian, 2018; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013), over the past 25 years how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples relate, both physically in classrooms and communities and epistemically in formal curriculum, has become one of the defining concerns of the Canadian iteration of the field. A generation ago, Cynthia Chambers (1999) wrote about the need for a unique landscape of Canadian curriculum theorizing, turning to Indigenous authors to help ground her thinking. Dwayne Donald (2009) later wrote of the Canadian mythology of the fort and how it showcased the prolific separation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people from one

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another, ultimately calling for new ways of relating across those mythic barriers (see also Donald, 2016). Recently, there has been a proliferation of work thinking at this intersection. This includes folks writing about the pursuit of allyship (Koops, 2018), critiques of colonial historical narratives in curriculum (Miles, 2021), truth and reconciliation education broadly (Howell & Ng-A-Fook, 2023), and ways of integrating Indigenous knowledge into curriculum (Lunney Borden, 2016) to name but a few manifestations.

The current trend of considering Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Canadian curriculum studies is expansive, and there are also persistent tensions at work within it. These tensions manifest acutely in the classrooms in which I work—university classrooms in teacher training programs where teacher candidates are required to take an introductory course in Indigenous education. These tensions show up in students who are nervous about trespassing (Bascuñan et al., 2022) or making mistakes (Koops, 2018) in teaching Indigenous topics, students who are worried about not doing enough, as well as the ubiquitous students who resent having to take the course at all (Newhouse & Quantick, 2022). All these emotions can make for a rich, though difficult, pedagogical environment (Brant, 2022, 2023). From my vantage point as a scholar of curriculum studies who teaches Indigenous education courses, I see these tensions as not only present in Canadian curriculum studies but one of several topics that define the current moment in the history of the field. These are formative tensions in determining the future of Canadian education.

The tensions feel intense because the stakes of relation, both inside and outside the classroom, could not be higher. Anti-Indigenous racism is ubiquitous and systemic in Canadian society, as evidenced by several high-profile cases known by name: Colten Boushie, Tina Fontaine, Chantel Moore, and Joyce Echaquan to list only a fraction of those for whom justice remains elusive. In education, racism manifests in teacher bias, including lowered expectations and deficit thinking, as well as in Eurocentric curricula (Adams, 2012). It also shows up in a normalized pattern of ignoring racialized name-calling (Varma-Joshi et al., 2004) and other persistent microaggressions (Wozolek, 2023). In the formal curriculum, the historic and continued erasure of Indigenous histories has resulted in generations of students who don't know about residential schools, let alone the myriad other genocidal acts the British Crown and Canadian state have enacted against Indigenous peoples (Peters, 2016). This just scratches the surface of the many reasons why the modes of relation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people must be urgently re-examined in Canadian curriculum studies, and why broader social change is desperately needed as well.

In this paper, I would like to add to this current conversation in curriculum studies by forwarding ex-colonialism as a way of thinking and enacting anti-colonial refusal from an intercultural perspective. Ex-colonialism is a neologism brought forward by settler-Australian scholar Simon Bignall (2014, 2022a, 2022b, 2023) standing for "exit-from-colonialism", and it broadly depicts a notion of collaborative change I consider generative for curriculum theorizing and potentially helpful in thinking through Indigenous and non-Indigenous curricular relations. Because ex-colonialism is not a well-known framework in curriculum studies, a major portion of this paper is given to describing it and characterizing it relative to more common terminology. The ultimate aim of the paper, however, is toward suggesting an alternative curricular future—one of ethical relationality (Donald, 2016) informed by micropolitical modes of relation and a shared desire to find exits from colonialism.

The ethics of relationality are vital to this work, and many Indigenous scholars note the

importance of knowing and articulating who one is and how one comes to this work (Styres & Kempf, 2022b). As such, I identify myself here as a white, CIS gendered, nondisabled male with Ancestors on both sides of the Indigenous-settler divide. Specifically, my maternal family are all members of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation (QMFN), as was I between 2012 and 2018. In 2018, my immediate family were removed from the membership of QMFN because of a political process beyond the scope of this paper to describe.[2] On my paternal side, my Ancestors are Irish and English settlers, who settled on the West Coast of Newfoundland in unceded Mi'kmaw territory. Making sense of my positionality relative to my work in Indigenous education has been a lifelong project, one that has driven my interest in ex-colonialism as an intercultural framework for anti-colonial refusal. Today, I see my own work in Indigenous education as working toward ex-colonialism; it is aimed at a curricular future separate from colonialism.

In this paper, which I methodologically consider an act of curriculum theorizing, I seek to make an initial effort at bringing Bignall's thinking about ex-colonialism into conversation with the field of curriculum studies—primarily within Canada, but with implications beyond as well. Here, I focus on the goals of ex-colonialism, describing both the method of change it envisions and the emergent change itself. I begin in the next section by giving a brief description of ex-colonialism through Bignall's writing on the topic. To further explicate ex-colonialism and its relevance to education, I characterize four Indigenous projects of social change currently circulating in education—reconciliation, decolonization, Indigenization, and resurgence. I then compare each of these projects to my interpretation of ex-colonialism in a subsequent section. Drawing on these four projects as well as ex-colonialism, in the penultimate section of the paper, I discuss the consumptive quality of capitalism, academia, and the school system, and how ex-colonialism might enable a different mode of relation. Finally, I conclude the paper by highlighting ex-colonialism as a manifestation of ethical relation, pointing once again to the collaborative future it enables.

Ex-colonialism in Brief

Ex-colonialism is fundamentally a framework for thinking through relational exits from colonialism. Bignall (2022a) uses the prefix "ex-" the same way one might use it to speak of a former partner.[3] In so doing, it names colonialism as something "that remains an inescapable part of my personal history and which has shaped me as the character I am today, but from which I have now qualitatively distanced myself and from which I have resolutely turned away" (p. 173). Thus, for Bignall, this exit, resolute as it may be, is an ongoing process. To further elaborate this process, I describe Bignall's work on ex-colonialism following a roughly chronological trajectory.

In her first article on ex-colonialism, Bignall (2014) highlighted that both critical and normative forms of western thought view conflict as the essential grounds upon which social change takes place (e.g., the liberal legal tradition, Foucault's notion of politics as war by other means, and/or Marxist dialectical materialism). For Bignall, one of the problems with conflict-driven theories of change, however, is that they are essentially identarian—the conflict sets one group

[2] See Brake's (2021) work for more detail.

[3] To emphasize this, I hyphenate "ex-colonialism" throughout this paper (see Bignall, 2023), though Bignall also sometimes uses the conjoined version "excolonialism" (see Bignall, 2014, 2022a, 2022b).

against another, and the main method of crossing the borders between groups is through sympathetic identification with the other. According to this view, an "ally" is someone who can sympathize with a group to which they do not belong and acts according to that group's interests (or, more accurately, what they understand those interests to be). As discussed later, the limitation here is clear, as social change becomes dependent on the sympathy of those in positions of power (see also Nxumalo & Tuck, 2023).

Informed by the Deleuzoguattarian description of "individual entities as 'infinite multiplicities' interlacing in selective and partial relations that are at once constitutive and transforming" (Bignall, 2014, p. 350; i.e., nomadic subjectivity, see Braidotti, 2011), Bignall views collaboration across colonial relations as producing intense affects (see also Deleuze, 1990), and she encourages a close attention to those affects. For Bignall (2014), the project of such attention would be to "isolate those elements of the relation that are beneficial and might be selectively reinforced; and those elements of the relation that are detrimental to one or both parties, and would best be avoided, reconstructed or redirected" (p. 351). Where the common notion of "allyship" can sometimes be taken up as an identity one claims without deep understanding or lasting commitment (Jardine & Lyle, 2022) or as a position at which one *arrives* (Dei, 2022), collaboration in Bignall's framing demands an ongoing, collective leaning-in to the relationships implicit between entities and a rigorous accounting, rather than casual reduction, of their differences. Differences are "sites of critical contestation, which provide elements that question and unsettle the order of each individual" (Bignall, 2014, p. 351), and a close attention to them informed by a "sensitive and ethical politics" (p. 351) can facilitate the "coexistence of their distinct and contradictory interests, *without subordinating one set of interests to the other* [emphasis added]" (p. 351).[4] This characterization from Bignall, then, paints a picture of collaboration as a process of deepening relations between entities—a sentiment shared, albeit in different language, by many Indigenous scholars (e.g., Donald, 2009; Ermine, 2007).

Bignall's (2022b, 2023) more recent offerings on ex-colonialism have applied her thinking about settler-Indigenous relations to emerging works in critical posthumanism (Braidotti, 2019). Bignall aligns ex-colonialism with critical posthumanism through a shared critique of European humanism and anthropocentrism, but she holds posthumanism to account for its tendency to ignore the prevalence of ideas that underpin it (i.e., the agency of non-humans) in Indigenous worldviews (see also Todd, 2016). Bignall (2022b) states, "continental posthumanism will exist *in its best form* when it aligns itself with relevant aspects in the knowledge traditions of non-European cultures, but does not seek to subsume them" (p. 16). As described in more detail below, I think the same may be said of curriculum theorizing.

Informed by both Indigenous and posthumanist sources, then, Bignall (2022b, 2023) suggests that the movements away from social ontologies of conflict, anthropocentrism, and European humanism enable a collaborative, collective exit from colonialism. Such an exit rejects settler-state initiated projects of recognition (Coulthard, 2014) and reconciliation (Styres & Kempf, 2022a), which invite relationality *while tacitly upholding* dominant settler social structures. Rather, ex-colonialism runs parallel to an Indigenous politics of refusal (A. Simpson, 2007)—albeit from an intercultural position—toward a total break with those structures. For Bignall, "through cooperative and collaborative pathways, we may yet transform the posthuman

[4] This is similar to the acceptance of multiple co-existing truths in some Indigenous knowledges and anticolonialisms (see Newhouse & Quantick, 2022).

condition by orchestrating allied actions of exit from colonial humanism, and so express a new performance of the present" (Bignall, 2022b, p. 18). I will elaborate the overlaps and divergences between ex-colonialism and other Indigenous projects of social change more extensively in a subsequent section.

In summary, Bignall's ex-colonialism posits a shift toward a collaborative rather than conflictual model of social change, where competing interests need not lead to subordination. Ultimately, for Bignall, that change is a definitive and collective break with colonialism in all its forms, and it must be a collaborative effort across difference navigated with an ethical and relational politics. In my view, working toward a collaborative and ethical exit from colonialism constitutes an anti-colonial future that is actionable by settler educators. For example, in my experience teaching Indigenous education courses, settler students often become immobilized by uncertainty after reading critical Indigenous scholarship (i.e., they ask "what do *I* do?"), and ex-colonialism gives them an avenue to work relationally toward anti-colonial goals without co-opting or subordinating Indigenous causes. Ex-colonialism offers a framework for settler agency within an anti-colonial project, but it is, crucially, an agency that does not subsume the project for the agent themselves. To take up such a project within curriculum studies would mark a new trajectory in Indigenous and non-Indigenous curricular relations—it would form a curricular future well worth pursuing.

Indigenous Projects of Social Change

Having thus offered a brief overview of ex-colonialism through a discussion of Bignall's (2014, 2022a, 2022b, 2023) writing on the topic, I now proceed to further explicate ex-colonialism in relation to what I identify as four Indigenous projects of social change currently circulating in education: Reconciliation, decolonization, Indigenization, and resurgence. To do this, I must first characterize each of these terms.

Delineating these four projects is something I have found useful in my teaching insofar as it allows students to see that there are interconnected and overlapping, yet still distinct, projects at work in the broad category of Indigenous education. Indeed, following Hanson (2020), Indigenous education itself can be said to have several meanings ranging from "teaching *to* Indigenous students" (p. 10) and "teaching *about* Indigenous content" (p. 10) to "preparing society *for* social change" (p. 10) and "transforming education systems *through* decolonization" (p. 10). Some of these meanings permeate curriculum studies as well. In such expansive fields as Indigenous education and curriculum studies, then, characterizing these four terms and what is aimed at through them allows for a rough comparison among different theories and practices of social change. It also allows for a discussion of which projects might be appropriate for the school system and in which projects settler teachers might ethically be able to participate.

With that said, most often these projects work together, and my intent in sharing this characterization—which ought to be taken as an illustrative gesture rather than a comprehensive literature review—is not to suggest strict boundaries between them. Each of these projects might be deemed part of a larger project of social justice, yet each also carries a unique vision for the future and a distinct way to get there. My intent here, then, is to characterize these terms so as eventually to suggest how ex-colonialism may overlap with and differ from the projects of social change they represent. In the following section, I describe each

Indigenous project of social change, highlighting its similarities and differences with other projects. In a subsequent section, I compare ex-colonialism to each of these projects.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is perhaps the best known and most pervasive project of Indigenous social change in Canadian education. In settler society, the term became popular in association with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which was established as part of the Settlement Agreement between the Government of Canada and the survivors of Indian residential schools (TRC, 2015). In that way, reconciliation began as an accounting for the atrocities committed through residential schools, which included physical and sexual abuse as well as the genocidal act of removing children from their families and cultures and forbidding them from speaking their languages. Reconciliation is, thus, a project of redress (Miles, 2021), seeking to heal past wounds and right the wrongs committed historically and carrying through to today.

In recent years, reconciliation has become about more than just residential schools. It has become a movement of public education that spreads to every corner of society (Kempf et al., 2022). Indeed, reconciliation can be defined "as the movement of improving relationships between Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples while maintaining an understanding of how past events have adversely affected these relationships" (Deer, 2022, p. 4). The TRC released 94 calls to action, all of which were aimed at governments to make specific changes to redress the harms of residential schools and their intergenerational effects (TRC, 2015). Where there has been substantial change resulting from reconciliation, it has been in the presence of Indigenous peoples and cultures (i.e., inclusion). Airports, universities, and sports stadiums have all started using land acknowledgements to recognize their place in relation to Indigenous nations. There are more Indigenous reporters, Indigenous directors, and Indigenous authors telling stories that matter to Indigenous people; there are also a stream of new university positions related to Indigenous knowledges and cultures (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kempf et al., 2022). All of this can be viewed as progress toward a vision of social change, and all of it was possible at least in part because of the public weight put behind the reconciliation movement.

With these successes accounted for, there are still major critiques of reconciliation in both practice and theory. At the level of practice, the most substantive critiques are that not enough has been done to actualize the goals established by the TRC, and that government inactivity has resulted in substantial delays in some specific demands. Perhaps the best evidence in support of this critique is that only 13 of the calls to action can be classified as complete (Orangepath.ca).[5] Certainly, reconciliatory action is often left wanting. A second major critique of reconciliation at the level of practice is that it is often taken up as more of a performance than as action (Dei, 2022; George, 2022; Pidgeon, 2022; Zinga, 2022). This is especially the case in post-secondary institutions, where despite the number of new positions created, those in the highest levels of university administration only want reconciliation that doesn't come with substantial costs or existential discomfort (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Zinga, 2022).

Theoretically there are also substantive critiques of reconciliation (e.g., Styres & Kempf, 2022a). For example, reconciliation is a state-initiated project, and as such it tacitly leaves the settler

[5] Additionally, of the more than 200 recommendations of the now 5-year-old Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) inquiry, only two can be said to be fully implemented (Stefanovich, 2024).

state unchallenged (Coulthard, 2014). Nothing within the range of changes possible under reconciliation directly challenges the legitimacy of the settler state—nothing can because the very existence of the project of reconciliation legitimates the Canadian nation-state. In this way, reconciliation becomes similar to inclusion as a project of social change (George, 2022)—and indeed, as above, many of the changes that have occurred as a result of the reconciliation movement might be seen as forms of inclusion (i.e., inclusion in the university, inclusion in curriculum, inclusion in news media; see Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Inclusion, of course, always begs the question of what one is being included in. If the answer to that question is an inherently unjust system, or a nation-state whose very existence sits atop your own like a suffocatingly heavy weight, many would rather not be included at all (George, 2022). There is no level of inclusion, and thus no level of reconciliation, that will ever fundamentally undo the structure into which one is included or with which one seeks to reconcile. Of course, a more practical problem leaves the above a hypothetical only: Canada holds all the cards in reconciliation. Just as "inclusion is [often] on the terms of the settler" (Bascuñan et al., 2022, p. 189), Canada decides what version of reconciliation moves forward. The calls to action were aimed at the government, and the government ultimately decides to which calls it will respond. As such, reconciliation is truncated by its form as a state project.

In summary, as a project of social change reconciliation has produced significant, though too often inclusionary, changes across Canada. It has, however, also further legitimated the Canadian nation-state, strengthening its power to recognize Indigenous peoples (Coulthard, 2014). The remaining Indigenous projects of social change in some ways address that problem.

Decolonization

Decolonization is a term populated with many meanings, but in essence it refers to the removal of colonization in its numerous manifestations. Indeed, even the word itself isn't universally agreed on, with many preferring the gerund form "decolonizing" to reflect the ongoing nature of the process (e.g., Haig-Brown & Green, 2022). Yet commonalities do exist.

Stemming from the work of foundational decolonial theorists like Fanon and Césaire, decolonization can be thought of as a return, or retaking, of land to, or by, Indigenous peoples (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The term is frequently extended beyond this literal interpretation through metaphor (Aguirre, 2024). In the context of education, for example, decolonization is often used to denote the removal of Eurocentric thinking in one's own mind (Battiste, 2013). Some authors argue that these metaphorical manifestations of decolonization ought to use a different term so as to maintain the possibility of articulating a material return of land in settler colonial contexts (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Indeed, for many today, because "colonialism takes land… decolonialism must principally be about returning the land" (Grafton & Melançon, 2020, p. 138). The "land back" movement in Canada, which favors the return of Crown land to the control of Indigenous nations, is one vision for how this material decolonization could unfold (Palmater, 2021). It is also worth noting, however, that some Indigenous scholars critique the literalism of only using decolonization to denote a return of land as being restrictive (Aguirre, 2024).

At an institutional level, decolonization can take on the metaphorical connotation of removing or deconstructing Eurocentric, colonial power structures (Grafton & Melançon, 2020) and, at an individual level, changing one's mind to reflect less colonial thinking (Battiste, 2013; Poitras

Pratt & Bodnaresko, 2023). Eurocentrism and cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2013) pervade western education and society more broadly; to decolonize one's thinking and action requires a profound shift. At an institutional level, such shifts include dismantling Eurocentric curricula, meeting structures, pedagogies, evaluations, and procedures (Pidgeon, 2022). At an individual level, decolonization is about learning to think and feel differently, including deconstructing stereotypes, unlearning colonial biases and assumptions, and in some cases changing one's actions to reflect Indigenous knowledges, including thinking across the barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples/knowledges (i.e., transsystemic thought; Battiste, 2013).

While decolonization as a concept is rarely critiqued in the literature, different connotations of decolonization are sometimes pointed out as performative, ineffective, lacking the potential for true decolonial praxis, or simply being something other than decolonization (e.g., Tuck & Yang, 2012). Decolonization also often overlaps with Indigenization and resurgence, which can be confusing for students. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018), however, are clear on the distinction between decolonization and resurgence: "Where decolonization looks to transform existing institutions, to remake colonial structures in a new image, resurgence is a parallel movement… focused on rebuilding and strengthening Indigenous culture, knowledge, and political orders" (p. 224), and below I address the distinction between decolonization and Indigenization.

Indigenization

As a project of social change, Indigenization refers to the alteration of colonial systems to reflect Indigenous knowledges, though it can also extend to centring "Indigenous ways of knowing and being within the relationship of lands and waters, the animate and the inanimate" (Pidgeon, 2022, p. 17). Indeed, Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) identify a spectrum of Indigenization in academia ranging from simple inclusion of Indigenous peoples to substantive decolonial change in patterns of relation between universities and Indigenous nations. Weenie (2024), speaking in the context of curriculum, gives an example of how Indigenization can be both superficial and meaningful depending on the specific manifestation:

> Indigenization can be understood as the infusion of Indigenous knowledge into curricula. For the most part, this is often surface knowledge without the inclusion of language. The worldview of Indigenous people is profound and must be delt with in a more pronounced way. Efforts to Indigenize are commendable; however, we must be able to experience Indigenous knowledge in a deeper sense to speak to it and to teach it. (p. 11)

Indigenization, in its most substantive forms, does overlap with some connotations of decolonization. That said, they can be understood as "separate movements with the potential for mutual reinforcement in the liberation of Indigenous peoples from settler colonial oppression and the transformation of colonial structures" (Grafton & Melançon, 2020, p. 135). Semantically, decolonization refers to the removal of Eurocentric processes, while Indigenization refers to the replacement of those processes with others informed by Indigenous ways of knowing and being. However, some articulate Indigenization as resurgent politics, where "it is not a response to colonialism, but a movement despite colonialism" (Grafton & Melançon, 2020, p. 135).

The more practical difference between Indigenization and decolonization might be who creates the change. As above, decolonization as institutional and individual change is a project

in which everyone can and should participate (Battiste, 2013; see also Donald, 2009). Indigenization, however, is often articulated as something that only Indigenous people can do (see also Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018): "Euro-Canadians can decolonize settler colonial structure but cannot Indigenize them without Indigenous collectivity" (Grafton & Melançon, 2020, p. 144). The idea here is that anyone can work to make thinking and institutional practice less colonial, provided they think carefully and critically. Indigenization, on the other hand, requires what Coulthard (2014) calls "grounded normativity". Grounded normativity refers to "the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our [Indigenous] ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13). In my reading, it is a rootedness in Indigenous cultures, knowledges, and languages. To change thinking and process to reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and being requires some knowledge of, and grounding in, those ways of knowing and being. Only those who have lived experience of these things can lead the changes envisioned by Indigenization. Non-Indigenous folks might support this work and learn from it, but ultimately it must be undertaken by Indigenous peoples, particularly those from firmly grounded positionalities.

Following Weenie (2024) above, Indigenization is often critiqued as being representative of a superficial change to Eurocentric structures in much the same way as reconciliation (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Its more performative forms can also be seen as forms of inclusion (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; George, 2022) or limited to superficial changes in curricular content without substantive pedagogical changes (Rollo, 2022). These critiques are, however, less common with iterations of Indigenization that favor an Indigenous-centered change informed by grounded normativity. Indeed, Indigenization seems the most widely accepted by Indigenous scholars when it is guided by a resurgent ethic (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Resurgence

Resurgence refers to the rebirth of traditional Indigenous governance and cultural practices (L. Simpson, 2011). As Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson explains, "building diverse, nation-culture-based resurgences means significantly re-investing in our [Indigenous] ways of being: regenerating our political and intellectual traditions; articulating and living our legal systems; language learning; ceremonial and spiritual pursuits; creating and using our artistic and performance-based traditions" (L. Simpson, 2011, pp. 17-18). Thus, as a project of social change, resurgence is primarily concerned with Indigenous communities themselves. Broader social change happens because of the assertion of Indigenous sovereignty; it is not subject to a politics of recognition by the settler state, nor is it interested in the change of settler institutions, except those that are enforced on Indigenous nations, such as the Indian Act and elements of the free market (L. Simpson, 2017). In this way, resurgence is a different social project than the others discussed here, though as above it can overlap in some ways with more critical manifestations of Indigenization that are Indigenous led and work toward Indigenous flourishing.

While some may see two sorts of resurgence, cultural and political, these two facets of resurgence work together (L. Simpson, 2011). Cultural resurgence is political, and political resurgence comes through grounded normativity in specific Indigenous cultures. More political manifestations of resurgence include the assertion of sovereign Indigenous

governance structures, such as hereditary chiefs and grassroots Indigenous organizations. These actions are resurgent in that they refuse the governance structure forced on Indigenous communities through the Indian Act (i.e., Indian Act chiefs) in favor of the community's traditional governance structure (i.e., hereditary chiefs), breathing new life into the cultural traditions that have always been a vital part of the community's identity. The more cultural forms of resurgence can be seen most readily in the arts. Jeremy Dutcher serves as an example in the way his 2018 album *Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa* drew together traditional Wolastoqiyik songs with contemporary musical styles—again breathing new life into traditional practices. Cultural manifestations of resurgence, such as Dutcher's music, also have a politics about them—one that refuses the parameters of settler colonial expression and reasserts Indigenous cultural expressions in their place.

Resurgence can, thus, be seen as a politics of refusal (A. Simpson, 2007). Its defining markers as a project of social change are the refusal of colonial structures through the assertation of sovereign Indigenous alternatives. This is, in many ways, the starting point for ex-colonialism as well, and as discussed below, the two share much, albeit from different positions. Having thus characterized these four[6] Indigenous projects of social change that circulate within Indigenous education and curriculum studies, I now move on to discuss the convergences and divergences of each with ex-colonialism.

Ex-colonialism as a Project of Social Change

In my interpretation, ex-colonialism shares some ground with each of the Indigenous projects of social change characterized above, but it also differs from each. Like reconciliation, ex-colonialism works from an intercultural perspective that is aimed toward building and maintaining better relations. Whereas reconciliation is a national project, however, ex-colonialism works only at the local level—it is a project of social change emergent from the particularities of specific relationships between humans from different groups and non-humans as well (Bignall, 2022b). Additionally, ex-colonialism is not a project initiated by, nor necessarily maintaining, the existing settler state or its structures and processes, such as the school system. Indeed, I think ex-colonialism can be read as a "micropolitics" in the Deleuzoguattarian sense of the word (i.e., Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).[7] In this sense, micropolitics does not refer to a "smaller" level of political analysis, but rather one where entities such as the state are not taken as a given (May, 2006). A micropolitical analysis enables a view of seemingly permanent structures, such as those dictated by the settler state, as but one actualization of the virtual—only one of many possibilities (May, 2006). Other possibilities exist in every subsequent moment. Drawing on micropolitics, ex-colonialism takes the view that other ways of organizing education and relations between people are both possible and necessary (Bignall, 2014). In that way, ex-colonialism is significantly different from reconciliation.

Like decolonization, ex-colonialism seeks a deconstruction of the existing colonial structures

[6] There are other projects worth discussing such as anti-racist education and critical manifestations of inclusion. Here, however, I limit the discussion to these four for their specificity to Indigenous education—other projects often include but also extend beyond an Indigenous focus.

[7] Bignall (2022a) evokes Foucault's use of the term "micropolitics" rather than Deleuze and Guattari's, which is my preference. The difference is, I think, *mostly* one of emphasis.

both within the subject (i.e., cognitive imperialism) and within society. The deconstruction favored by ex-colonialism is a complete and total exit—a break with colonialism in all its forms. Whereas decolonization can be thought of as an undoing of the colonization process, ex-colonialism is a break with the colonization process. The differences, then, are somewhat evident semantically. Decolonization implies a return of stolen Indigenous land to Indigenous people (Tuck & Yang, 2012); ex-colonialism seeks an exit from the ongoing process of colonization in ways that are accountable to the primacy of relationships within a community, assemblage, and place (Bignall, 2022b). In other words, it seeks *something else*—an otherwise—without necessarily subsuming one set of interests into another through conflictual relations (Bignall, 2014). An exit from colonialism might indeed entail the return of stolen Indigenous land to Indigenous people, and it will certainly attend carefully to treaty rights and responsibilities, but it might also call into question the concept of ownership, creating a new concept that better fits the needs of local communities regarding who cares for the land—perhaps something akin to an Indigenous notion of ownership. To summarize, then, ex-colonialism shares an emphasis on deconstructing, or breaking with, colonial power structures, but it puts more emphasis on a new, emergent response.

At a structural level, ex-colonialism and Indigenization share the least. Indigenization, in its most superficial manifestations, takes as a given the settler state structures (i.e., curricula) with which ex-colonialism seeks to break. In that way, the two are somewhat incommensurable. There is, however, a common "seeking otherwise" between the two within the parameters of a given institution. That is to say, if ex-colonialism is mobilized only within a given institution, it can resemble Indigenization. Instead of blindly following institutional rules, Indigenization—especially its most critical forms (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018)—often necessitates a rethinking of those rules and procedures from an Indigenous perspective. An example from my own experience is the rethinking of fire safety protocols to allow for smudging. The officials in charge of fire safety had to experience a smudge and understand its importance before they could comprehend that this was not a risk to fire prevention; the rules needed to be rethought and restructured to maintain the relationships of the individuals involved within the social assemblage of the institution. In that way, ex-colonialism and Indigenization could share some overlap. That said, as a micropolitics, ex-colonialism does not limit itself to envisioning otherwises to existing structures *within* an institution, but rather calls into question and seeks a definitive break with colonialism in all its forms, including large social systems that are often taken as a given. To quote Bignall (2022a), "excolonialism… relies upon a collaborative effort to practice the 'non-fascist life' at every level and in every structure of existence" (p. 160). In this way, ex-colonialism aligns most closely with resurgence of the four Indigenous projects of social change named above.

Ex-colonialism works in parallel to resurgence, specifically the Indigenous politics of refusal that underpin resurgent action (A. Simpson, 2007; see also Bignall, 2022b, 2023). As noted above, resurgence refuses the settler state's projects of recognition (Coulthard, 2014), instead seeking to reassert Indigenous sovereignty through the revitalization of traditional Indigenous governance structure and cultural practices (L. Simpson, 2011). Ex-colonialism, as an intercultural framework, cannot directly contribute to resurgence in the ways that only Indigenous people can. It can, however, refuse the settler state in the same way that resurgence does. By this, I mean that ex-colonialism enacts a refusal to accept the parameters of life as defined by existing colonial social structures; in Deleuzoguattarian fashion, it refuses to accept

the stability of macropolitical structure like the state and the education system (May, 2006). Where Indigenous refusal eschews the question of participation in colonial society, so too does ex-colonialism. Indeed, both Indigenous resurgence and ex-colonialism seek an otherwise to what currently exists, and they refuse to accept that *this* is all there is. In this way, ex-colonialism functions as an intercultural framework for refusal that is allied and aligned with an Indigenous politics of refusal and resurgence (Bignall, 2022b).

The refusal in ex-colonialism is done in favor of something other than what exists, but ex-colonialism does not define what that otherwise is. Rather, what is yet to come takes shape through the specificity of relationships and assemblages in localities. Humans and non-human kin come together in new formations, connect with one another, and listen to concerns with openness. They stay with the difficult feelings of disagreement in the interest of maintaining relationship and find solutions that do not require one truth to take precedence over another. In this way, ex-colonialism doesn't directly contribute to the project of resurgence—though it is informed, I think, by Indigenous concepts of governance, which generally favor consent-based decision making (L. Simpson, 2014) and expand kinship networks beyond the human (Donald, 2016). Rather, it helps redefine the social in such a way that resurgence might be possible—it allows for everyone to breathe a breath untainted by colonialism and see what might be possible after it.

Consumption, Change, and Curriculum

Having discussed ex-colonialism relative to four Indigenous projects of social change, I now offer thoughts about the relevance of ex-colonialism in curriculum theorizing. The particular thread of curriculum theorizing I would like to pick up on is how social change is enacted in and through education—the thread in which much of the work considering relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks in Canadian curriculum studies implicitly finds its base. Since the 1970s, one of the core foci of curriculum studies has been enacting social change. It might be named the critical paradigm of curriculum studies (Schubert, 1986), a manifestation of critical curricular awareness (Kumar, 2013), or an understanding of curriculum as political, gendered, and racialized (Pinar et al., 1995). Regardless of the name, Paulo Freire's (1996) legacy is writ large in this thread of curriculum theorizing. That legacy includes notions like pedagogy as a site of liberatory praxis through conscientization, or consciousness raising, and teaching in ways that honor the humanity and previous experience of students (i.e., avoiding the banking model).

Tuck and Yang (2012), however, famously highlighted how Freire's (1996) work can be taken up in ways that limit the pursuit of change to only conscientization without substantive material action in the world: in other words, if one's mind changes, action does not *necessarily* follow (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 19). Elsewhere, Tuck (in Nxumalo & Tuck, 2023) has said that such theories of change rely on the empathy of people in power to make change happen, thus making them ineffective. Others note the need to move from passive empathy to activism in education for similar reasons (Brant, 2022). Additionally, 50 years of pushing for change through consciousness raising in education has resulted in little more than superficial inclusionary changes to the school system. Schools today look and feel much like they did 50 years ago, and neoliberalism, colonialism, and ideology continue to be the most prominent forces in shaping curriculum worldwide (Kumar, 2019). Rollo (2022) points out that this bias toward consciousness raising in educational thinking truncates efforts at reconciliation, Indigenization, and decolonization by limiting changes to the formal curriculum rather than

pedagogy or the enacted curriculum. All of this points toward a desperate need to rethink the modalities through which change is pursued.

In my view, all the educational work done in the name of social change is valuable—though perhaps not evenly so. Yet, I do not think all the Indigenous projects of social change named above are necessarily things that can or should be taken up by educational institutions, nor necessarily is ex-colonialism. More accurately, not every project of social change is aimed at the sorts of incremental changes to the school or university that educators and administrators are accustomed to making. Indeed, I would argue that in their most critical forms, none of the projects of social change described above aim toward incremental change. They all in some way seek a complete overhaul of the education system, but the system is resilient and has a consumptive quality (Donald, 2016; see also Wynter, 2006), bringing ideas into its folds that once sought to subvert it.

Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) show this consumptive quality with clarity in the context of curriculum theorizing when they discuss the ways that multiculturalism, critical race theory, and browning all originated as subversive, anti-hegemonic positions for thinking curriculum only to be brought into the fold of curriculum studies' main/whitestream (they were consumed). White scholars began to occupy those critical discursive and physical spaces intended to speak back to their dominating presence. In so doing, these ideas were brought into education, and, crucially, the version of them that existed in the main/whitestream were their least threatening iterations (they were digested; see also Donald, 2016). This consumption and digestion are precisely manifest in the school system as well. Because public schooling is public, it caters to a huge diversity of people, and in so doing, anything taught therewithin must be presented in its most accessible and acceptable format (easily digestible). Thus, originally subversive ideas like multiculturalism are expressed in banal, celebratory ways, such as the numerous f's (fashion, food, famous people, etc.).

This leaves a significant problem regarding the projects of social change described above. Not every project of social change is compatible with the project of public education in the way that it manifests today. Indeed, in their most critical descriptions, both decolonization and resurgence seek to disrupt, dismantle, or disengage with the school as it currently exists, as it is viewed as inherently Eurocentric. A true decolonization of the school system would require that it be rebuilt from the ground up, throwing off the remnants of the industrial model upon which it was founded. Likewise, a resurgent politics articulates a land-based pedagogy distinct from the school system (L. Simpson, 2014; see also Ahenakew, 2017). Indigenous cultural education cannot be taught in the absence of a direct relationship with the land, and thus, the modern school system doesn't play a role in a resurgent education.

Reconciliation and Indigenization are more often taken up as projects of incremental change within existing institutions. Reconciliation, as a state project, is perhaps the most commensurable with the modern school system, with some articulating reconciliation as something that can and should happen *through* education (Poitras Pratt & Bodnaresko, 2023). Indigenization, for its part, can be framed as curricular change (Weenie, 2024) seeking to build a stronger Indigenous presence in institutions: more Indigenous teachers and faculty members, more Indigenous language, more opportunities for Indigenous students, among other examples (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Though some interpretations of Indigenization are akin to or are inspired by a politics of resurgence—and thus seek a more radical

transformation, or even rejection, of the educational project of modern schooling—the versions that are taken up widely are those perceived as least threatening to the status quo (i.e., inclusion; see Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Once more, all these projects are valuable, but I actively worry that they also run the risk of being consumed by the educational machine should they be taken up broadly within public school systems. They may become too watered down—too easily digested (Donald, 2016)—to enact any meaningful change.[8] I am not alone in this worry (Ahenakew, 2017; L. Simpson, 2014). Moreover, the idea that the system can be changed from within is a limited truth insofar as the changes available are those allowed by the system (see the critiques of reconciliation discussed above). Even changes from the outside, forced as they are through conflict, inevitably fall back into the same patterns of relating deemed normative within settler institutions (Bignall, 2014). This is why a clear break is necessary; this is why I have turned to ex-colonialism.

Ex-colonialism offers a conceptual outside to the dominant expressions of schooling and education by rejecting the certainty of their existence in favor of more immanent material manifestations of (educational) relations—an otherwise yet to be determined. The school system has been inexplicably resistant to change in no small part because of the persistence of its physical and social infrastructure. Yet, alternative arrangements are possible—for example, free schools and home schooling. Ex-colonialism, seen here as a micropolitical way of relating, eschews the school as it exists and asks the question "how *might* an education be?", keeping alive the myriad possibilities of educational being or becoming precluded by a pre-existing school system. Ex-colonialism enables a critical rejection of the fixity of Eurocentric schooling from an intercultural standpoint that includes a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism (Bignall, 2022b; see also Braidotti, 2011). Here, I quote Bignall (2022a) at length to highlight the care that must be taken to avoid consumptive colonial tendencies:

> Following colonialism, it is deeply problematic for settlers to 'borrow' ideas from Indigenous philosophies and appropriate them. In my view, the only way to proceed ethically in the aftermath of empire is to situate oneself in one's own cultural and philosophical traditions and then to engage outwards to find points of sympathy and alliance with others, as respective bearers of alternative worldviews that differ in many ways but also share points of resonance, contact and overlap…My hope is that this endeavour may advance the potential for intercultural mutuality in responsibly shared processes of social and political reconstruction following colonial devastation. (p. 169)

In other words, Bignall's project is one of seeking allied theories from within Eurocentricity, specifically continental philosophy. In articulating a conceptual point from within Eurocentricity that not only criticizes Eurocentricity but also rejects it out right in favor of an otherwise, ex-colonialism avoids the tendency of the school system and education broadly to consume and digest subversive ideas (Donald, 2016). Rather than claiming the break with colonialism as something in service of Indigenous peoples, ex-colonialism names it a priority for all people to tackle from their own positions in collaboration with others who share the goal. It is a framework for parallel work toward anti-colonial ends.

Fundamentally, I see ex-colonialism as seeking new ways of relating to people and non-human

[8] While a positive step toward change in educational research and scholarship, the rapid flourishing of truth and (then) reconciliation education (Howell & Ng-A-Fook, 2023) as an emerging field of study shows just how easily digested reconciliation has been by the educational mainstream.

beings outside the constraints of what currently exists. Rather than taking as a given that children need to go to school five days a week, being taught by a single teacher in classrooms with 30 other students from the hours of nine and five, as a micropolitics, ex-colonialism says to education "what else is possible?". Ex-colonialism asks similar questions of colonialism as well—"how else might we relate to each other, outside the constraining ontologies of separation (Donald, 2009) in specific communities" or simply "what might be possible in collaboration?". Perhaps most importantly of all, these questions are not posed from an Indigenous perspective alone; rather, they are asked by settlers and Indigenous folks alike, together. The askers do not ask because they want quick answers to make minor adjustments to course syllabi that have been taught hundreds of times; they ask out of genuine concern for the material conditions of their relationships with and responsibilities to each other. In this way, Indigenous critique can inform the response and be taken up genuinely—not in the truncated forms left behind by neoliberal colonial consumption and not in ways that are claimed by settler scholars because such outcomes would degrade the quality of relationships, building them on false claims to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012) rather than on a recognition of culpability and relational accountability (Haig-Brown & Green, 2022).

Conclusion: Toward an Ex-colonial Ethic of Relationality

What I have attempted in this paper is twofold. First, I have brought forward ex-colonialism as a way of thinking and enacting anti-colonial refusal, and thereby systematic change, from an intercultural perspective. In order to facilitate that primary act, I have secondarily offered characterizations of four interconnected and overlapping, yet distinct, Indigenous projects of social change currently circulating in Indigenous education and curriculum studies, to which I then compared ex-colonialism. The broad question I have attempted to answer has been that of how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples might relate within the context of curriculum studies and, by extension, public education. In attempting to answer this question, the question has become the answer: we need to ask how we *might* relate rather than how we *should* relate (May, 2006). The former remains open to possibilities beyond those presented by the latter, and that openness is characteristic of the response required.

Styres and Kempf (2022b), in their chapter within an edited collection I've drawn on extensively throughout this paper entitled *Troubling Truth and Reconciliation in Canadian Education: Critical Perspectives*, note the necessity of moving from deconstructive frameworks toward those based in relationality:

> In any movement toward reconciliation, the conversations need to shift from colonial/anti-colonial or even decolonizing frameworks—those that remain fixed in colonial relationships of power and privilege and attempts to reinforce the mythology of settler claims and entitlement—to frameworks based on the ethics of relationality. (p. 151)

Explicating the reasons for this shift, they go on to name reconciliation and Indigenization both as impossibilities[9] given the project of the Canadian state: "Even at its most progressive, the Canadian state cannot walk in right relationship any more than a fish can breathe air" (p. 152).

By way of response, Styres and Kempf (2022b) rightfully point out that education is

[9] Though her reasoning is different, Bignall (2022a) also notes an impossibility to reconciliation.

fundamentally concerned with building toward the future and that education today still perpetuates a settler futurity, one that necessitates the erasure of Indigenous peoples (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). Styres and Kempf (2022b) suggest, then, that "perhaps we need to imagine and enact Indigenous futurity in schooling by engaging an ethics of relationality and a supplanting of settler-colonial logic, epistemology, and futurity" (p. 154), and they conclude by reminding that land is the context in which Indigenous futurity, knowledge, and culture is manifest. I agree on all these points, but I worry that too often this is seen as an Indigenous future in which non-Indigenous people have no role to play.

In part, this is because, as it stands, there are too few non-Indigenous frameworks for thinking an outside to colonialism—the default seems to be to incorporate (consume) rather than escape. Ex-colonialism enables such a thinking outside, both materially and epistemically, and it does so from an intercultural position. While ex-colonialism is potentially open to people of all backgrounds (Bignall, 2022b), here I think it is of most utility to non-Indigenous people in envisioning and enacting a curricular future outside the onto-epistemic constraints of consumptive colonial capitalism. Indigenous thought has no shortage of ways outside colonialism; indeed, it began in such a world. As such, some Indigenous thinkers may have no need for ex-colonialism, nor for non-Indigenous presence in anticolonial work at all (see Bignall, 2022a). For non-Indigenous people, however, being able to envision an otherwise to what currently exists, to take a breath in the absence of colonialism, might require a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentricity in addition to Indigenous critiques, lest the cycle of consumption continue unabated. Styres and Kempf (2022b) are right that what is needed is a shift to an ethics of relationality and, in my reading, that is what ex-colonialism enables—a modality of relation outside colonialism, an exit, full stop.

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