

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Migration/Immigration

by Susan Gushee O'Malley and Linda Dittmar



JACOB LAWRENCE, THE MIGRATION GAINED IN MOMENTUM IN THE MIGRATION SERIES, THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (1940–41)

Home

no one leaves home unless

home is the mouth of a shark

you only run for the border

when you see the whole city running as well

...

you have to understand,

that no one puts their children in a boat

unless the water is safer than the land

...

- Warsan Shire, British poet, born in Kenya to Somali parents

The Introduction to "Teaching and Immigration," issue #84 of *Radical Teacher* (2006), edited by James Davis, Joseph Entin, and Susan O'Malley, began with "This issue of *Radical Teacher* features work that conveys the urgency of teaching about immigration and offers educators ways of meeting that challenge." Since then, that urgency has grown to unprecedented proportions, both as a concern inside the United States and internationally. It has become, moreover, not only an issue of *immigration*, but one of *migration*, with the attendant traumas of wars, expulsions, climate change, economic crises, and globalized economies.

In 2006, hundreds of thousands of immigrants and their supporters marched in dozens of cities in the United States. In 2019, there were an estimated 272 million international migrants, an increase of 51 million since 2010. Yet even as we write, the numbers only grow. By 2020, the number of people leaving home or migrating globally has greatly increased to an estimated 281 million, an increase of 51 million. Migrants make up 3.5% of the global population, up from 2.8% in 2000, with 38 million (14%) under 20 years of age (Women's Human Rights Teaching, Learning and Advocacy Resource). People migrate because of war (by 2020, 6.6 million Syrians had sought refuge primarily in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey) (UNHCR, "Syria"); because of domestic and institutionalized violence and crime; because of natural disasters – devastating hurricanes, volcanoes, tsunamis, fires, earthquakes exacerbated by climate change; because their water has dried up or become polluted with toxic waste runoff from mining companies upstream from them; because they have been targeted as a hated minority group and deprived of citizenship (Rohingyas in Myanmar); because of food insecurity caused by NAFTA's (North American Free Trade Agreement) intervention in Mexico's corn crops, for example, or Monsanto's genetically modified seed promotion in Mali.

Of these, 4.2 million people are stateless today, many of them tenuously residing in 94 countries, with millions housed in refugee camps (UNHCR, "Refugee"). "Stateless" means that their birth was never registered or that they left

their country without birth or school certificates often fleeing because of conflict, violence, and flooding.) The largest refugee camp is Kutupalong in Bangladesh, housing more than 800,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar; Dadaab in Kenya is made up of 5 camps, housing more than 200,000 refugees (USA for UNHCR). Refugee camps are located primarily in the global south in undeveloped or least developed countries. While providing refuge, there can be food and water shortages and ethnic, religious, and gendered violence, including attacks on LGBTQ people. With COVID-19 spreading, countries have also shut their borders, citing the pandemic as their reason for not allowing refugees who have already been approved to immigrate even though they could test them for COVID.

The numbers are overwhelming, even if already out of date. According to the UN Department of Economic Affairs, 2019, the US has the largest number of international migrants at 51 million. Thirteen million migrants have sought refuge in Germany and Saudi Arabia, 12 million in the Russian Federation, 10 million in the United Kingdom, 9 million in the United Arab Emirates, 8 million in France, Canada, Australia, and 6 million in Italy (WHRTLAR). 21.8% of the population of Lebanon are refugees (UNHCR, "Lebanon").

Xenophobia, populist governments, criminalization of migrants, and COVID-19 have been used to deny all immigration, and the US is not an exception. Its policies and populist assault on immigrants--long-term citizens or newly arrived, documented or not--were particularly hate-filled under Trump, but in fact predated him and continue. Even as this issue of *Radical Teacher* was being copyedited, Vice-President Kamala Harris was in Guatemala, following up on Biden's preposterous idea that the US will fix the situation in Mexico/Latin America so people will not need to migrate. The import of her emphatic "do not come" message was not lost on a people who recently saw their families torn apart and children caged--sometimes irreparably lost to their parents--under ICE.

The facts underlying these policies and numbers are grim. We may glimpse them in Ai Wei Wei's documentary, *The Human Wave*, which gives a powerfully sweeping sense of the mass displacement and misery taking place across the globe or look to the US in Netflix's documentary *Immigrant Nation*, which follows ICE's devastation of individual and communal destinies. The situations presented are not parallel. *The Human Wave* is a counter-epic of migration, an endless sequence of displacement traumas, of one spoken language and another, one ravaged face and another, one story and another. *Immigrant Nation* is clinical and specific, following closely individuals and situations subject to meticulously legalized bureaucratic control. Neither has closure and, in a sense, both register one reality--that of displaced people denied a desperately needed shelter.

Still, while the word "displaced" speaks to the overarching need and pain experienced by so many people, not all displacements are alike and not all legal and extrajudicial claims to shelter are alike. According to the UN's International Organization for Migration,

- **Immigrant:** a person who moves into a country other than of his or her
- nationality or usual residence, seen from the perspective of the country of arrival.
- **Migrant:** an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.

Either of the above categories may include,

- **Refugee** (as defined by the UN): a person who qualifies for the protection of the UN as provided by the High Commissioner for Refugees. A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to avail himself of the protection of that country.
- **Asylum Seeker:** a person requesting admission as special protection from imminent danger or threat.
- **Exile:** a forced or self-imposed uprooting from one's home country, not necessarily violent.
- **Deportee:** a person forcibly removed from their country of residence.

Our title for the article cluster, "Migration/Immigration," points to all such displacement and suggests their interconnection. It concerns both the precarity of homelessness and the ongoing effects of immigration on those who attempt to find a new home in often unwelcoming lands.

Our "Call for Papers" for the present cluster was intentionally inclusive. When we, Linda and Susan, sent it out, we had no idea what kind of articles it would elicit. Our initial motives were different too. Susan was dismayed about feminists' ignorance regarding migration during her work preparing for the UN's Commission on the Status of Women's Beijing + 25 conference and, so, had agreed to chair the Social Protection Curriculum that included migration. She wanted a *Radical Teacher* issue that would provide teachers with syllabi on migration, such as the Sanctuary Curriculum, useful information that included a global human rights perspective on migration and refugee camps, not so US or Eurocentric. Linda, coming from a war-torn region (the Middle East) herself, wanted a clearer political analysis of the global aftershocks of colonialism, including the military and extractive-economic role of the US behind the refugee crisis, and including attention to historic displacements inside the US, notably Indigenous First People, enslaved Africans, and indentured Asian-Americans, as a history that anticipates the xenophobia, racism, and islamophobia rife today.

Of course, the articles we received had their own focus, and in one way they were unexpected. For many years

Radical Teacher tried unsuccessfully to solicit articles from teachers in schools, K-12. Our Immigration/Migration call elicited articles by three high school teachers: Alisha Mernick, an art teacher from California; Miguel Abrantes Antunes, an English Language (ELL) teacher from Pennsylvania; and Lynn Glixon Ditchfield, a Spanish teacher embedded in the Brazilian community on the island of Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts. Andy Beutel, a junior high school teacher in a suburban New Jersey town, whose students had never met an immigrant, discusses with his students the contradictions and difficulties of being an immigrant. Additionally, two grade school students, 6th grader Soraya Hajizadeh-Lieber and 5th grader Anna Sedlock-Reiner, asked to review their favorite books, Alan Gratz's *Refugee*, and Victoria Jamieson's graphic novel *When Stars are Scattered* about Omar and his brother Hassan who fled from Somalia to the Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya. Andy Beutel discusses teaching the chapter on Syria in *Refugee* that Soraya reviewed, while the Dadaab Refugee Camp is also discussed by Husseina Dinani (more below).

This concentration of high school and junior high teacher submissions is both welcome and suggestive. All four teachers are passionate about the well-being of their students and have developed innovative curricula and creative pedagogies that depart from the "banking model" common in higher education. All four demonstrate the power of personal engagement in learning that is not shackled by rigid syllabuses and testing. Younger students learn about immigration in collective settings of some duration, often "discovering" their families' immigration stories and working to challenge the reductive counter-narratives frequently used to describe immigrants. The power of empathy as a means to understanding is palpable in these articles, as is the awareness of the networks of relations that make or break the racism, xenophobia, and lack of privilege that constrain the immigrant experience. The empowering community-forming capability of this teaching emerges in this setting.

The three articles about college and university teaching reach outward, beyond our intra-national experience of immigration to the *global migration* crisis. Reading Ben Rawlence's *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp*, Husseina Dinani also focuses on Dadaab. About half of the families of her students at the University of Toronto (Scarborough) come from Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon. The account of displaced people in Dadaab by Rawlence challenges stereotypes of victimhood of the refugees in Dadaab by disrupting the victim-perpetrator binary in mainstream media with a counter-narrative of Africans as humans that have agency and dignity. For extra credit students turned out provocative artwork, one of which used UN Secretary General's statement, "Refugees are not terrorists. They are often the first victims of terrorism," written over a scene from that refugee camp.

Teaching at Ohio State and herself an immigrant, Amrita Dhar uses literature to reflect on global migration. Literature, she notes, lets her use the slow and reflective immersion it elicits to access "stories of those who have

been displaced, misplaced, replaced, and strangely placed.” Questions of race, class, and caste come up, as do climate, sexuality, and nationality--all intersecting within the US’s normative self-definition. Because the wingspan of this literature is wide, what emerges is a network of the empathic connections that can become movements for change. This empathy, moreover, is anchored in close reading. Using *TIDE* keywords as a central tool, Dhar has students analyze known and lesser known words (“denizen,” “foreigner,” “settler,” or “alien,” etc.) to contextualize and reflect on the historic and political ramifications of usage.

Combining history, politics, and culture to question Western colonization of the continent, including the genocide of Indigenous people, Angela Cecilia Espinosa’s article, entitled “Teaching Dreamers in the Time of COVID,” discusses her course on US-Mexican Relations in the Chicana Studies Department at San Jose State. At issue is not only decimation but also survival, including the power of indigenous, non-Western knowledges. That Covid-19 hit this course in mid-semester (as it hit Dhar, above, too), followed by California’s wildfires and a bruising election, made studying especially challenging in this Hispanic-serving institution, with many of its students Dreamers. Espinosa describes “battle fatigue” but also the empowering force of a teaching that does away with the US founding mythology.

Literally taking place in refugee camps, the article co-written by Hadas Yanay and Juan Battle concerns an unusual project: an on-line internship-based course on teaching quantitative and qualitative analysis to refugees at the MA-level to do important research on COVID-19 in their refugee camps. Taking place in five different countries--Malawi, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, and Lebanon--this online pilot course has the students working together learn a marketable research skill that may lead to employment and their leaving their refugee camps. The course, sponsored by the Graduate Center, City University of New York, and the University of Southern New Hampshire, will continue to be taught as part of the MA program. Unlike the other articles included here, this course is not *about* the conditions of being immigrants or refugees, where both outsiders and those impacted by it, teachers and students, articulate deeper understanding of the wounds of displacement. It is not *about* immigrants, colonized people, or refugees, meant for people who need to know and care more about their condition. Rather, it sketches a way to empower the people who are at the hub of refugee life--living in a refugee camp--giving them access to new competencies and possible employment.

We also include two syllabi: *The Sanctuary Syllabus*, written and taught by New York University (NYU) faculty and graduate students who had organized to protect DACA and Muslim students and who attempted unsuccessfully to make NYU a Sanctuary Campus. The Syllabus includes topics such as Militarism and Refugees, Migration and Ecological Crisis, and Dispossession and Indigeneity. Included each week are policies and tools for change and resistance. The second is a Migration Curriculum based on an understanding of human rights that includes The UN Global Compact on Refugees, 2018 (an update of 1951 and 1967) and The Global Compact on Migration, 2018, to promote safe, orderly, and regular migration.

As always, the perennial question raised by the rich collection of articles gathered here is, “What is to be done?” Options include acquainting our students and ourselves to progressive organizations such as “Make the Road” (NY, NJ, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Connecticut) that work with immigrants who are undocumented and for the pathway to citizenship for Dreamers (young people brought to the US by their parents many years ago and who are still undocumented although they are allowed to work temporarily). Other possible progressive organizations are the Sanctuary Movement and the NGO Committee on Migration.

What emerges most clearly from this cluster is the focus on the teaching of outsiders--of learners, their families, and their communities--to know and care about the suffering of dispossessed people. We, mostly American *Radical Teacher* readers, know it most directly through our own national racism, xenophobia, and hate-filled border “protection,” intensified under Trump’s presidency. But, in fact, the discussion begun in *Radical Teacher* #84 is still relevant. The same issues persist, rooted in a white, red, black, brown, and yellow history whose wounds are still open. The main difference is that as waves of migration crash against all available shores, the traumas of global displacement have become more visible.

For radicals, this situation opens new challenges. The now more-or-less established teaching of post-colonialism needs to be understood more directly in relation to the displacements and migrations taking place across continents. Climate and economies are all factors, on top of wars and civil wars driven by need and greed but currently occurring under the flags of religion, ethnicity, and nationality. Undergirding it all is anxiety about the communities of choice and the nation-states they came to form: the “rights” of Magyar people, for example, to a pure and purified Magyar nation, or a Jewish only Israel. The teaching discussed in our articles is deeply humane and caring. It can help us live better with one another and know and teach better about the humanitarian crisis at hand. But for radical educators this is something of new territory, going beyond “diversity,” “multiculturalism,” and “postcolonialism” to consider the globalized flows of money, weapons, labor, and despair as a major political and economic reconfiguration under way.

This history includes the forced relocation of this land’s indigenous people (notably the 1830s’ Federally enforced “Trail of Tears”), the massive transportation of shackled African people into this country, the indentured Chinese workers brought to build our railroads and more, and the “traditional” immigrants imagined by the Statue of Liberty: the mostly European, light-skinned “huddled masses,” but also the Vietnamese and Cambodians for whose fate the US bears special responsibility, and others whose skill and/or money we crave. Notable among the current recipients of our xenophobia are Latinx people blamed for the usual panoply of “crimes” and “job theft,” Muslims feared as “terrorists,” and Asians blamed for the “China virus” of Covid-19. In all these respects, this cluster of articles shows us not only what we as radical teachers do, but also what new directions still await us as we face local and global surges of human movement.

Works Cited

International Organization for Migration. "Key Migration Terms." *IOM: UN Migration*. <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

Shire, Warsan. "Home." *Facing History & Ourselves*. <https://www.facinghistory.org/standing-up-hatred-intolerance/warsan-shire-home>

UNHCR. "Lebanon." *Global Focus: UNHCR Operations Worldwide*. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/lebanon>

UNHCR. "Refugee Data Finder." *UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency*. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

UNHCR. "Syria Emergency." *UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency*. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/syria-emergency.html>

USA for UNHCR. "Inside the world's five largest refugee camps." *UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency*. 1 April 2021. <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/inside-the-world-s-five-largest-refugee-camps/>

Women's Human Rights Teaching, Learning and Advocacy Resource (WHRTLAR). *Poverty Eradication, Social Protection and Social Services (Poverty, Education, Economy, Human Rights and Health) Subtopic: Migration*. <https://whrtlar.files.wordpress.com/2021/02/3-social-protection-subtopic-1.pdf>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



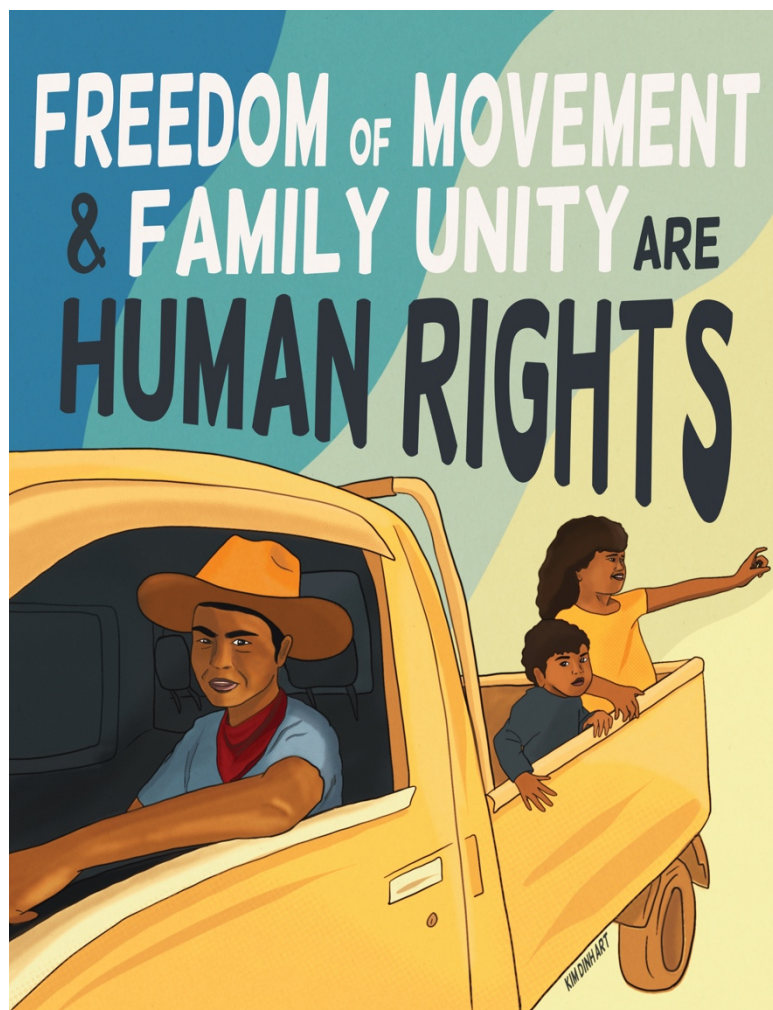
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the University of Pittsburgh as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.press.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching U.S.–Mexico Relations to Dreamers in the Time of COVID-19

by Angela Cecilia Espinosa



FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND FAMILY UNITY ARE HUMAN RIGHTS, KIM DINH (2020) VIA JUSTSEEDS

*Long live students! Gardens of our happiness!
They're birds who fear neither beast nor police,
neither bullets nor hounds could scare them!*

- Violeta Parra

On August 18, 2020, I received a call from the chair of Chicana Studies at San José State University (SJSU), asking me if I might step in to teach "U.S.–Mexico Relations," a required course in the curriculum. The class would start the next day. Six weeks earlier, I had relocated to the Bay Area with my partner, who had accepted an administrative position at SJSU. We had been told all summer there were no teaching opportunities for me at the moment, and I had resigned myself to teaching first-year Spanish online. "I know it's audacious of me to ask you this at the last minute," the chair told me, "but otherwise we'll have to cancel the class. With your background in the Mexican Revolution and *folklorico*, we think you'll be a good fit. And our students are wonderful." I was thrilled and panicked by the opportunity, but a few hours later, I accepted. The chair and I agreed that she would introduce me to the class the next day and explain the unprecedented circumstances (a sudden faculty retirement), and that I would present the beginnings of a syllabus the following Monday. What follows are my reflections on building and teaching "U.S.–Mexico Relations" from a Chicana Studies perspective amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the California wildfires, and the 2020 presidential election.

History of Cal State; California as a Borderland

After the Mexican–American War (1845–1848), Mexico lost over 50% of its territory and the United States acquired the Four Corners states, California, and access to the Pacific Ocean. The California Gold Rush of 1849 brought an influx of wealth to the region, and the precursor to San Jose State—Minn's Normal School—was founded in San Francisco in 1857. It is the oldest public university on the west coast and the first university in the Cal State system. During the 1960s and 1970s, it was the site of student activism. Most notably, San Jose State students John Carlos and Tommy Smith raised their fists in a Black Power salute to protest African Apartheid and anti-Black racism in the United States. They had just received medals at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. Today, a statue of the two track stars stands in the center of the SJSU campus. Not far away, César Chávez helped organize the Salinas Lettuce Strike of 1970–1971.

SJSU is a Hispanic-serving institution. Most of my students were Latinx, and all were either Chicana Studies majors or minors. Some were children of migrant farm workers or worked on the farms of the Central Valley themselves. One student referred to himself as an "anchor baby," apparently unaware of the term's racist connotations. Another was Vietnamese-American but identified with the Chicana community, having grown up in East LA. Some had been in California for generations. Others openly identified

as Dreamers; all of them at one time or another had been inspired by other Chicana faculty to continue learning about their culture and how it brushed up against the dominant Anglo-American culture. The only white student—a young woman from the Central Valley—found the alternative pedagogies of Chicana Studies so energizing that she wanted to learn more. I was excited to teach upper-division content to engaged students after so many years of teaching first-year Spanish to students who might not continue their language studies long-term.

Over the years, I've had to reckon with my own identity politics. My relationship to the "Chicana" tag is ambivalent. I grew up in Denver, Colorado, home of Rodolfo "Corky" González and site of key moments in the Chicana movement. My mother was second-generation German American, my father a Mexican national she'd met while abroad in Mexico City during the 1970s. My father sympathized with the Chicana movement but did not identify as Chicana himself until 2001. Both of my parents supported the student-led movements throughout Latin America, and the parents of my closest childhood friends actively resisted U.S. military action in Central America. My parents spoke Spanish to each other but English to me. (I was born a generation before public schools embraced bilingualism/dual immersion.) As a result, my Spanish is fluent but academic, lacking any of the spontaneity of "Chicano" Spanish/interlingualism. I worried that my new students might not view me as "authentically" Chicana (whatever that means). Nevertheless, having spent my summers in rural Veracruz, Mexico during the 1980s and 1990s, I could provide them with vivid accounts of recent history on both sides of the U.S.–Mexican border, as well as provide a context for the family histories of children of immigrants. By reading the history of U.S.–Mexico relations from the late twentieth century to the present, we could all understand more fully the political and economic factors that had brought us together in this class. Then I remembered Gloria Anzaldúa's description of *Nepantla*: "... that in-between state, that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity" (Anzaldúa 2009: 180). All of us inhabit multiple, hybrid identities and have negotiated our relationships to the dominant culture on both sides of the border.

"The Future is Today": A Humble Attempt at Rocking My Students' Worlds

The first day of class was the usual combination of icebreakers and protocols. I described my academic background and research. I completed my Ph.D. in Latin American literature at UC–Irvine. My research focuses on race, gender, and the historical avant-garde period, with a special emphasis on Mexico and Brazil. I've taught courses on Latin American civilization and culture, revolutionary poetry, and utopia and dystopia, and the cultural production of the Mexican Revolution. My background was in the humanities rather than in the social sciences (Chicana Studies at SJSU is housed in the College of Social Sciences), and so my approach to teaching U.S.–Mexico Relations

would be different than, say, a political science course. In addition to covering traditional texts on history and economics, we would look at how U.S.–Mexico dynamics played out in film, music, and literature. We would then relate that material to our own experiences negotiating hybrid identities in the borderland of California. That we were coming together under the umbrella of Chicana Studies afforded all of us an intercultural, hybrid vantage point from which to study our topic.

I ended our first class by screening the music video “Futuro” (2017) by the Mexican rock band Café Tacuba. The video depicts the four band members disguised as a skeleton, a priest, a rainbow-colored furry, and a grim reaper (or perhaps a saint) clad in garbage bags. The band hurtles through space on a galactic bus outfitted with airplane wings. Their passengers are a motley crew: female back-up dancers dressed as Zapatista rebels, a skeleton, a U.S.-born drug dealer, and Native Americans from both sides of the border. World political figures like Queen Elizabeth II and the Mexican President are impersonated by little people, while Donald Trump and Pope Francis appear from the waist up in their traditional garb but are feminized below the waist by tennis skirts. The lyrics evoke indigenous views of life, death, and the passage of time. The song’s refrain states, “El futuro es hoy” (“The future is today”).

I asked the students about their impressions of the video. Only one of them had heard of Café Tacuba. I asked them, if this video was the future, what did it look like to them? How were the figures of power represented? What was this video saying about U.S.–Mexico relations or Mexicans’ view of the United States? The students remarked that the future looked grim, especially as we were living through a pandemic. They were perplexed by the androgynous depictions of Trump and Pope Francis but ultimately found them appealing. I asked them to consider how these depictions might undermine patriarchal structures and to keep the video in mind as we progressed through the class. Later, we would read about the delicate line the founding fathers trod between efforts to create a Caucasian democracy through land grabs and mass murder of indigenous peoples, and their desire “to prove themselves good stewards of its [the United States’] land and its people” to Europe (Grandin 2019: 48). Andrew Jackson, however, was not concerned with international opinions, and he pursued a brutal campaign of genocide against Native Americans. “Jackson was the future,” Grandin writes. With Trump’s anti-immigrant policies such as family separations and caging small children, he was that future personified.

Laying Foundations/Foundation Myths

Chicana Studies had provided me with a syllabus, but it was centered around history and political science texts. I didn’t feel that I could provide meaningful insight into them. I did retain Shannon K. O’Neil’s *Two Nations Indivisible: Mexico, the United States, and the Road Ahead* (2013). Thanks to a colleague’s recommendation, I decided to use Greg Grandin’s Pulitzer prize-winning *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America*

(2019) to provide both a historical and theoretical framework for the class. But I needed to give students time to order the book online and meanwhile give them some background on the topics we would be discussing.

That second week of class, I gave a PowerPoint presentation on the introduction to Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983). I wanted to question the very idea of national identity because so much of the rhetoric of the past four years concerning *who* was “authentically” a resident of the United States had excluded most of my students. It was important to me to address the very notion of nationality as illusory and alternately idealistic and problematic. Drawing on the subtitle of Grandin’s book, I chose the idea of myth as a secondary theme throughout the semester. What myths dictate U.S. attitudes and policies toward undocumented Mexican and Central American immigrants? What myths about the United States do those same immigrants carry with them across the Rio Grande? What myths are children in the U.S. school system taught about the founding fathers, the Civil War, or social mobility? My students’ personal histories and previous coursework facilitated an understanding of Anderson’s concepts. Having grown up on the margins of mainstream US society, they knew national identity was not univocal.

I problematized the ideas of myth and “imagined communities” in the context of Chicana Studies and U.S.–Mexico relations by having students read “Conquerors and Victims: The Image of America Forms (1500–1800)” in Juan González’s *Harvest of Empire* (2011). The introductory chapter provides a brief history of the territories that would later become the United States. It discusses the indigenous peoples who first inhabited the continent, as well as the Spanish conquest and its aftermath. I asked students to describe and identify aspects of early U.S. history that were new or interesting to them as a result of reading the chapter. Many said they were familiar with a superficial version of this history but had not put much thought into its relevance today. One student was impressed to learn that English settlers had adopted aspects of the Iroquois constitution and that “Several of the Founding Fathers were influenced by the Iroquois system of checks and balances” (González 2011: 25).

Picking up on González’s account of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, I screened a climactic scene from the Mexican film *Cabeza de Vaca* (1992), in which the Spanish explorer—captured and enslaved by a Native American dwarf shaman—attempts unsuccessfully to escape. This scene provides a counter-narrative to the history of the conquest most of us learned in school, not to mention the melodramatic images we see in Hollywood films. The conquest successfully annihilated millions of indigenous people in the first hundred years of colonization, so the image of a European male being subjugated by an indigenous man with physical disabilities is powerful. It reflects the traditional indigenous belief that those born with disabilities are special in the eyes of the gods. Such people were highly revered in pre-Colombian societies. Second, it demonstrates the power of alternative (or subjugated) knowledge in a non-Western context. Third, it shows that

the conquest was not uniformly successful. Finally, it calls into question the Eurocentric dichotomy of “savage” vs. “civilized.”

Getting into the Nitty Gritty

After laying these foundations, we were able to delve into our main text, Grandin’s *The End of the Myth*. The author argues that the idea of the frontier was at the heart of independence from Great Britain. Constant westward expansion provided a safety valve to relieve mounting social, political, and economic tensions (Grandin 2019: 3). Donald Trump’s election in 2016 marked a turning point in the founding myth. The idea of the frontier gave way to that of the border. Grandin writes, “Trumpism is extremism turned inward, all-consuming and self-devouring” (9). Although the word “race” doesn’t figure into the title, it is central to Grandin’s argument. The history of the United States is the history of expansion for the sake of Anglo-Saxon Americans, which took a heavy toll on Native Americans, on enslaved Africans, and on Mexicans whose government ceded their territory in 1848. As such, it is also a history of white nationalism, with its most recent (and perhaps most dangerous) incarnation in Donald Trump.

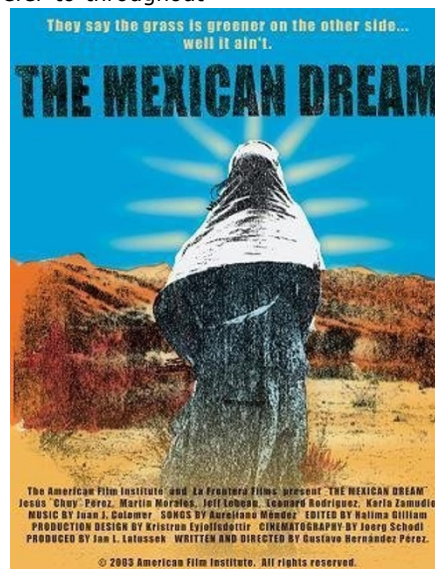
I scaffolded *The End of the Myth* by assigning an interview of Grandin on *Democracy Now!* via YouTube. As we read through the first few chapters, some of my students expressed difficulty reading Grandin’s language. Many of my students were heritage speakers of Spanish; and as much as I loved Grandin’s mesmerizing prose, he used words I was unfamiliar with, too. So I assigned students the task of looking up two to three unfamiliar words and posting their definitions on the weekly discussion board. Students thus had a working list of terms they could refer to throughout the semester, generated by their own inquiry rather than mine.

To lighten our first week with Grandin, I also assigned the short film *The Mexican Dream* (2003, dir. Gustavo Hernández Pérez). The film follows Ajileo, a would-be Hollywood actor, as he treks across the desert from Mexico into the United States in search of his dream. The film splits the screen to tell the story of Ajileo’s migration and subsequent life as an immigrant working menial jobs. As the students contributed observations on the main character’s tragicomic circumstances, I pointed out the multiple borders he continued to cross (in terms of language, social class, gender, etc.) once he had arrived in the United States. Picking up the myth theme, we discussed how the film parodied “The American Dream” and the idea that any immigrant to this country could achieve success through grit and hard work. I asked the students what they thought of the representation, knowing that many of their parents had

made the same trek as Ajileo. One student shared that the scenes of Ajileo with the border patrol triggered her, as her mother had experienced a similar encounter when she crossed into the United States. I thanked her for sharing and apologized for causing her distress. At the end of the class period, I acknowledged that several other students might have similar memories. I commended them for taking Chicanx Studies courses and for wanting to learn about their place in history. Nevertheless, many of them are experts in the immigrant experience and in some ways don’t need such classes the way that a mainstream white college student would, or any individual who supported the Trump platform. At the end of the day, I argued, the discipline of Ethnic Studies is really American Studies. They are not mutually exclusive. We could all benefit from acquiring a more complete picture of our shared history than the one we learned growing up. After laying these foundations, I assigned chapters of Grandin’s book alongside additional texts, websites, and videos about contemporary U.S.–Mexico relations with the intention of weaving the two threads of the class together into a cohesive whole by the end.

“Cruel Summer”: The COVID-19 Pandemic, the California Wildfires, and the 2020 Presidential Election

Students—especially Dreamers—experienced a myriad of issues during the fall semester of 2020. Each week of the semester brought a new onslaught of crises. My students and I suffered from battle fatigue caused by what I refer to as “Cruel Summer 2020”. The state of California, which had mostly been able to contain the COVID-19 pandemic when it erupted in the spring, found itself in the throes of a summer spike after July 4th festivities. As early as April, the California State University system had declared that most courses would be taught virtually in the fall; by mid-September, it had announced the entire academic year would be conducted online via Zoom. Given the population Cal State served, the administration made it clear that faculty should not require students to turn on their cameras during Zoom meetings. Because I had come so late to the scene, I received relatively little guidance in this regard. I felt the loneliness of being in a new city, and this feeling was compounded by the anonymity of mask mandates. Teaching virtually at a new institution fifty miles away was even more alienating when I logged into my class and saw nothing but a grid of Zoom tiles. Because teaching is inherently performative and interactive, the virtual setting made it difficult for me to “read the room” and know if students were engaged in the discussion or understanding the material.



THE MEXICAN DREAM (2003) DIRECTED BY GUSTAVO HERNÁNDEZ PÉREZ AND WRITTEN BY GUSTAVO HERNÁNDEZ PÉREZ

Once, I asked them all to turn on their cameras for five minutes, just so I could associate a face with a Zoom tile. After class, I administered a short survey on the Learning Management System to get an idea of their circumstances. One student was a single mother with a kindergartner. She was juggling working from home, her own coursework, and her son's online schooling. Several lived in loud, chaotic households with younger siblings whose schoolwork competed for the family's bandwidth. At the end of class one day, a student turned on her camera to show that her seven-year-old sister was sitting on her lap—something that absolutely delighted me. A few were transfer students from community colleges looking for the traditional residential college experience, so they were living in the SJSU dorms. The information from the survey helped me understand my students' circumstances better. Additionally, there was the usual handful of students who consistently used cameras and participated frequently. Several other students posted questions and comments in the Zoom chat, all of which quelled my performance anxiety and apprehension over their engagement.

Of course 2020 tied a record set in 2016 for the hottest year in the state. There were nearly 10,000 wildfires that consumed 4.1 million acres of land. The North Complex fire blazed through the mountains surrounding the Bay Area during our third week of classes. On September 2, 2020, San Francisco became engulfed in orange haze. Air quality levels registered extremely unhealthy. I had to turn on all the lights in my apartment for my 9 a.m. class due to the perpetual twilight. As I wrapped up our conversation about their first written assignment, I found myself telling my students, "See you Monday, and wear your masks."

"Professor," a student spoke up, "next Monday is a holiday."

"Oh, that's right," I replied, turning to look at the orange glow outside my apartment window. "See you next Wednesday." For instructors to forget a holiday weekend is common enough; but in that instance, my heart sank. The days were melting into each other like Dalí's clocks. Nothing felt normal. It was difficult to imagine celebrating labor on Labor Day when unemployment was so high and Californians were being told to stay inside to avoid COVID-19 *and* bad air. The fires continued through October; one of my students missed a week of class because the Silverado fire in Orange County had disrupted electrical service to parts of Los Angeles.

The 2020 presidential election and racial unrest following the police murder of George Floyd added to our collective unease. Teaching within the context of Chicana Studies afforded me the opportunity to talk about—rather than shy away from—race and politics. All of my students—but especially the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) ones—had been directly affected by Obama's DACA memorandum in 2012 and Trump's efforts to undermine it. Our first few weeks of classes coincided with the Republican and Democratic national conventions. One week we were reading about the idea of the frontier and how expansion, according to historian William Appleman Williams, was

"exhilarating in a psychological and philosophical sense" because it could be "projected to infinity" (quoted in Grandin 2019: 5). It was the same week that Eric Trump declared, "And soon under my father's leadership, it [the American spirit] will send Americans to Mars" (RNC speech Aug. 24, 2020, 6 p.m.). As the election drew closer, I assigned students to listen to two episodes of *The Daily* podcast from *The New York Times*. "The Field: A Divided Latino Vote in Arizona" (Oct. 19, 2020) profiled Latinx voters of all ages and political leanings to demonstrate how deeply divided the demographic was. In particular, the journalists interviewed a Mexican-American veteran in his forties who, after both witnessing and experiencing repeated acts of intimidation by law enforcement officials, became an active member of the Democratic Party and mobilized a voter registration effort in Naco, Arizona. On the other side of the spectrum was an older police officer who was voting for Trump. One of his daughters was gay, and his grandson was half black. The daughter refused to engage with him on the topic of politics because she loved him and didn't want to create bad blood between them.

I asked students if they identified with any of the interviewees, or if they had similar issues with family members. Some could relate to the discrimination one of the interviewees described; another shared that his family owned a small business and therefore sympathized with Trump's pro-business platform. We pondered how immigrant culture generally reveres its elders, and how young Latinx people might be less inclined to argue with their parents than mainstream white Americans. The second episode, "A Peculiar Way to Pick a President" (Oct. 22, 2020), provided an overview into the Electoral College. Students appreciated the review of US civics, and I emphasized these two points: 1) The Electoral College made it all the more incumbent upon us to vote in off-year elections. 2) It reflected another way in which racism (via the Three-fifths Compromise) was deeply entrenched in our democracy.

The week of the election, we were increasingly anxious. During the Monday morning check-in, one student mentioned she was worried about potential hate crimes around polling areas. Others wished for a quick and easy resolution to the election, even though the pandemic and resulting need for mail-in-voting would thwart that desire. It was November 2nd, Día de los Muertos, and the United States had reached 240,000 deaths from COVID-19.

Before jumping into our discussion of the day's readings, I opened up a Google Jamboard and created a virtual altar. I had asked students beforehand to bring pictures of friends, family members, or anyone else important to them who had passed on in 2020. Over the next ten minutes, photos of *abuelitos* (grandparents) appeared on the screen, as did some of flowers and hot chocolate (traditional altar items). I posted photos of John Lewis, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Oscar Chávez (an important Mexican protest singer), and Quino (a beloved Argentinian cartoonist). I invited students to share about their loved ones, but mostly we were silent as we contemplated the circle of life and death. A powerful sense of peacefulness and

healing overcame me. It was the closest I'd been to community since moving to San Francisco.

On election day, I was a nervous wreck. I couldn't focus on planning my class. The lesson was supposed to be Mexican Muralism, the influence of Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, and Mexico City as an international center for revolutionary art and thinking. As I watched the returns on the Internet, I decided to cancel class. Instead, I posted an assignment on our online discussion board. Students would watch one hour of election returns and then comment on their own levels of political engagement and their experiences with voting. The following is a lightly edited selection of my students' comments:

I was not politically active until Trump threatened to take way DACA. I started to do my own research about my rights and become informed. When I took your class, I realized how much power the United States actually holds, and how political decisions made in the United States affect everyone else...Throughout the election I have been super anxious. I work at Five Guys, and I have seen a couple people come into my store decked out in MAGA wear. I have been feeling even more nervous because of how they see me. I'm happy to see Biden turn three states blue that were red last election. It helps me be calm and remain hopeful. (Student A)

My main priorities for this election are making sure a transparent COVID relief plan is set for helping regular citizens who are struggling to make ends meet, as well as giving businesses the materials they need to ensure safe and secure reopening in regions with low infection rates. Also, I think it's important that whoever wins the election is determined to heal our divided country by supporting the many minority communities who have been hurting and are vocal in their fears. Lastly, I hope the new administration begins to redistribute the national budget so areas such as education, renewable energy, poverty/income security can be invested in more properly. (Student B)

I've been more politically active this past year and taking Chicano Studies classes has helped me be more aware of how history has led us to this particular moment. I started reading more about Che Guevara last August, and I really admire the way he helped the working class, debunking what I had initially learned about him in my US history classes in high school. The events that occurred this year (starting with police brutality) really opened my eyes to how BIPOC [black, indigenous, and people of color] are perceived. I can think for myself about where I stand in all of this, and how I can be more active within my own community as well as others. (Student C)

As a first-generation Latinx voter from parents that immigrated from Mexico, one of my main priorities is

having fair and reasonable immigration policies. This pandemic forced me to reflect on my own identity. I realized that the fear my undocumented parents instilled in me about deportation shouldn't have been a norm for me as a human. Thankfully, my military service and veteran status helped my mom get residency. My dad's case is up next, so we're hoping for the best. I know not everyone is fortunate enough to receive these documentation statuses, so I feel like it is my civic duty to have my vote represent my parents and others who can't vote. (Student E)

Other students described their anxiety as the election results streamed in. Cancelling class gave us breathing room to reflect on what Biden called "the most important election of our lifetime." This event provided me with valuable insight into my students' experiences as we walked the border between our class and the new post-election reality.

Student Assessment and Finding Closure

Given the extreme circumstances of the pandemic, wildfires, and the election, I endeavored to make student assessments accessible yet challenging. I used weekly discussion boards to boost student participation both synchronously and asynchronously. Taking guidance from John C. Bean's *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (2009), I assigned response papers that were argument-driven yet seemingly low-stakes. For example, their first written assignment was a letter to a friend or family member dispelling the myth that the American revolution was solely about taxation versus representation, and instead that the revolt was fomented by the white colonists' desire to expand unhindered into Native American territory. I asked students to write another paper defending or refuting President Trump's condemnation of "The 1619 Project" by *The New York Times* and his subsequent creation of "The 1776 Commission" (Whitehouse.gov 2021).

In their final project, which I called "Debunking Myths, Reclaiming History," students wrote a blog post they uploaded to the Learning Management System. Specifically, I wanted them to debunk one of the myths about U.S.-Mexico relations or immigration. I gave them the opportunity to expand or revise previous response papers in this essay/blog, with the requirement that they reference three main texts from our class plus two additional sources. I also required them to include relevant images and hyperlinks. Some of the blog titles included "Debunking the Myth of Job-Stealing Immigrants," "Debunking the Myth of Limited Resources," "Debunking the Myth of Freedom and Liberty for All," and so on. Students created fascinating posts that were imminently readable. During a non-election year, I would have placed more emphasis on Mexican history and culture to compensate for knowledge gaps.

I tried to end the course on as positive a note as possible. We read Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2015), about the author's

experience translating for immigrant children seeking asylum in the United States as she taught at an elite private Eastern college. We discussed how her students took the initiative to create a club dedicated to immigrant outreach. I encouraged them to volunteer in their own communities. I told them it was the best way to gain job experience in the current economy.

We watched the documentary *The Tinaja Trail and Transborder Migration Tool* (2012), which follows the collaboration of performance artist Ricardo Domínguez and a human rights organization as they provided water and poetry in locations across the desert to aid migrants in their journey across to the border. Finally, we watched the trailer to the documentary *Fandango at the Wall* (2019), in which Latin jazz artist Arturo O’Farrill participates in the annual celebration of *son jarocho* (an Afro-Mexican musical genre from the state of Veracruz) at the San Diego/Tijuana border. As painful as the events of 2020 and reading about our country’s racial past had been, I wanted students to see that “regular people”—not politicians—could create positive change for their communities.

Throughout the semester, students would occasionally linger after class to continue discussing one of the readings, or to get clarification about politics. One student told me the class was his therapy as he dealt with caring for an ailing mother and taking engineering classes. Another expressed her dismay over learning about Andrew Jackson’s Trail of Tears, but she thanked me for opening her eyes to the scope of racism in our shared history. Teaching this class allowed me to feel hopeful about the future.

What Did Students Learn?

Although many students were children of Mexican nationals, their understanding of Mexican history, much less U.S.–Mexico relations, was limited. This was not surprising, after all, given that they had grown up in the United States. Their parents, often having little more than an 8th grade education, either couldn’t or wouldn’t share with them the historical and social factors that prompted their departure from Mexico. Because of their undocumented status, many students had never been to Mexico or Central America. One student, for example, remarked on her surprise at how “modern” Mexico was upon visiting the city of Aguascalientes for the first time. This phenomenon reflects both the Chicana experience and what we’ve heard so many times about DACA students/Dreamers: The United States is the only country they’ve ever known, yet they are foreigners in it. They occupy Anzaldúa’s *Nepantla*.

Having grown up in the United States, it was sometimes difficult for students to conceive of different approaches to race, democracy, etc. They didn’t think that another country could be more liberal or progressive than the United States. For example, the post-revolutionary, single-party Cárdenas government expropriated foreign-owned oil companies, to the benefit of that industry’s workers, while Franklin Delano Roosevelt worked to convince workers to support corporatist policies that increased oil company profits at their expense

(Grandin 181). They learned U.S.–Mexico relations didn’t just begin with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, but rather in 1821 when Mexico gained its independence from Spain. They also came to realize that the racism they’ve witnessed and experienced did not simply date back to U.S. immigration policy from the 1990s to the present or even to the Mexican–American War, but is instead a foundational aspect of the United States.

Conclusion

In the days following the election, students observed former President Trump’s attempts to overturn the results in Wisconsin, Michigan, Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. They asked me if Trump could possibly stay in office by simply refusing to leave the White House. Based on my knowledge of Latin American history, I told them it could only happen with the support of the military, and this would constitute a coup. And then January 6th happened. Despite the chaos Trump created, he still found time to release the report of the 1776 Commission on Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a final snub to the Civil Rights movement. Biden promptly removed the report from the official White House website upon taking office. If the events of 2020 have shown us anything, revising history can only take us so far. It’s time for the White House to sponsor a Commission for Truth and Reconciliation. The work of debunking myths continues.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and Brooklyn: Verso, 1983.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. “Border Arte: *Nepantla*, el Lugar de la Frontera.” *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*. Ed. AnaLouise Keating. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2009.
- Barbaro, Michael (host). “A Peculiar Way to Pick a President.” *The Daily*. The New York Times podcast. October 22, 2020.
- Bar-Kar, Varda (director). *Fandango at the Wall* (2020).
- Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.
- Café Tacuba, “Futuro.” Music video accessed Jan. 18, 2021. <https://youtu.be/bRIJtAYMkv4>
- Echevarría, Nicolas (director). *Cabeza de Vaca* (1992).
- Electronic Disturbance Theater. *Transborder Migration Tool*. (2012).
- González, Juan. “Conquerors and Victims: The Image of America Forms (1500–1800).” *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. 2nd edition. New York: Penguin, 2011.

"Greg Grandin on *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America*." *Democracy Now!*, April 1, 2021. <https://youtu.be/L4IMUXimQ-g>

Grandin, Greg. *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America*. New York: Metropolitan, 2019.

Luiselli, Valeria. *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press, 2017.

Medina, Jennifer (host). "The Field: A Divided Latino Vote in Arizona." *The Daily*. The New York Times podcast. October 19, 2020.

Newell, Bryce (director). *The Tinaja Trail* (2014).

O'Neil, Shannon K. *Two Nations Indivisible: Mexico, the United States and the Road Ahead*. Oxford UP, 2013.

Parra, Angel (vocalist). "Me gustan los estudiantes," recorded November 1969, track 3 side B on *Los Parra de Chile*, América Hoy, vinyl LP.

Pérez, Gustavo Hernández (director). *The Mexican Dream* (2003).

Trump, Eric. Republican National Convention speech, Aug. 25, 2020, Andrew Mellon Auditorium, Washington, DC. MPEG-4, 8:55. <https://youtu.be/JFi8C06Nek4>

Whitehouse.gov. *The 1776 Report*. The President's 1776 Advisory Commission. Accessed Jan. 18, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Presidents-Advisory-1776-Commission-Final-Report.pdf>.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Popping the Bubble: Critically Analyzing the Refugee Crisis with Suburban Seventh Graders

by Andy Beutel



"SANCTUARY" BY CHRIS LEE (2017) VIA JUSTSEEDS

The town of Mountainview, New Jersey is an upper middle-class suburb located about 20 miles outside of New York City. The median household income and average price of a home in the town are both well above the state and national averages. It is a safe community and one where the children have many opportunities for success. It is the type of place that comes to mind when Coates (2015) describes “The Dream” as a way of characterizing the privileged life of some in contrast to those who are underserved in this country. Working in this type of community has very specific and important implications in the classroom.

I teach at Mountainview Middle School, part of the high-achieving Mountainview Public School District, which serves 675 students across grades 6-8. The demographic make-up of the school is 70% white, 13% Asian, 9% Hispanic, 4% two or more races, 3% Black, and 1% American Indian. The overwhelming majority of the students enjoy stable housing and consistent access to healthcare and food. They have had generally pleasant interactions with the police and don't have friends or family that have been incarcerated or subjected to an ICE raid. This privileged reality has functionally shielded the students from personally experiencing various forms of social injustice. Additionally, as 12 and 13-year-olds, they have not yet thoroughly explored such topics in school. The combination of their geography and age has left most unaware of how issues of injustice impact individuals and society at large.

In this setting and with this population, a critical approach to teaching and learning can create exposure to unfamiliar issues and enable students to analyze and understand these issues in the context of justice, equity, and power. Critical pedagogy has historically been an educational tool for empowering the marginalized and underserved (Freire, 1997). However, while different in its goals and application, this type of pedagogy is as necessary for students who are in a position of relative privilege. My overarching goal as a teacher is to help students develop a critical consciousness of the world to better understand the world and their role and position in it (Freire, 1997; hooks, 1994). This requires a rejection of neutrality in the classroom and instead an intentional approach to teaching for a more inclusive and equitable society (Apple, 1990; Zinn, 1994). I try to help students broaden and deepen their thinking about content by explicitly addressing social context, misconceptions, and injustices.

As part of this broader goal, I seek to help students recognize their relative privilege and develop empathy for those who are marginalized but in a way that avoids exoticizing or othering. It is worth noting that while the vast majority of my students are non-marginalized, that number is not 100%. There are some students who are members of racial, ethnic, and religious groups that are subjected to high levels of discrimination as well as those who are of a lower socioeconomic status than most of the population in town. It requires a careful balance to help students critically analyze examples of marginalization and injustice but not doing so at the expense of other students in the class or in a way that exacerbates existing societal divisions. Mirra (2018) describes a “critical civic empathy” that moves students beyond individual feelings of sympathy and

tolerance toward an empathy that recognizes social positioning and inequity of power combined with civic action for a more democratic and just society. An approach that combines justice and empathy has the potential to enable students to develop a critical understanding of the world while also building bonds with those of different backgrounds both inside the classroom and beyond it. Working toward this goal, I try to help students imagine and strive for a more equitable and inclusive community.

Complicating this work is, as Swalwell (2013) describes, the difficulty of finding the balance between engaging in critical pedagogy while avoiding the alienation of students and the accusations of indoctrination from administrators and parents. The latter point has become a more acute concern during remote instruction as the location of learning shifted from a physical classroom to the individual homes of students. (On most days, I had about a third of my students in person with the remainder joining through Zoom; however, the school shifted to a full remote schedule with all students on Zoom for half the time students were working on the project I will describe below.) The learning culture of the school is one where students are encouraged to think independently and creatively and engage in inquiry-based learning projects, reflective of what Anyon (1980) characterized as an “affluent professional school” in her work connecting school demographics with instructional philosophy. This environment creates space for in-depth student-centered exploration, but being situated in the broader community requires a careful navigation of politically charged topics, especially those that bring attention to the relative privilege of the student population. I mitigate the risks associated with this type of teaching by being mindful of how I frame information and strategically using texts and questions to drive instruction. Downey and Long (2016) detail an approach to teaching history that I have embraced in which student-centered inquiry is the instructional foundation for building conceptual knowledge and understanding.

The inquiry-based project I will describe below is an attempt to achieve these critical learning goals through the lens of the current refugee crisis. At its core, the refugee crisis is a collective failure to ensure basic human rights for all people; this is a key concept for young people to understand as they are beginning to learn about the world. There are nearly 80 million people, roughly 1% of the world's population, who are forcibly displaced (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, 2020). Included in those tens of millions of forcibly displaced people are refugees who are fleeing violence caused by authoritarian regimes, gangs, paramilitary organizations, and endless wars. These numbers have increased each of the last few years, creating the worst refugee crisis since World War II (Trilling, 2018). However, these numbers don't even tell the whole story as there are also people who have lost access to a reliable water source or fertile land due to climate change, and others with no prospect for economic survival unless they voluntarily migrate elsewhere. In response to this multilayered crisis, we have witnessed a president spend four years rhetorically demonizing refugees and migrants and their home countries, and use the power of the federal government to drastically reduce the number of refugees allowed into the

country while enacting cruel and inhumane practices such as family separation at the border (Packer, 2020). Despite its far-reaching implications, this is not an issue that personally or directly affects most of my students and, as a result, most have lived unaware of the current hardship of tens of millions of people. The modern refugee crisis incorporates the effects of war, the widespread restrictions on human movement, the ways in which discrimination is multifaceted, and the pervasive disregard of the most marginalized in our global community. As such, this topic is uniquely important for students to explore in order to critically understand the world today and begin to imagine a better one.

Learning Goals and Structure of the Inquiry Project

I aimed to create a series of learning activities that would enable students to understand the complexities of the refugee crisis on a macro and micro level; in other words, from the perspective of the single individual experiencing the myriad hardships of becoming and being a refugee, and by considering the role of countries in creating and exacerbating this problem. This project was guided by several specific learning goals:

- To help students understand the challenges faced by refugees, including the unique and intersectional forms of discrimination;
- To help students understand the causes of the refugee crisis and the connection between war and displacement;
- To help students move beyond feelings of individual sympathy for refugees toward an empathy rooted in justice and equity;
- To help students critically examine the actions of the US in the context of the refugee crisis;
- To help students generate solutions for this issue that would lead to a more peaceful and equitable world.

I structured the project as an inquiry into the topic guided by a combination of my questions and students' questions. This model served to focus students' learning while also increasing their ownership over the process. Students began their inquiry by sharing their own prior knowledge about refugees and the refugee crisis and then generating questions they had and would need to answer to thoroughly understand the topic. I then organized the project into three sequential components: 1) reading part of a fictional book about refugees, 2) conducting targeted research about the refugee crisis, and 3) engaging in a Socratic discussion focused on the students' own ideas and solutions for this issue. At the end of the project, students reflected on their own initial questions and what they had learned.

The book the students read is called *Refugee*, written by Alan Gratz in 2017. It is broken into three separate but related fictional stories about refugees in different times and

places. One follows a Jewish boy and his family in late 1930s Germany, another focuses on a Cuban girl and her family escaping their country in the early 1990s, and the other is about a Muslim boy and his family fleeing the war in Syria in 2015. Partially because I situated this project in a unit about the Middle East and partially because of time constraints, students only read the story about refugees from Syria. The book is written at a slightly lower reading level than the typical seventh grader, which makes it a very accessible text for the students. Because the story is fictionalized, students find it more interesting and enjoyable to read than a historical text or contemporary news articles. While students were reading, they annotated the text with their own reactions, questions, and ideas and answered guiding questions that I posed. This type of reflective notetaking is designed to help students engage with the text and make meaning of the content (Downey & Long, 2016).

The research part of this project was designed to help students deepen their understanding beyond what they learned from the book. I structured the research around guiding questions that were grouped into three categories: 1) overview of refugees and the refugee crisis, 2) causes of the refugee crisis, and 3) challenges and treatment of refugees. Within each part, I included specific questions based on the students' original questions as well as those reflective of my goals for the project. Students also had several choices about where they wanted to focus their research. I provided links to a range of different sources including videos, charts, and news articles, which students used to answer the guiding questions. As students were building their knowledge, we continuously circled back to the questions that would be the basis for our class discussion. The inquiry-based structure helped students as they conducted an "evidence-based investigation into what happened and why it's important to us" (Downey & Long, 2016, p. 29).

The culminating activity of this project was the Socratic discussion. This class discussion structure is almost entirely learner-centered with the students sharing their ideas, posing their own questions to others, and monitoring their contributions as well as those of others. In preparation for the discussion, students used their notes to consider the rights they believe refugees should have, the responsibilities countries should have, and their own ideas for solving this crisis. I set up the discussion into two, 10-minute segments. In the first block, half of the students participated in the discussion while the other half listened and took notes. In the second block, the groups of students switched. The smaller groups created more opportunity for each student to participate and therefore allowed all students to hear more perspectives on the topic. This type of discussion is an example of the "engaged pedagogy" described by hooks (1994, p. 20) where the voice and ideas of students become centered rather than just the teacher. Through the preparation for the discussion, the discussion itself, and the reflection that followed, students were able to sharpen their own thinking on the topic.

Inquiry Project in Action: Instructional Activities and Student Voices

Generating Questions

The students began by examining a collage of pictures illustrating different aspects of the refugee crisis. They wrote words that reflected what they saw. Some of the most common responses included: unwanted, war, prisoners, forced/pushed/kicked out, seeking help/shelter, crowds, homeless, scared, rebellion, immigrants, outcasts, struggle, pain, poverty, and sadness. The students hadn't learned about this topic before and very few had much prior knowledge, but most seemed to express that this was an undesirable situation for a person to be experiencing.

From there, I introduced the project and asked the students to shift from word associations to generating questions for our inquiry. I framed this topic through the problem-posing model described by Freire as the "posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world" (1997, p. 60). This approach invites students to view this topic as a problem that needs to be better understood and addressed and requires their active engagement in the process. I showed students an infographic from the United Nations Refugee Agency followed by a series of pictures depicting refugees through different stages of their struggle: leaving a place of conflict, traveling to a new place, and attempting resettlement. I carefully selected images that show the hardship faced by individual refugees (e.g., a parent holding a child escaping a dangerous situation) and the mistreatment of refugees at borders (e.g., police with batons treating refugees like they are criminals). For each part, students wrote questions they had about the pictures or questions they felt like they needed to answer to understand the topic.

Most of the students' questions fell into three distinct categories: causes of the refugee crisis, countries accepting or rejecting refugees, and the challenges of refugees. These questions included: Why is this happening? What do the countries that create refugees have in common? Why would people who are displaced go to countries that are struggling to provide care for their people? How do people treat refugees that come to their country? How are refugees going to know where it is safe? How would they recover? These categories of questions would shape the research part of this inquiry.

There were several other types of noteworthy questions generated by the students. Many were focused on the specific experience of refugee children (e.g., Is it safe for children to be refugees?), an encouraging sign of the students potentially relating to this topic. Some, however, shared questions that reflected xenophobic views of refugees (e.g., How many of these refugees will grow to become terrorist groups?). Others raised questions about the unique forms of discrimination and hardship faced by refugees (e.g., Why are people treated differently cuz their (sic) from different countries? How can they start a new life with no money and a new language as well?) This last thread of questions is particularly useful in a critical analysis of the

refugee crisis. The concept of intersectionality was first developed by Crenshaw (1989) to explain the unique and overlapping forms of discrimination faced by Black women. Effectively understanding the plight of refugees requires a similar intersectional lens. It is not just poverty, or national status, or country of origin, or language barriers that lead to mistreatment of refugees but the combination of all these factors that create greater challenges for refugees.

Making Connections through Reading Fiction

The next day students began reading *Refugee*. I have used this book for the past few years but structured the reading differently this year due to the pandemic. Instead of students reading hardcopies of the book in class and writing their reflections by hand, students read a PDF of the book and digitally annotated the text and responded to guiding questions posted within the writable PDF. The questions were designed to help students put themselves in the situation that the characters were experiencing but also consider the wider implications of the refugee crisis. Barksdale (2013) described a practice undertaken by readers and historians seeking evidence that he called "zooming in and zooming out to make meaning" (p. 233). I wanted to create the opportunity for students to engage in this practice throughout their reading by continuously zooming in on the experience of the individual refugee and then zooming out to the broader refugee crisis.

Throughout the book, I asked students to describe how they imagine they would have felt if they were experiencing what Mahmoud, the fictional main character, and his family were experiencing. Kristen wrote: "It would be horrible to be in the same position as Mahmoud and his family are in. I would be scared to death if that happened to me." Mahmoud's character is the same age as the students, and I think that helps the students better relate to the challenges he faces and connect on a personal level. Mark commented: "I think going through what he has gone through would be traumatizing for life. I think this because he has lost almost everything." Mark touched on two important ideas here--trauma and loss. Both are key in understanding the refugee experience on a human level.

Other students, however, like Kiara and Carson, distanced themselves from the issue in their annotations. Kiara claimed: "I can't imagine something like what happened in the story happening in Mountainview." And Carson wrote: "I cannot believe this is what people had to go through." Both comments reflect a degree of sympathy and sadness for refugees, but both also make clear that this is not an issue that directly affects them. For Kiara, this is a geographically distant issue, and not something that could possibly happen where she lives. And for Carson, this is something that happened in the past but is no longer of concern. Both comments illustrate the difficulty of helping students develop a critical understanding of an issue that does not personally and directly affect them.

To help students understand the broader refugee crisis, I focused their attention on the reactions to and treatment of refugees in different countries. When Mahmoud and his family are put in an immigration detention facility, I asked

students to consider what this says about how refugees are treated in some places. Joseph wrote:

This shows that refugees are viewed almost as bad people. If they weren't viewed that way, why wouldn't they be allowed in the country? But in the end, refugees are just like us, except they were just unfortunate to have there (sic) hometown become unsafe. They're not terrorists, bombers, or anything bad like that. But the countries view them as just bad people.

Joseph makes an astute observation here by recognizing the connection between how refugees are viewed as a threat, despite all evidence to the contrary, and their mistreatment in certain countries. Annie made a similar observation but went further in condemning those who mistreat refugees:

It's crazy the way that they all think refugees are the monsters when it's really them. They may treat the refugees horribly but what they probably won't know is that somewhere down their family tree their family was a refugee. All the refugees just want to live a new life, start off fresh, and it bugs me how people don't let them be, their (sic) doing no harm.

Both Joseph and Annie noted the unfair and inaccurate perceptions of refugees in some countries as part of the larger problem and, equally significant, viewed refugees as fellow people who deserve basic rights and dignity.

As the students finished the book, I asked them to share what they learned overall about the life and challenges of refugees. The students' responses reflected a much more positive view of refugees than where they started. For instance, Georgia, concluded that "People who have to go through this have to be the strongest people ever." Others went further by connecting their understanding of refugees with their own privileged social positioning but only insofar as being appreciative of that privilege. For example, Sam realized that "people all around the world are like this so you just have to be grateful that you aren't in their shoes." Vihan shared a similar point but also noted the power imbalance, stating, "Refugees have to deal with people bullying them, but they cannot do anything, because others are a lot stronger, and they have power. Living a refugee life looks very hard, and I realize how lucky I am to be a non-refugee." Still others like Sarah went even further by connecting their privilege to action, asserting that "we have a duty to people in need, that it's in us as humans to help whenever we can to help others survive...if we ignore those in need we're only escalating the problem." Sarah's response reflects the critical civic empathy Mirra (2018) described by connecting feelings of empathy with a recognition of social positioning, justice, and action.

Deepening Understanding through Research

As the students finished the book and began the transition to research, I introduced the questions that would structure our culminating discussion: What rights should

people have as refugees? What responsibilities should countries have as it relates to refugees and the refugee crisis? How can we solve the refugee crisis? These questions created a purpose to the research and reinforced the point that we were learning for conceptual understanding rather than to simply collect a series of discrete facts (Downey & Long, 2016). Since most of the students were working primarily remotely and some were working entirely remotely, I created a digital three-column graphic organizer for them that featured specific research questions, corresponding links to charts, videos and articles, and space for their notes.

This is something I've noticed frequently with past students: they are more than willing to criticize past and present groups and countries around the world but are generally unwilling to apply a similar standard to the modern United States.

The first section featured basic questions about the refugee crisis including numbers of displaced people, the countries where most refugees are coming from, the countries where most refugees are going, and the historic rights of refugees as originally outlined under the 1951 Refugee Convention. This part was intended to provide a quick primer on the topic by offering contemporary data alongside the historic definition and framing of refugees. The next section was designed to help students understand the causes of the crisis and provide them with choices about what they wanted to explore. First, students were tasked with learning about what is happening in a specific country (e.g., Syria, Venezuela, Myanmar, South Sudan) that is leading to the mass displacement of people from that country. The situation is different in each place ranging from oppressive authoritarian regimes to civil wars to ethnic cleansing, but each also shares parallels including a lack of sufficient safety and humanitarian aid for the people. Second, I asked students to explore the actions and involvement of a more powerful country in one of the places where people are becoming refugees on a large scale (e.g., the United States or Russia in Syria or the United States in Venezuela). I wanted students to recognize the culpability of countries like the US in exacerbating the refugee crisis. Some students, like Aditya, grasped this point clearly, writing: "The United States/Obama had dropped many bombs on Syria and other countries. This made it so that Syria was not a safe place to live and so many citizens became refugees." However, many more were resistant to critiquing the US, and sought to justify the actions of the country. For example, here is how Charlie characterized the role of the US: "The US' attempts to bring freedom to the people of Syria may actually be a majority factor as to why there are so many refugees." This is something I've noticed frequently with past students: they are more than willing to criticize past and present groups and countries around the

world but are generally unwilling to apply a similar standard to the modern United States.

The final part of the research was about the various challenges faced by refugees. Some of the options for students to explore in this part included: refugee children, those in refugee camps, refugees settling in developing countries, refugees settling in developed countries, and the ways in which refugees are more at risk than non-refugees to discrimination, poverty, and disease. My hope was that students in each class would select different combinations of these challenges so that each could inform the class discussion. However, it was the last option that I was most interested in students exploring as it best reflected the intersectional challenges faced by refugees (Crenshaw, 1989). Several students were able to make connections between relocation and poverty, living in refugee camps and the spread of diseases, and the discrimination that extends from speaking a different language or practicing a different religion than the majority of people in a new country. Arun best articulated the intersection of these challenges:

Refugees are more at risk than non-refugees to disease because the crowded, packed refugee camps get very little medical services. The COVID-19 pandemic has made three-quarters of refugees lose income. They are more at risk of poverty because they have PTSD. Because they have PTSD, it is hard for them to learn in school. Because it is hard for them to learn in school, they can't get jobs. Because they can't get jobs, they are broke. They are also prone to discrimination because people look at refugees as a class lower than them, even though everyone is human and deserve to be treated equally. This discrimination has led to many refugees being sent back to their homes of war and persecution. Discrimination is essentially killing refugees.

By recognizing the multiple layers of discrimination and hardship faced by refugees, students can better understand the depths of this problem and generate more informed solutions.

Developing Solutions through Student-led Discussion

The goal of the discussion was to help students synthesize what they had learned through reading and research, hear the perspectives of others, and formulate their own informed ideas about the issue and how it can be solved. I opened each of my classes by explaining the structure of the two 10-minute discussions, announcing the discussion groups and sharing my expectations for all to participate. I then stopped talking and turned it over to the students. Almost every student shared at least one comment or question, and across the classes several fascinating exchanges took place. hooks (1994) emphasized the importance of students hearing and listening to one another to ensure that all are recognized, and no student is invisible. This is an important aspect of any classroom devoted to centering students and engaging in critical learning but even more so when the classroom is in a virtual, not physical, space.

Through these discussions, students developed and articulated a range of views about the rights of refugees and the extent to which they should be supported. Students across classes generally agreed that refugees should be entitled to basic human rights, but it was revealing to hear what they envisioned as basic human rights. One student, Billy, claimed that "refugees are people and we shouldn't be treating them like they're not human. Just give them a t-shirt and a bottle of water; I mean, we shouldn't have to give adults everything." Clearly, Billy rejects the dehumanizing treatment of refugees but equates humanity with simple survival. Through this line of thinking refugees shouldn't be harmed but they shouldn't really be helped either. Other students made similar qualified statements indicating support but not too much. For instance, Neha was initially in favor of refugees being allowed entry into a country and provided with support but then clarified that the support she meant was help finding a job and not being given money because "refugees might get lazy and not get a job if they are just given money." These quotes illustrate just how deeply ingrained certain misconceptions have become about marginalized people in this country, particularly in the minds of those who are far-removed and in positions of relative privilege.

Going slightly further, Annie, who was quoted above condemning the mistreatment of refugees, spoke about refugees being entitled to sanitary conditions and educational opportunities at refugee camps. But when speaking about resettlement, she said, "Refugees should have the same opportunities as others, like to work as a cashier at Walmart." Annie believes refugees should have more rights and opportunities but limited to only those of the working class. The implicit point here is that refugees should not have the same opportunities as others in the middle and upper classes. However, some, like Ashley, combined an argument for equality with a willingness to help those in need: "I think refugees should have just as many rights as we have. At the end of the day, we are all human and they are the ones fighting for their survival...We need to allow them into countries and even our homes if we can."

Within these discussions students also shared their ideas for solving this crisis. Avalos (2019), in her description of decolonial pedagogies, emphasized the importance for students to shift from social critique to imagining solutions, stating: "We need alternative visions for living and being. And we need to remind ourselves it is possible to live in a different kind of world. To remind ourselves of the possibilities beyond all those oppressive structures shaping our lives..." (p. 147). This is particularly instructive when working with younger students. Students need to be exposed to the realities of our unjust world but in a way that doesn't demoralize them and instead instills a sense of hope and reveals the possibilities for a better world.

Students' solutions addressed both the needs of current refugees and the conflicts that are constantly creating new refugees. Several were focused on improving the structural supports for current refugees through measures such as setting up more camps for temporary settlement that are clean and safe, building free and permanent housing, and

creating safe routes for refugees to eliminate arrests. Others were focused on the well-being of individual refugees. For example, Alice noted that any solution must focus on mental health and specifically “address the trauma inflicted on those who have experienced being a refugee.” Some students argued for a nuanced and multi-pronged approach to the crisis. For example, Kirk noted that the challenges for refugees are different depending on whether they are resettling in a developed or developing country and suggested an increase in funding for camps in developing countries and the passage of anti-discrimination laws to protect refugees in developed countries. Several others were focused on addressing the causes of the conflicts creating refugees, with a particular emphasis on the role of the United States. In one discussion, Daniel said, “We should focus less on refugee entry and more on stopping the wars.” His classmate, Adon, put a finer point on the culpability of the US, stating, “We need to stop causing refugees rather than stop refugees.” These ideas reflect a recognition of the unique challenges of refugees, the root causes of the crisis, and the role of the United States and other countries in creating, and potentially solving, this crisis.

Of course, not all students embraced this perspective. Some students were resistant to recognizing this issue as a legitimate problem worth solving and downplayed the severity of the crisis. For instance, Tim pushed back on the need for the US to do more, claiming, “The US is doing the most for a lot of minorities and we are lucky to be living in the US.” Later in the discussion, he took an even more aggressive (and factually-baseless) position by arguing that if we allow more refugees into the country, then “We’re going to get poorer, stocks are going to go down, and it’s going to be dangerous.” These comments reflected the same type of xenophobic American exceptionalism rhetoric that came from the White House the last four years. Despite well-reasoned and evidence-based arguments challenging his worldview, Tim could not conceive of a situation in which the US is at fault or could be improved.

Conversely, the most encouraging moments of these discussions occurred when students included themselves as part of the solution. In one discussion, as students were suggesting how countries can solve this crisis, Kevin posed the question to the group: “How can you help?” Several students in that class (as well as others) said they could spread awareness to those who don’t know about this issue. This is a very thoughtful and age-appropriate response. Students began this inquiry generally unaware of this topic and this suggestion recognizes and responds to that lack of familiarity and understanding.

Lessons Learned

Student Reflections

On the final day of this inquiry project the students reflected on what they had learned. They wrote and shared responses to the following questions: What was a question you had about this topic that you now can answer and what is a question you still have? How did your view of this topic

change or deepen as a result of our book reading, research, and discussion? How does understanding the refugee crisis help you better understand the world? Several noteworthy trends emerged in the students’ reflections. Some students indicated how this inquiry process helped them answer their own original questions and better understand an unfamiliar topic. For example, Claire wrote, “My question was why they would leave their home and have to walk miles and miles as a refugee. But when I did my research, I realized the war in some of these countries is so bad that I would rather leave.” For others, like Jane and Gavin, this process has now led to more questions. Jane acknowledged, “I didn’t even know what a refugee was before this, so I had a lot of questions but now my only question is why this happens to people.” Similarly, Gavin wrote, “I never paid attention to this topic really but now I sort of get it and now have more questions about it. A question I still have is why don’t other people help them if we are all the same?” There is a lot to take away from these two comments: the self-recognition of not previously knowing or caring about this topic, the fact that inquiry is an ongoing process of asking and answering questions, and a frustrated idealism about the world not working as it should.

Several students admitted that they were personally moved by this project. For instance, Roena explained: “As I started getting more into research and learning new things I got more interested but also I felt more sad. I feel so bad that these refugees have to go through all these things because their home country went into war in the first place and they had to flee.” Ashley and Courtney went further connecting similar feelings of personal sympathy with a need for action. Ashley noted the need for political and national action: “My view of this topic changed because at first I didn’t really care to learn about this or research it but as I read the book I realized how hard it is for refugees to survive and everything they’ve gone through. I feel bad for them and think that our government and country needs to do more to help them.” Courtney focused on the need for individual action: “My view of this topic has deepened as a result of our book reading, research and discussion because now that I know more about refugees and what they go through, I feel more empathy for them and I want to help them. Before, I didn’t know much about refugees or what they were so I didn’t realize how we have to try and help them.”

Most importantly, many students connected their new understanding of the world with their own privileged and sheltered upbringing. For example, Jenna wrote: “Understanding the refugee crisis helps me better understand the world because it shows me that not everyone has a good life. Not everyone has a house or even resources to survive. It shows me not to be greedy because some people don’t have the stuff we have. It is not their choice to have to flee their home and country...we have to learn that we are all humans and our differences should not be something to discriminate against.” Here again we see the type of empathy Mirra (2018) described that connects personal empathy with social positioning, power, and inequity. Charlie, whose research notes I highlighted above

as an example of students being resistant to critiquing the US, wrote the following in his reflection: "It better helps me understand the world because it kind of pops our little, safe bubble here in Mountainview." Lucas made a similar point: "Understanding the refugee crisis helps me see the world clearly because where I am growing up I am shielded from seeing this type of violence." These statements are reflective of the critical consciousness described by Freire (1997) and hooks (1994) and the possibilities of critical teaching with this population of students.

Conclusion

It's easy for students from relatively privileged backgrounds living in middle-upper class suburban communities to stay shielded from issues of social, economic, and political injustice. Most are not personally confronted with the hardships faced by those who are marginalized in our society and, in fact, often benefit from the structural inequities in place. Therefore, a neutral approach in education does not work (Apple, 1990; Zinn, 1994). Either we choose to be complicit in perpetuating the capitalist, imperialist, Eurocentric norms embedded in our history and society or we choose to offer an alternative rooted in justice, equity, and inclusivity. Through this latter approach, students can develop a broader, deeper, and more accurate understanding of our past and present in order to imagine and work toward a better future.

Successfully engaging young students in a critical learning process requires an inquiry-based approach. It would be thoroughly ineffective to follow the banking model described by Freire (1997) where students are treated as empty vessels ready to be filled with knowledge. This would not create the ownership over the learning process necessary for students to develop a connection to the information and would open teachers up to the criticism of indoctrination noted by Swalwell (2013). Rather, through an inquiry process in which students are seeking the answers to questions together, they become a "community of learners" (Downey & Long, 2016, p. 30). The primary role of the teacher in this process is to ground the activities in critical learning goals and frame the questions and select resources that guide and support the students toward those goals. This approach helps students develop their critical lens as individual learners but also helps create a more inclusive community in which all are working toward the goal of a more just and equitable society, regardless of individual background and identity.

As demonstrated above, this kind of teaching and learning is possible and necessary with this population of students. That said, there are several areas where this project could be expanded. For instance, this crisis involves more than just those who are refugees but also migrants who choose to leave an unsustainable situation for any number of reasons. A broader examination of this topic could specifically include an analysis of how climate change is exacerbating the refugee and migrant crisis. Additionally, students could look more closely at the most recent compacts from the United Nations as well as country-specific

laws and policies about refugee and migrant entry to better support their development of policy-based solutions. Incorporating these aspects of the topic would provide students with an even more in-depth understanding of the crisis and its far-reaching impact. Another approach would be to have students explore their own family histories of immigration. This has the potential to help students connect more personally to this topic and develop a greater sense of empathy for the migrants and refugees of today.

Ultimately, through this inquiry project, students gained a clear understanding of the causes and effects of the refugee crisis and the intersectional challenges of refugees, developed a sense of critical empathy for refugees, and generated thoughtful solutions to this problem. Many, but not all, of the students saw the world through a clear-eyed and critical lens, contextualized their new understanding with their own privilege, and imagined a more just, equitable, and inclusive world. This project demonstrates the potential to foster a critical, empathic, and justice-oriented disposition among students as they begin to meaningfully think about the world and their role in it.

Notes

¹ The town data is from the United States Census Bureau and the school data is from the New Jersey School Performance Report. The name of the town and school district are pseudonyms. All student names used have also been changed to ensure privacy.

References

- Apple, M. W. (1990). *Ideology and curriculum* (Second edition). New York: Routledge. (Original work published in 1979).
- Anyon, J. (1980). Social class and the hidden curriculum of work. *Journal of Education*, 162 (1), 67-92.
- Avalos, N. (2019). Insurgent pedagogies: Decolonization is for all of us. In J. Mink (Ed.), *Teaching resistance: Radicals, revolutionaries, and cultural subversives in the classroom* (pp. 144-156). PM Press.
- Barksdale, S. (2013). Good readers make good historians: "Can we just settle it on 'a lot of people died?'" *The History Teacher*, 46 (2), 233-251.
- Coates, T. (2015). *Between the world and me*. New York: Spiegel and Grau.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1 (8), 139-167.
- Downey, M. T., & Long, K. A. (2016). *Teaching for historical literacy building knowledge in the history classroom*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

- Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Revised 20th anniversary ed). New York: Continuum. (Original work published in 1970).
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Mirra, N. (2018). *Educating for empathy: Literacy learning and civic engagement*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Packer, G. (2020, October 24). Donald Trump's refugee policy is bureaucratic sadism. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/10/donald-trumps-refugee-policy-is-bureaucratic-sadism/616840/>
- Swalwell, K. (2013). *Educating activist allies: Social justice pedagogy with the suburban and urban elite*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Trilling, D. (2018, June 5). Five myths about the refugee crisis. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jun/05/five-myths-about-the-refugee-crisis>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2020, June 18). *Figures at a glance*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>
- Zinn, H. (1994). *You can't be neutral on a moving train: A personal history of our times*. Boston: Beacon Press.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

We The People: Immigration Counter-Narratives in the High School Visual Arts Classroom

by Alisha Mernick



COUNTER-NARRATIVE ARTWORKS ABOUT IMMIGRATION COURTESY OF AUTHOR

For the last decade, I have taught High School Visual Art in the Pico Union neighborhood of Los Angeles, a primarily black and brown immigrant community. The vast majority of my students are immigrants, or children of immigrants, growing up in yet another era of heightened villainization of *the other*, a continuing neo-native attempt at drawing a hard American line between *us* and *them*. I am doing everything in my power to make sure these students do not internalize the same learned self-hatred that I once did.

My parents met and married in Iran and moved to the states just before the 1978 Iranian revolution. Originally hoping to visit regularly with our family, the violence and political upheaval in Iran, and the growing tensions between our countries made these visits unlikely, and then impossible. So, they settled and raised three children in the United States. My mother has not been back to Iran or seen her parents in nearly 40 years, and I have not seen my grandparents since I was an infant.

Growing up in a primarily white area, the little I learned about my Iranian heritage came from a handful of old family photographs, and the ever-present American media. Our pediatrician advised my mother not to teach us Farsi; teachers constantly corrected our behavior and body language; classmates teased about our bodies and cultural quirks; and my path toward assimilation into a culture of whiteness was secured. For the majority of my childhood, I readily consumed the depictions of Iran as a violent, suspicious, backwards society. I assumed the photos of my mother in college, surrounded by unveiled women in miniskirts carrying stacks of books, were just an anomaly.

I was in high school when the 9/11 attacks took place, and the *war on terror* began. The representation of persons of “middle eastern” descent in mainstream media became even more one-dimensional, racist, and vile. I allowed friends to make fun of my mother’s accent, call us “muzzy,” and joke about us being terrorists. Our family was often asked by strangers “what are you?” and “where are you from?” and we were occasionally “randomly searched” at the airport. When people asked about my background, I would often laugh off my “vague ethnicity” and attempt to align my identity more closely to my father’s ethnic Jewish roots. Somehow, this felt safer.

It took me many years to heal - to move on from the embarrassment about my heritage. First, this embarrassment was replaced by anger for having been made to feel inferior, then a guilt for allowing myself to feel that way, and finally to a position of nuanced understanding, self-love, and focused intent to *disrupt* the system that had harmed me. A large part of this healing came while studying critical race theory and critical pedagogy in graduate school, and first naming the white supremacy that had permeated so much of my k-12 education - both in and out of school. I began to deconstruct the dominant narratives about Iran and the Middle East, to identify the political intent behind

these falsehoods, and to critically question what American visual culture and media had taught me about my people.

Today, I aim to equip my students with these critical skills at a much earlier age - to fortify them against the subtle, and not so subtle, lies they would consume about themselves as they come of age in a xenophobic, white supremacist culture. Our small public charter high school is the epitome of contemporary, urban, American public schooling. We operate an award-winning program out of a converted storage facility located underneath a six-lane freeway interchange in downtown Los Angeles. Nearly 98% of our student body checks a box labelled “Hispanic” when enrolling for our school, and 96% of these students qualify to receive free or reduced-price meals and produce boxes. Our families previously lived in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, and Ethiopia. Most of our students speak English as a second language, with about a quarter typically qualifying as English language learners. Most of our families speak Spanish at home, and our families

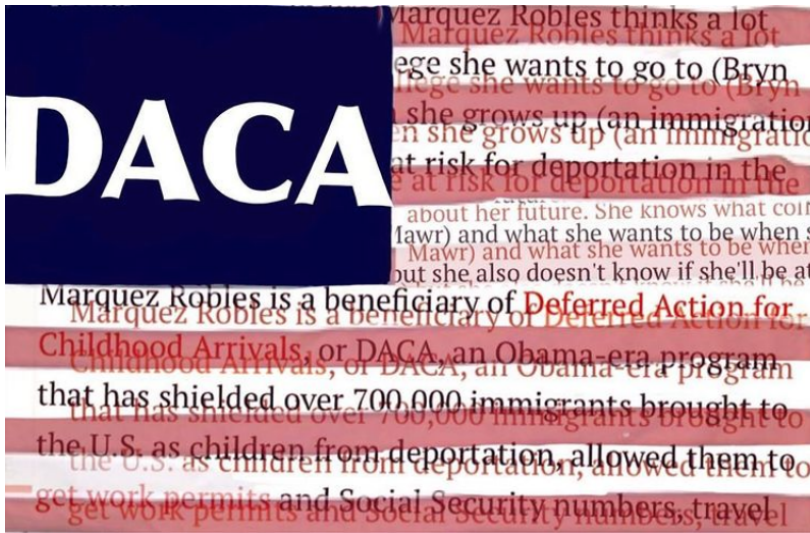


CYNTHIA AND ANTHONY’S SPIRIT WEEK COSTUME ILLUSTRATE THE WAY THAT CONVERSATIONS AROUND IMMIGRATION POLICY AND IMMIGRANT RIGHTS ARE CENTERED ON CAMPUS. (2017)

are deeply invested in their students’ academic success.

The surrounding community is one of the highest density neighborhoods in the country, with many of our students living 5-10 people to an apartment. Most students have additional responsibilities at home - child care, preparing meals, or helping the family businesses - which reduces their available time for schoolwork. Despite these many additional challenges, our school has a strong academic program, an exceptional college acceptance rate, and some of the most committed and intellectually curious young folks I have ever worked with. We have been recognized among the top 25 “most transformative” high

schools in the nation by Newsweek and won a Blue Ribbon Award and other accolades for schools that “beat the odds.” These recognitions are ultimately due to the willingness of staff to overwork ourselves, and the commitment of our students to meet our community’s high expectations.



THEMES OF IMMIGRATION POLICY BEGAN EMERGING IN STUDENT ARTWORK, UNPROMPTED. DIGITAL ARTWORK BY ANGENI V., 2017, FOR THE AP STUDIO ART PORTFOLIO.

Many of our students are undocumented childhood arrivals who benefit from DACA and Dreamer programs. As access to these programs ebb and flow with our national political climate, the mood on campus changes palpably. Our college counselors specialize in supporting students' applications to both of these programs and navigating college applications without a documented immigration status. Our students are politically engaged, by necessity. Our community follows immigration law the way some high schools follow their football teams. The 2016 election season, as well as the four years of living in Trump's America, cast a dark shadow over our community. (Even with Biden's notable call to “preserve & fortify” DACA on his first day in office, at the time of this writing we are still waiting on the passage of the “Dream Act,” which would finally secure a pathway to citizenship for the nearly 2 million

undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children.)

I had always made a point to center and honor my student’s identities and individual funds of knowledge in my classroom, but in the wake of the 2016 election, I saw the need to teach much more explicitly about the topic of migration. Trump’s presidential campaign was centering overtly racist and violent rhetoric about immigrants, and these themes were already emerging in student artwork and class conversation. After Trump took office, feelings intensified, and the mood shifted. As ICE raids began increasing in Los Angeles, as “the wall” started going up nearby, our resting anxiety level rose. I recognized a need to create a safe space for these emergent conversations to be explored and decided to redesign an upcoming portraiture lesson in order to name and counter the dominant narratives of immigration in the United States today.

We began with a lesson resource from Facing History & Ourselves - a guided analysis of a political cartoon created during the Chinese Exclusion Act. The image shows racialized caricatures, laboring over the construction of an *anti-Chinese wall*. The mortar bucket is labeled *congress*. The individual bricks are labelled *prejudice*, *law against race*, *fear*, etc. We watched a short PBS video for historical context, interpreted the image together, and then held a Socratic seminar for students to discuss: What connections can you draw between the Chinese Exclusion Act and today?

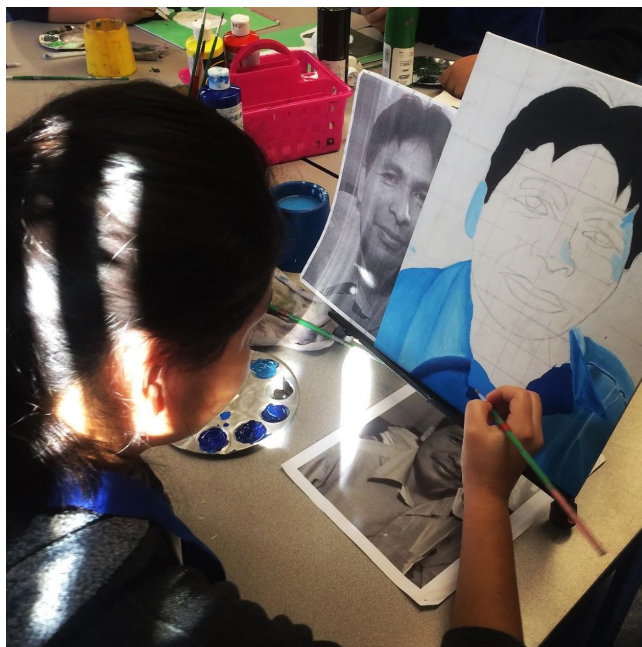


STUDENTS EASILY SAW CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT AND THE RHETORIC AROUND IMMIGRATION POLICY TODAY. IMAGE FROM LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: (<https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3G04138/>)

I am always in awe of how sharp and critical my students can be, especially when they are personally invested in the topic. Students brought up the election, the rhetoric around the border wall, the *extreme vetting* of Muslim immigrants, and more. Students were especially quick to recall recent language in Trump’s 2018 speech about immigration reform: “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” and “These aren’t people, These are animals.” Several students, who were simultaneously enrolled in an AP European History course, drew poignant connections between Trump’s language and the rhetoric used during Nazi Germany. Other students connected Trump’s racist generalizations to their own lives, sharing personal stories about discrimination. A skinny freshman, whose parents immigrated from Mexico, shared that he was always followed or harassed by cops when out skateboarding, and wondered aloud if he was being seen as a “criminal.” A small, dark skinned classmate related, and shared that she was also Mexican, and was always followed around stores by an employee when shopping with her sisters.

Several students brought up the media, observing that Latinos in Los Angeles were usually represented on TV as criminals, drug dealers, or gang members. A few students connected the conversation to the #OscarsSoWhite movement and proposed that the media was full of racist stereotypes because “everyone running Hollywood is white.” One of my taller, darker students, whose family was from El Salvador, shared that he felt like he made people “uncomfortable” with his mere presence, and that these media stereotypes were probably why. We summarized the key points of the conversation together and created a reference chart on the board defining the “Dominant Narratives about Immigrants” in the US today: violent, lazy, selfish, uneducated, rapists, animals, drug dealers, criminals.

analysis. These artworks portray three women of the global majority in confident poses, painted in red, white and blue, with the text “We the People” centered under each portrait. We analyze the meaning of the text, the color scheme, the confident poses, and the other subtle visual symbols in each art piece. Next, I introduce the term “counter-narrative”: a narrative told by people who have been historically marginalized with the intent of offering positive alternatives to mainstream narratives. Again, we brainstorm the counter-narratives we know to be true about immigrants, and record them on the board: hardworking, family oriented, loving, honest, selfless, determined, powerful, brave.



DIANE PAINTING A PORTRAIT OF HER FATHER, 2018



PROTEST ART THROUGHOUT HISTORY SERVES AS A “COUNTER NARRATIVE,” TO DOMINANT POLITICAL DISCOURSE. SHEPARD FAIREY IMAGES. IN PUBLIC DOMAIN.

The next day, students viewed and interpreted Shepard Fairey’s “We The People” series as a class. Again, students impressed me with their visual literacy skills and contextual

Finally, I give student’s their assignment: research a real U.S. immigrant to honor with a painted portrait and write an artist statement that serves as a counter-narrative about immigration. Since the majority of my students are the children of immigrants, and since we have already established our classroom as a “safe space” for personal vulnerability, many students choose to represent a family member or loved one. Students write their own interview questions and interview the immigrants in their lives. Most questions focus on how their subjects migrated to the United States, why they chose to leave their home countries, and what it was like when they first arrived.

Many students shared with me that these interviews were initially uncomfortable for their loved ones, many of whom had previously hidden some of the more traumatizing details about their migration stories from their families. Some parents cried as they recalled needing to pack up everything and leave their home communities, often in haste, with the abstract hope of finding safety and a better means to survive in a strange land. For many students, this was their first-time hearing about their parent's experience crossing the border without legal documentation. Some students learned that their parents were taken advantage of by *coyotes*, were physically smuggled, robbed on the road, suffered from dehydration, or witnessed sexual violence against women during their journey. One child recalled his own dangerous journey to reach the United States from El Salvador, and how the only personal belonging that survived the journey was a small gift from his grandmother—a handwritten prayer on a postcard of the Virgin Mary.

Each student painted a representational portrait and wrote an artist statement, informed by their interviews. When complete, students presented their artworks to the class and read their artist statements aloud. I model this emotional act first by holding up a painting of my own mother and sharing my family's story. I give plenty of time and space for students to respond and discuss each other's work, while I facilitate respectful dialogue. The resulting conversation is rich, and organic - and the sharing is real. Many students share with their classmates, for the first time, their own undocumented status.

One common theme in student's artist statements is how hard-working and family-oriented real immigrants are, and how so often, their choice to migrate was a necessary sacrifice made for the sake of their children. Many students speak directly to the stereotype of South and Central Americans as 'lazy,' clarifying in detail just how hard-working their loved ones were. They share how common it is for U.S. immigrants to simultaneously study English, work multiple jobs, keep a home, prepare meals, care for elders, and somehow still find the time and energy to attend parent teacher conferences.

Another common topic for dialogue is the dominant narrative of immigrants as violent criminals and drug addicts. Students discuss the very real presence of drug addiction and crime in their neighborhoods - generally concentrated in the houseless communities of veterans and persons with mental illness around Skid Row, MacArthur Park, and Downtown Los Angeles. Growing up around so much abject poverty and addiction, many students develop a strong aversion to drug culture and find it ironic and aggravating that immigrants are represented as "drug dealers" in dominant media narratives. One student shared that her mother came to the United States to flee an alcoholic partner in Mexico. She came to the United States in order to escape substance abuse, not to bring it with her.

Throughout our class presentations, students respond with love and support of one another's stories. They relate

similar experiences, applaud each other's vulnerability, and swear themselves to secrecy—and to protect each other. This is due in part to the work we have done all year to develop a "safe space" and model respectful dialogue in our classroom. This feeling of mutual love and respect was summarized beautifully in Jenny's (2018) end-of-year reflection: "When I think of [our class], the word that comes to mind is *community*... I remember that many students would break down crying because of how emotional their projects were but because of the community built up over time in the classroom, everyone was very open as an audience and respected one another."

This project also showed students that art making was a form of activism. Daniela (2018) remembers learning that "art wasn't all about sunshine and rainbows," but that it "has the power to educate people... and raise awareness for social issues." Kimberly (2017) summarizes this beautifully, "Art has a really big impact in shaping the world." I believe strongly in the power of artwork to not only reflect, but to also shape our culture, and so public exhibition is a core element of every project we do.

We exhibited our counter-narrative portraits and written statements together around campus (anonymously, to protect our artists) in order to reach the broader community and have a deeper impact in *countering* the dominant stereotypes the images addressed. Through public exhibition, our artists become activists—publicly challenging the negative stereotypes and xenophobic, racialized assumptions about our community.



STUDENT PAINTING A HYBRID MEXICAN AMERICAN FLAG, TO SERVE AS THE BACKGROUND TO A PORTRAIT OF HER MOTHER. 2018

One year, we had the opportunity to exhibit our paintings at a nearby immigrant rights fair. Families who came to learn more about their legal rights from a panel of expert speakers were greeted by our counter-narrative portraits and written statements—faces and stories that

likely reflected their own experiences as immigrants. Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, who spoke at the fair, reflected that “At this time of fear and uncertainty for so many in our communities, events like this are crucial.” Most impactful to me though were the smaller and more intimate moments of students and their families interacting with the artwork. Occasionally, one of the artists would bring their loved one to see their portraits in person. I watched Daniel, one of my young artists, translate his artist statement into Spanish for his mother. As he read, tears welled up in her face. She laughed, spoke to him softly in Spanish, and embraced her child. “To me that is an ultimate sacrifice,” Daniel recalled later, “to give up all you own, and make such a commitment solely in the name of your children. When I look at this portrait, I see a brave, powerful woman, and the most honorable human I know.”

the myriad issues around human migration, neo-nativism, and xenophobia. Visual culture and representation have the power to dismantle oppressive systems, especially as regards to our internalized white supremacy. Our public exhibitions of these artworks began to serve this purpose, and I hope that this publication will amplify my student’s truths and broaden their impact. I hope that these art works will provide a necessary counter-narrative to the xenophobic representations of immigrants and our families that we encounter daily.



WHEN INVITED TO CREATE COUNTER-NARRATIVE ARTWORKS ABOUT IMMIGRATION, MANY STUDENTS CHOSE TO REPRESENT THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILIES.

This is the learning experience that was missing from my own youth. One that saw *me*, honored *my* story, and validated *my family’s* experience of marginalization. I imagine how this space for processing, analyzing, and countering xenophobic narratives might have liberated me from so much of the internalized racial inferiority that plagued my teenage years. Self-love and critical self-knowledge have become so central to my personal journey and my educational equity work—my mission for this project is to spark the same confidence and sense of agency for my students.

I also hope that the images and narratives we created will heal our culture beyond ourselves: that our truths will educate and motivate others to better understand us and

Student Artwork &
Written Counter-Narratives



“My mother came to the U.S. in the year 1990 with her brother and the help of a ‘coyote.’ She decided to migrate because she wanted to escape poverty, and follow my father to the States. My mother challenges the stereotypes that immigrants are ruining the country. Her sole motive was to work, for her children, for a better life. I painted her because she represents the innocent immigrants and refugees that want to come to the U.S. for a better life. It is important that people learn about these immigrants and that they aren’t here to commit crimes. Immigrants are innocent people who may have been victims of poverty, wars, or other hardships.”

- Daniel, 2017

“My mom came to the U.S. at the age of 16. She was the oldest so she had to drop out of school during 5th grade and started working at the age of 11 to help out her parents. She came to the U.S. for a better job with just a friend and lived with a woman who would treat them badly. The next day she went walking around asking for a job for almost 3 hours, and eventually she found one. Even today she goes to work and takes the bus and when she gets home she immediately starts cooking. My mom is important for the audience to know because she didn’t steal jobs, she doesn’t do drugs, or something like that. She is a hardworking woman that worked with sweat and tears and because of her I am here today.”

- Anonymous, 2017





“My mother, is an immigrant. She came to this country seeking opportunity when she was just 19. It’s crazy to think a teenager was willing to leave everything and risk her life to get away from poverty and violence. My mom went through a lot and was still treated badly here by ignorant people. Many wouldn’t hire her because she was an immigrant but eventually she got a job. When I say immigrant many may imagine a rapist or a delinquent. But my mom is none of that, she is a respectable woman that came for a better future. There’s no delinquency in that, in fact it’s inspiring. It’s important for people to know this in order to end the negative assumptions there are about immigrants.” - Ashley, 2017

“I chose to paint my mother, to represent how her immigration story challenges stereotypes towards immigrants. My mother lived in Mexico up until the age of 12 when she crossed the border to enter the U.S. When my mom entered the U.S. and went to school, she knew nothing of English and struggled to make friends and didn’t have time because she would have to take care of her little brothers and sisters...I chose my mom because she’s a perfect example of how not all Mexicans, Latinos, or Hispanics are criminals, rapists, and drug dealers. My mom would rather work hard for every dollar she makes and do what is right rather than do what is easy.” - Rebecca, 2017





WHEN INVITED TO CREATE COUNTER-NARRATIVE ARTWORKS ABOUT IMMIGRATION, MANY STUDENTS CHOSE TO REPRESENT THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILIES.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://dscribe.org/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/press/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Borders to Bridges: Awakening Critical Consciousness

by Lynn Glixon Ditchfield



SCREENSHOT OF A STUDENT FILM FEATURING RODRIGO AS LA LUNA / THE MOON. COURTESY OF AUTHOR

In this period of mass migration, mass incarceration, and tumultuous cultural shifts, many teachers are unclear how to approach the crucial yet sensitive subjects of immigration, racism, and cultural insecurity. A toxic xenophobic atmosphere engenders myths, mistrust, false rumors, and fear of the other, loss of identity, being stereotyped, deportation, family separation, persecution, retaliation, isolation, and loss of status or job. Educators know the effects: students riddled with anxiety; some, not normally disrespectful, spouting racial and ethnic slurs while others simply withdraw, resulting in an inability to engage in the learning process. Educators also face the results of a crippling pandemic that has exposed alarming inequities. Teachers struggle with new technologies and uncertain outcomes. They juggle the demands of administrators, parents, politicians, individual students, families, and their own standards and expectations. Yet, these challenges also provide opportunities to re-imagine education for diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, belonging, resilience, and healing; opportunities for critical educators to find their place as change agents in a changing world.

The two-lesson plan-projects that follow were designed to counter anti-immigrant hostilities that increased dramatically during periods of local and national crises. Both projects aimed to empower students to practice what Isabelle Wilkerson (2020) has now called "radical empathy," an empathy rooted in awareness of social, economic, cultural, and political realities. They are part of what became *Borders to Bridges: Creative Activities for Belonging, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* with supplementary sections *Personal Narratives*, and *Poetry, Prose and Short Fiction*, and related resources (Arts & Literature, News, Teacher Guides, Services).¹ The materials written, compiled, and edited in this *Guidebook* evolved from fifty years of teaching pre-school to graduate school in domestic and international, urban and rural schools, using arts-based creative strategies to address immigration and human rights issues for social justice. The *Guidebook*, written in collaboration with a diverse group of contributing educators and artists from thirty-two countries and fifteen states of the US, is grounded in liberatory pedagogy, arts in education, and expressive arts theories.

Community Context for the Lessons

Martha's Vineyard, a 90 square mile island community off the coast of Massachusetts, is known as a haven for day-trippers, a wedding destination, and home of the rich and famous. However, the island is part of Dukes County, one of the poorest in the state, because of its seasonal work cycle and long months of unemployment or underemployment for year-round residents. While we have a cohesive community that comes together to lend mutual support during the off-season months, we also have a high rate of alcoholism and heroin addiction, depression, and a critical housing crisis with related stresses and tensions. Thanks to our tax base of wealthy summer residents, our schools are well equipped; yet, not unlike other US schools, our teaching staff does not represent the racial and ethnic composition of the Island.

Martha's Vineyard is the unseated territory of the Wampanoag people whose tribal council, tribal land, tribal

housing, stores, cultural center, and museum are located in Aquinnah, one of the six Island towns. Another town, Oak Bluffs, was one of the earliest resorts for African American people, attracting Black professionals, artists, and literary greats who came to the island for inspiration during the Harlem Renaissance, a tradition that is still true today (Levy). Yet while an attitude of embracing culture and difference is a unique characteristic of Martha's Vineyard, occupation of land, repression, racism, redlining, segregation, bias, classism, and sexism are also a part of its history. During the colonial period and later, whaling drew many immigrants from Portugal, the Azores, and Cape Verde. Recent immigrants who comprise a significant portion of the population since the 1980s are from Brazil. Other newcomers come from Jamaica, Eastern Europe, and Latin America among other places. There is a complicated evolving dynamic between old Vineyard working-class families, skilled laborers, and service workers, and what has been perceived as competing interests with newly arrived Brazilian workers willing to accept lower wages.

Approximately 20% of the year-round population of 18,000 is made up of Brazilian immigrants. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (2020), the current demographics of the regional high school where the lessons that follow took place reflect approximately: 66% White, 21% Latinx, 5% Black, 5% multi-race, non-Hispanic, 2% Native American, under 1% Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander; 23% of the population whose first language is not English, 12% English language learners (ELL), over 21% students with disabilities, over 53% students with high needs, and 34% economically disadvantaged.

Project #1 Response to a Community Crisis: Roleplay Activities, Empathy, Advocacy, Action²

The following roleplay lesson plan project, one of fifty plans later included in *Borders to Bridges*, developed as a response to a community crisis on Martha's Vineyard that stirred up xenophobia. Working in collaboration with two teaching colleagues in two schools, we developed a seven-month curriculum plan using roleplay for our second-year Spanish language classes of fifteen- to sixteen-year-old students. The plan connected our schools and classrooms, the local Spanish speaking immigrant community, the local court system, and local media. Our goal was to encourage our students to take risks, honor diversity, inquire deeply, and think globally. Below is my account of that collaboration which later transformed into one of three connected roleplay lesson plans for *Borders to Bridges: Creative Activities for Belonging, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*.

In January of 2008, a tragic accident occurred in which a young white woman who had graduated from the regional high school was killed when her car crashed into a delivery van driven by an undocumented worker originally from Brazil. In Massachusetts, undocumented people are not permitted to get a driver's license. The effect of the accident was devastating in the schools and the community at large.

That year, in my second-year Spanish language class of eighteen students, nine students were Brazilian immigrants, one student was Black, one was a first-generation student with parents originally from India, and seven were white, mostly born and raised on Martha's Vineyard. There was a mixture of working class, lower-middle class, and middle-class students. All of the Brazilian students and several of the others worked after school. After the accident, the mistrust among students was palpable, as if an invisible line had been drawn splitting the classroom in half by ethnic identity. The roleplay lessons were created to promote deeper learning, community understanding and to prevent hate crimes, bullying, and cultural alienation. Slowly, over the seven-month period, we witnessed a shift in student interactions as a "team" that broke down the wall between the classroom and community.

The three classes, two from the regional high school and one from the public charter school, were divided into small groups designed so that students worked with people they did not know well. Each small group became a "family" (later changing to a "research team" and then "advocates") to work together for the seven-month duration of the unit. Each member of the group was assigned a task which rotated: timekeeper, group manager, recorder, reporter. Each "family" was assigned a country. We purposely chose a Spanish speaking country that did not reflect the backgrounds of participating students—Chile, Guatemala, Ecuador, Mexico, and Uruguay—so that everyone could experience belonging to a homeland different from their country of origin. More importantly, we had connections with community volunteers from each of those countries who guided students as "community advisors" throughout the project.

This process was especially revealing for the students born in the US who were surprised to compare the average wages and cost-of-living in "their" adopted country to the US.

One student from each group was assigned the role of sole wage earner for their "family" and given a profession (teacher, farmer, doctor, accountant, landscaper). These jobs reflected the professions of our community advisors. The other three students of the small group decided what family relationship they had to the provider (husband, in-law, grandparent, child). The "family" was given the name of the town or city where they lived, but they had to research and use currency conversion tools to understand what their family income would be, the cost of basic necessities of food, housing, clothing, and hygiene. Using Google Earth, they found a home and neighborhood. This process was especially revealing for the students born in the US who were surprised to compare the average wages and cost-of-living in "their" adopted country to the US. Students shouted in disbelief at the wages of a teacher in Uruguay or an accountant in Chile. They were shocked to discover the income of a doctor in a Guatemalan clinic. The prices for basic food and clothing were sometimes higher than in the US, despite the

significantly lower wages. Their findings and reactions were recorded and later reported to the whole class.

Meanwhile, and throughout the unit, the regular curriculum was incorporated and assessed and, when possible, related to the roleplay activities. In this way, the subject curriculum was enhanced by assigning students tasks like writing a self-portrait in Spanish of their roleplay character; studying literature, tradition, music, history, and culture of their roleplay countries; giving group presentations of their "families" with research findings; keeping a journal; and conducting oral history interviews with the community advisors. During the group process in class, students were purposely not graded or evaluated in order to preserve an open, non-threatening, exploratory atmosphere for teamwork.

Once students had enough information about their countries and families, the three classes organized a luncheon in the Culinary Arts Dining area to invite the community advisors to share their life stories, to listen to what the students had discovered and give their perspectives, answer questions, and eat food students prepared from authentic recipes. We had engaging guest advisors who were tolerant of mistakes, appreciative of the food, and interested in what the students had learned about their countries of origin. The advisors included: a highly regarded artist ceramicist from Uruguay with an enchanting sense of humor, interesting philosophical views, and stories of escaping from the authoritarian military dictatorship as a young man; a young doctor from Guatemala who had worked in a women's clinic in a mountainside village, living through the repression of the civil war, the military coup, and struggles for democracy in her country; an accountant from Chile who had experienced family trauma during the Pinochet regime and discrimination because of her indigenous Mapuche roots; a landscaper from Mexico who shared his extensive knowledge of Mexican history and his critical perspective of immigrant life in the US; and a young woman from Ecuador who talked about her rich cultural background and the struggles of coming to the US with two young children, and studying English to become a teacher.

Because the luncheon exchange was conducted in Spanish, learning the language became relational, challenging, and stimulating. Students were invested in knowing about "their" country and were surprised to successfully communicate with native speakers. Our advisors served as role models for newcomers while being admired by all the students. They provided new perspectives, and the students identified with their struggles learning a new language. Students from the three participating classes collaborated with groups assigned to the same country, sharing information.

In the next roleplay activity, the teachers gave each group a crisis to deal with that was based on a political or natural disaster that had actually occurred in their country. Students researched those events, assessed, recorded, and imagined what the impact on their "family" might be. Then, each group received a letter from "Tío Juan," a lost relative who had immigrated to the US. This "uncle" had heard about the crisis and invited them to come find work and a better life in his new home (our town) in the US. As a family, they

pondered a response, weighed the possibilities of splitting up the family, or not leaving, and facing the results of the crisis, or leaving together to encounter the challenges of living undocumented in a country whose language, customs, and laws were foreign to them. By this time, at least three months into the project, the relationships inside the groups had evolved enough to have a heartfelt conversation about the dilemma. It was during these discussions that students began to recognize the risks and complexity of migration.

In the following phase, students roleplayed as researchers diagramming two parallel timelines from the 1900s to the present, one of important historical events in their roleplay country and the other of the relationship with the US. The information was shared with the whole class, and alarming comparisons were made such as military or policy interventions of the US in each of the countries studied.

The final roleplay activity shifted focus. Each small group became a legal team of advocates who were charged with proposing changes to laws around immigration. Each group was given a topic and a packet of facts and information from the Immigrant Learning Center and other sources about common immigration misconceptions around crime, taxes, entrepreneurship, ethics, welfare, and work. They then researched their topic further and as a group wrote an argument in Spanish to make immigration laws fairer. During the advocacy stage, a bilingual judge visited classes to advise the students as if they were young law students. The student advocate groups then prepared for a field trip to the Dukes County Courthouse to present their final proposals in Spanish to the judge. Community advisors and local media attended the courtroom hearings. Students were passionate advocates and called on characters from their "families" as witnesses to testify, for example, to back a law for community safety allowing undocumented people to legally apply for drivers' licenses and car insurance to be able to carry out the essential work they do for the community.

In my many years as an educator, I have never witnessed such a remarkable growth of proficiency in language acquisition by second-year students. Vocabulary, grammar, history, and culture lessons were incorporated in the assignments organically. Throughout the seven months, we assigned related essays and received profound student reflections on the unit as part of their midterm and final exams. The beneficial intersection of arts and experiential learning, friendly competition, and collaborations engendered meaningful dialoguing as students confronted real-life challenges and advocated for policy change which directly related to a crisis situation they were experiencing. In that way, these lessons become a vehicle for empowerment and application of learned skills with an immediate and a long-term impact beyond the classroom.

In preparing for this article, I contacted a former student for insights. I remembered that Nick, who grew up on the Island, played a positive role in class. As a part of the soccer team, he had more contact than other white students with his Brazilian teammates. His sense of humor and friendly manner made him a constructive member of his small group. I also recalled that, like other students in that

class, he had little interest in learning Spanish at the time and treated the initial roleplay family activity as an awkward exercise. But as the work continued, he became more and more engaged. It was Nick that gave the testimony in the final courthouse hearing as a "teacher" from Uruguay who had left to support his family after the political crisis in his country. He argued to the judge that working as a landscaper on Martha's Vineyard, he needed a driver's license to transport equipment. Here are Nick's words from our recent conversation (January 2021):

At that age, a seven-month project was probably the most immersive experience of my education to date. It forced a different way of thinking than the week or month-long assignments that were the norm. It also served to put you in someone else's shoes for that extended period of time, as compared to more narrow views of the perspectives of others that I had more commonly encountered.... I do remember coming away with a better understanding that all Central and South American countries are not a monolith. They have different sets of challenges and beliefs.... Coming from a place of privilege, that was one of the first and only times I have been inside that courthouse. Being there in a situation that forced me to keep in mind the realities of how someone viewed as 'different' would be treated wasn't something I had encountered before. Especially in an environment like the Vineyard, which for all its incredible qualities is not the most diverse place. That was valuable to me.

As was later revealed, the young woman who was killed in the accident that had brought out underlying racial and ethnic tensions was driving her car at over 80 miles an hour (the speed limit was 35 mph) at 10:30pm (when streets are empty) and was legally intoxicated when she crashed into the van which pulled out of an intersection at nine miles per hour. Long before these details and the state toxicology report were publicly released, our project was under way and the resulting positive changes in our classrooms—attitudes, sensitivity, awareness, and school environment—were substantial. Beyond that, connections were made among the Spanish-speaking immigrant community from which we drew our "community advisors," the Brazilian students and their families, and the larger island community through media coverage of our mock courtroom hearings.³

Project #2 Response to a National Crisis: A Film for Building Community, Inclusion, and Engagement

The school year began with 9/11. Karla Cornejo Villavicencio in her book *The Undocumented Americans* (2020) explains that thousands of undocumented workers in New York City cleaned up the ruins of the attacks, unprotected, often exploited, exposed to hazardous conditions that would permanently damage their health. "Because the antithesis of an American is an immigrant and because we could not be victims in the public eye, we became subjects. And September 11 changed the immigration landscape forever" (pp. 40-41). There were more stringent immigration laws; repressive, militarized

security forces; police cooperation with Homeland Security; private prisons running detention centers; the creation of ICE, increased deportations; and racial profiling.

The national changes in policy intended to combat terrorism had the effect of creating xenophobic aggression, exclusion, erasure, and anti-immigrant fervor that reverberated in our communities and classrooms. In the aftermath of 9/11, even as our nation was closing ports and tightening borders, there was an urge by many to challenge cultural prejudice and resist nativism and isolationist policies. Our post-9/11 film project reflected a collective need for empathy, self-expression, positive identity, and inclusion rather than exclusion.

That year, I had a particularly creative group of globally concerned students. Building on their expertise and energy, and the confidence that the arts provide a pathway to immerse students in rigorous learning that sparks empathy and agency, we had a potential movie crew. In my third-year Spanish class, we were reading *Bodas de Sangre/ Blood Wedding* by Federico García Lorca, a lyrical play that teens relate to because it captures the struggle for identity, the torture of repressed passion, forbidden love, warring families with entrenched biases, rebellion from inhibiting structures of society. The contents of the play and the tragic ending of senseless violence and death resonated fiercely that 9/11 year. The students in that third-year class took the initiative to transform Lorca’s play into a script for a movie, creating the framework so that the project could expand to

the Spanish Club and other 9th – 12th grade classes to fully orchestrate the production.

The project began in October 2001 and finished in May 2002 with a screening of a student created, full-length film adaptation of García Lorca’s *Bodas de Sangre/ Blood Wedding* in Spanish with English subtitles. Seventy students from 9th to 12th grades participated as actors, directors of photography, editors, musicians/composers, writers, dancers/choreographers, designers, location scout, lighting, make-up artists, subtitle translation crew, graphic artists, line coaches, assistant director, publicity, consultants, and more. The 800-seat capacity school auditorium was filled, and the YouTube video of the production is still shared in classrooms twenty years later (available on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xu2eqfdpjUY>).

Lorca’s poetic words from 1930s Spain remained in our screenplay, but the settings, costumes, and characters molded to our contemporary community. Horses became a motorcycle carrying the runaway Bride escaping her wedding celebration with her lover; the Woodsmen became buskers outside a convenience store; the knife fight took place in a backyard; and the Beggar was draped in a Mexican blanket donated by the secondhand store. The powerful Moon character sang his death threats over and over, “Tengo hambre/ I am hungry,” while multiple moons repeated the phrase in a chorus of eight languages, including Yoruba, Turkish, and Vietnamese, with faces half covered in white grease paint before a green screen upon which the image of a full moon was imposed.



TOP LEFT: RODRIGO – LA LUNA / THE MOON
 BOTTOM LEFT: ASOKA- YORUBA MOON

TOP CENTER: LUKE – EL MENDIGO / THE BEGGAR
 BOTTOM CENTER: LUISINA -ARGENTINEAN MOON

TOP RIGHT: KIM – VIETNAMESE MOON
 BOTTOM RIGHT: EBRU – TURKISH MOON

All participants gained new skills. I learned how to direct a production by encouraging each student to play an active role in their own development, to enjoy the process, laugh at our imperfections, and value each person's contributions. I also arranged coaching with Spanish speaking friends, intervened when an infuriated father found the red kimono costume too suggestive for his daughter, and connected with other parents and families who were supportive and grateful to see their children so engaged, laboring for hours, immersed as a team in a protracted school activity. An important goal agreed upon by all was to be flexible and inclusive. We intentionally extended participation to students who were immigrants or of mixed status, their families from Vietnam, Turkey, Nigeria, Germany, Peru, Bolivia, Hungary, Holland, Romania, France, Argentina, Korea, China, and Brazil. My personal goal was to find ways for our newcomers from Brazil to be an integral part of the film.

Our Brazilian student population was increasing, but with the exception of soccer, few of the newcomers participated in after school activities due to jobs or demands from family and church. One recently arrived Brazilian student in my first-year Spanish language class, for example, spoke no English and worked forty hours a week after school as a hotel chamber maid. To feel welcomed, she needed to socialize, but the only way she and others could be involved in filming activities was to have rehearsals and filming accommodate their work schedules and get support from other teachers and classmates. Consequently, the collectivity of the group was tightened which intensified the impact.

The following year, while on sabbatical in graduate school, I had the opportunity to reflect and analyze the process while examining the high dropout rate from high school among Latinx and recent immigrants nationally. I studied the impact of the arts to engage students and counter that "early-exiter" trend. Encouraged by a professor to do a case study based on our *Bodas de Sangre* movie project, I interviewed thirty-three people related to the film, including students, parents, teachers and administrators, Latinx community members, professors, and a Brazilian Fulbright scholar at Harvard's Graduate School of Education. I have transcribed some of the voices of the newcomers below (see *Breaking Silence/ Linking Voices*. YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjFFjBb-TCc&feature=emb_logo).

Rodrigo first welcomed me to the living room of his home as we watched excerpts from the videotape of the *Bodas de Sangre* movie projected onto a small television screen filled with the powerful image of him in the role of the Moon. Listening again to his original jazz interpretation of Lorca's words, sung with impeccable Spanish and deep emotion, I marveled at his talent and amazing voice. I also remembered how difficult it was to schedule him for rehearsal and filming because of his responsibilities for the evangelical church where Rodrigo's father was the pastor.

Rodrigo is exceptionally friendly, always exuding kindness and appreciation of life and learning; yet in the interview, he shared a profound sadness describing the pain of prejudice.

I've been in this country for five years, and I was born in Brazil. When I came here ... it just gave me like a shock because I never thought that I would face a second culture ... different than the one I had learned ... the first 12 years of my life I learned how to deal with it In the beginning, kids when they are like very ignorant, they don't know what they are doing or what's happening around them. I heard lots of 'Oh, my God, when are these Brazilians gonna get out of here'.... So, it was kind of like saddening for me because I'd never thought that I'd hear such things I learned how to just overhear that ... like when you hear something sometimes you put it down in your heart and sometimes it just goes through your ear I learned how not to listen.

Rodrigo described being in the movie as something that "shaped him" and made him "a very lived person."

Before my second interview with Rodrigo, I followed him around the school with my camera capturing his affable gestures and high-fives with every student he passed in the hallways. I was impressed with how much he had become an admired school leader. I learned later that despite his popularity, when he was invited to sing the national anthem at a football game, he heard the remark "these fucking spics" murmured loudly enough to hurt. Our interview continued in the photography shop where he worked every day after school except for Fridays when he volunteered at the hospital. Rodrigo's ambition since he was two-years old was to become a physician.

In our recent conversations (March 2021), Rodrigo said, "Things didn't quite work out the way I planned... I didn't have a green card when I graduated high school, so I had to go into the workforce until the paperwork came through." After 9/11, his father was ordered to reprocess his green card application which postponed Rodrigo's plan to go to college for three years. By that time, he felt discouraged at the thought of many years of training in medical school. "I started out with business classes at the community college, paid for by the local bank I worked at, and then switched to computer engineering." Rodrigo needed to get away from the confines of the Church. He knew he was gay and could not come out to his parents yet, nor could he remain in the "toxic" environment among evangelicals. Because he is resourceful, bright, and brave, he managed on his own to transfer with a full scholarship to the University of Southern California where he could be himself in the sunshine of the other coast.

Rodrigo described going through a period of concern that affirmative action was the reason for his acceptance to USC until he discovered that wealthy white students had test prep tutoring, influential family members promising funding, a sense of entitlement, and other advantages. Rodrigo now works for Microsoft as a programmer, mentors others entering the field, does outreach and recruiting, and is active in the LGBTQ movement. Happy with his career and life, he was recently able to be open with his family about his life choices. He describes a touching discussion with his father who confessed that he was worried that his son would never be married; but he let Rodrigo know he will always be loved.

Andre came to the US from Brazil at fifteen and taught himself English by watching television. His main role in the film was as the director of subtitles, although he acted in some scenes as well. His native language is Portuguese, yet he managed to translate from Spanish to English and to match the text with the action of the film. I'd often see him in the computer room doing this detailed work with professional precision. He arrived in high school mid-year as a junior and regretted not having the full experience. Yet, within a year, he was translating subtitles using three languages.

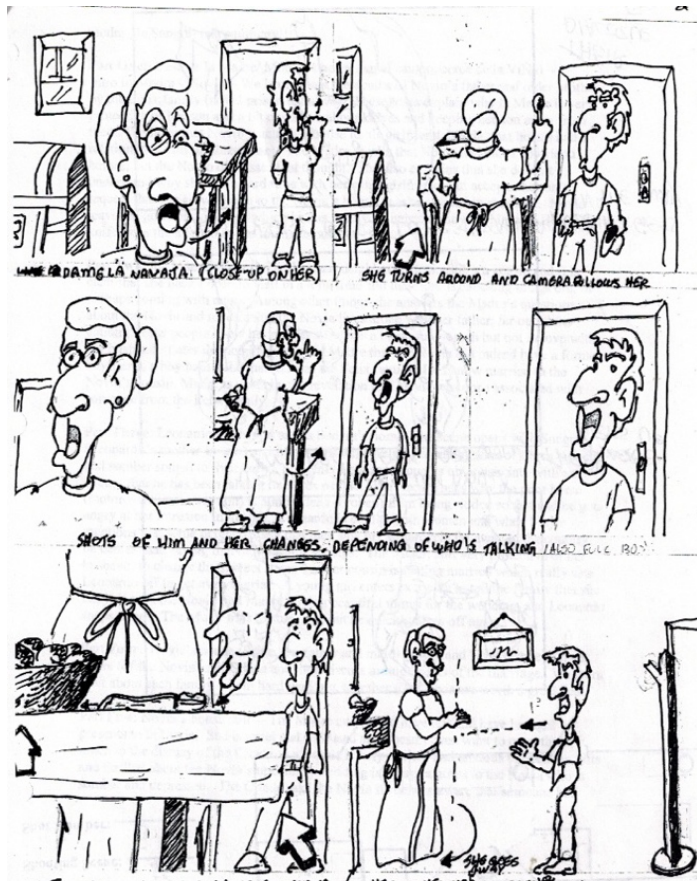
When I conducted case study interviews in 2003, Andre had graduated from high school. I found him at his job in a video store and later we chatted on the porch at his girlfriend's house. "High school just made me like keep growing a bit more so I can go to college, get better, better everything." He pondered his part in the film production modestly. But the smile on his face gave away the pride he felt as he listed the tasks he accomplished and the skills he gained.

In recent conversations with Andre (March 2021), he shared that after graduation his parents returned to Brazil, and he had to work to survive, postponing his dream of going to college. Now he is a new dad with a secure job in financial services and has worked gradually on completing his bachelor's degree in IT and Business at UMass Lowell. When asked what working on the film meant to him, he said "the biggest impact to me is that some experiences will stay

with you no matter how much time has gone by, while others will be buried in your memory somewhere. So, it's important to focus on the moment in order to make the best of everything."

Henrique was seven when his father first left Brazil to get work in the US. Six years later in 2000, he brought the whole family to Martha's Vineyard. After school, Henrique worked in a restaurant, but he was able to create an outline for the storyboard in art class during school. At home after work, while completing assignments for school, he captured the progression of each scene of the film in fifty-one pages of meticulous artistry and aesthetic vision. He described his dedication and fierce discipline as storyboard designer and art director of the film: "I started getting ideas in my head... it was a new experience that I really wanted to try."

When I interviewed Henrique for the case study in 2003, he was immersed in a project at school in the art room, surrounded by paints and brushes, pens and paper. He was an outstanding student who excelled academically as well as being an extraordinary artist. In order to create the storyboard, Henrique, who was a sophomore, had to comprehend Lorca's play in Spanish on his own because his second-year class was not yet reading complicated literature. He consulted with the director of photography, a senior familiar with the play, and together formulated each shot. Although he was reserved and had no desire to act, to please the group he joined the cast during the celebration scene, taking the silent role of wedding photographer.



LEFT: SAMPLE PAGE OF STORYBOARD BY HENRIQUE



RIGHT: POSTER BY ARTIST HENRIQUE AGUIAR

In recent conversations with Henrique (March 2021), I learned that he went to film school and lived in NYC for six years working on independent films and a Brazilian television show that interviewed local immigrants. He credits participation in *Bodas* as the spark that influenced his choice to go to film school. When he could not earn enough income to survive in NY and his part-time film jobs did not allow him to use his creative abilities, he decided to go back to school to earn a double degree in computer science and math at UMass Amherst. I reminded him that in high school he mentioned he wanted to be a lawyer, and I asked if he regretted studying film. Here's his response:

I'd say lawyer because I did not know what I really wanted.... The movie [*Bodas*] certainly gave me more confidence. I never regretted going to film school, although it didn't work out as I intended. I had an amazing experience in the profession and in NYC. I had a chance to express my ideas and creativity in a new media. I lived and loved every second of it. When I look at the bigger picture, choosing film changed the path of my life.... These experiences shape you and become part of your life story.... The value of the experience is something I wouldn't trade for anything.

Today Henrique, like Andre, is a new dad. He enjoys his work as a systems analyst for an investment company, but misses working creatively. "Film is still in my mind, but unfortunately, it is on the back burner for now."

In 2003, when I interviewed Fabricia for the case study, I was pleased to see her progress in learning English and observed the confidence she expressed in the same school environment that overwhelmed her when we first met. She said, "I work at a hotel about 40 hours per week and study. It is hard. But you have to try to get a good future.... I did a part of the movie last year and I didn't speak any English, so now I'm speaking like a little bit more. It was really nice. I love it, and I really want to do it again. And I recommend for everyone."

In *Bodas de Sangre*, she had played a small role in the wedding scene. To make sure she could participate, we coordinated with thirty cast members to film before she had to work and provided a ride so she would not be late. A blonde wig, a colorful scarf, and a fancy hat were enough to transform this shy young woman into a vibrant actress enjoying new friends and owning her contribution. Fabricia did indeed "do it again" two years after the *Bodas* movie project. In her third-year Spanish class, Fabricia played the lead role in a mystery film script we wrote in class. Henrique, by then a senior, shot and edited the DVD which was aired on public access television.

When I visited with Fabricia two years ago, she still spoke with appreciation for the time we had spent together making movies. She had been a student in danger of exiting early from high school, but her inclusion in creative school projects kept her engaged, and her participation fostered the self-confidence she needed to graduate. Rather than pursue her dream to study journalism, Fabricia continued to work in hotels after high school to send money to her family in Brazil. Eventually, she got promoted to what she considered an ideal job cleaning and maintaining properties owned by a wealthy newspaper executive who provided free

housing for her, her husband, and new baby. He also helped her procure a green card making it possible to visit her family in Brazil and to introduce them to her child. I found out just after our reunion that the executive had suddenly died, and her living situation was again precarious. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate her since. I had hoped to encourage Fabricia to take community college courses in the future because my bias is that education is the pathway to greater satisfaction. I wonder now if Fabricia's dreams were more constrained due to gender as well as social class restrictions. From an early age, she was burdened with financial responsibilities to her family in Brazil, yet she had been separated from them since her early teens. All four of the newcomer students shared experiences of sacrifice and deferred choices. Yet, most importantly, they all exhibit wisdom, strength, and resilience as they navigate their adult lives.

I also gathered feedback from recent conversations (March 2021) with other former students with major roles in the *Bodas* project. All four are women who were born and raised on Martha's Vineyard, white and brown, from working-and middle-class families, college graduates, three with master's degrees, all with jobs in helping professions – two in conservation of land and water, one an elementary Spanish teacher, the other a public health nurse. All have done service work in Latin America – in a women's clinic in the Dominican Republic, in an orphanage in Guatemala, building a playground in Peru – exposing them, according to Jennifer, "to both global inequalities and our common humanity ... an experience I carry with me to this day. It was my experience in high school that first sparked my interest ... in creating a sense of inclusion and belonging. [It] planted the seed" (Jennifer Sepanara, conversation March 2021). Jamie Burgoyne in a conversation in March 2021 recalled:

Being a part of the production showed me how my part connected and influenced the roles of others.... I did a poor job of memorizing my lines the days/weeks before the scene was to be shot, however, there was no way I could bail on the responsibility... others were depending on me, imperfections and all...how one's actions can affect the group as a whole... [T]he movie gave me a chance to collaborate and SEE others, students that were not usually a part of my peer group... Brazilian immigrant students, Asian, international students, and students of color in particular. I remember being so wowed [It] helped me to build empathy for different communities and cultures around me ... so affirming to my personal life choices.... The message was: get involved.

Students and professors interviewed in the 2003 case study generally agreed that the film project stimulated immersion in the "magic" of the work, collaborating as a team, being recognized by and recognizing the accomplishments of others, and fulfilling their commitment to themselves, the audience, and community.

These collective conversations confirm the power of the arts in education especially during a crisis period. Henrique says, "9/11 was definitely a shocking moment, but my life influences and focus were tied to my family here and my friends and extended family in Brazil.... My family was still planning on going back and making a living there.... Looking

back, I see how the movie brought so many students together whose backgrounds are so different.... It may have helped with the healing.”

Andre’s words sum up much of what I’d hoped to give my students:

[9/11] was the first time that I experienced the difference between patriotism and nationalism. I watched the nation band together in unison to heal, while simultaneously noticing the animosity that brewed for those who were considered outsiders.... The *Bodas* project to me represented the best of inclusivity and what people from everywhere can accomplish when they work together with a common goal.

Conclusion

Although both projects emerged from crises - the first, a local accident that shook our small island community, the other a shock to the nation with local repercussions - these lessons must not be reserved for extraordinary moments of crises.

Community and the arts, these two essential ingredients, help students affirm their self-worth. Community with its dynamic diversity in nationality, culture, age, and expertise is a vital resource for teaching all students, particularly immigrant/migrant students, by infusing a sense of belonging. The arts and collaborative artmaking provide a pathway for engaging in learning for students to reach beyond themselves. Bridging classroom and community in mutual exchange and relationship inspires students to participate in society with compassion and curiosity, building a more humanizing transformation of the world.

Notes

¹Note that *Borders to Bridges: Creative Activities for Belonging, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* is not yet published; however, updated information, resources and teacher guides are in *Focus on Immigration Education and Stories Through the Arts* (FIESTA; <https://fiesta-immigrationfocus.com>)

²In *Borders to Bridges* curriculum, the instructions detail nineteen steps divided into seven 45-minute sessions: (1) Family Groups; (2) Crisis in Towns; (3) Gathering with Community Advisors; (4) Research Investigation; (5) Advocacy Research and Preparation; (6) Courtroom (or public) Hearing; (7) Conclusion Assessment, and countries changed to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to focus on asylum seekers at the border.

³This project was devised with Spanish teachers Victoria Dryfoos and Justine Shemeth DeOliveira in collaboration with Judge Liza Williamson.

References

- Conchas, G. & Acevedo, N. (2020). *The Chicana/o/x Dream: Hope, Resistance, and Educational Success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press.
- Cornejo Villavicencio, Karla (2020). *The Undocumented Americans*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House LLC.
- Davis, J. H. (2008). *Why Schools Need the Arts*. New York, NY: Teacher’s College Press.
- Ditchfield, L. (Director, Producer). (2002). *Bodas de Sangre/ Blood Wedding*. [Video]. YouTube. MVYPS Student Production of Federico García Lorca’s play. Retrieved: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xu2eqfdpJUY>.
- Ditchfield, L. (Director). (2003). *Breaking Silence/ Linking Voices*. Student & Professor Interviews with Gil Conchas, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, Jessica Hoffmann Davis, Pedro Noguera [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjFFjBb-TCc&feature=emb_logo
- Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 50th Anniversary Edition. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
- Gonzales, Roberto G., Nando Sigona, Martha C. Franco, Anna Papoutsi (2019). *Undocumented Migration (Immigration & Society)*. Polity Press: Medford, MA.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2020, November 20). Education’s hard re-set. [YouTube]. RILE 2020 Race Policy and Reform Stanford Graduate School of Education. Retrieved <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzfqWRB0jr4&feature=youtu.be>
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. & Ewing, E.L. (2021, January 14). Eve L. Ewing interviews Sara Lawrence Lightfoot on family curriculum and social inheritance. [YouTube]. *CrossGenConversation* of Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4vfghQ_6Rc&t=21s
- Levy, G. (2019, May 30). The Real Story of Black Martha’s Vineyard. *Narratively*. Retrieved from <https://narratively.com/the-real-story-of-black-marthas-vineyard/>
- Massachusetts Department of Education. (2020). School and District Profiles. Retrieved from <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?orgtypecode=6&orgcode=07000505>
- Noguera, P. (2019, July 12). *Project Based Learning & Equity*. [Webinar]. PBL Works 2109. Retrieved: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2XCsskVAtPU>
- Schüller, S. (2012, November). The Effects of 9/11 on Attitudes Toward Immigration and the Moderating Role of Education. In: *Discussion Paper Series. Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit Institute for the Study of Labor IZA DP No. 7052*. Retrieved: <http://ftp.iza.org/dp7052.pdf>.
- Tonti, A. (2002, May 9). Blood Wedding All in Spanish First DVD Film. In *The Vineyard Gazette*. Retrieved:

<https://vineyardgazette.com/news/2002/05/09/blood-wedding-all-spanish-students-make-first-dvd-film>

Wilkerson, Isabel (2020). *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. New York, NY: Random House, LCC.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/press/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

The Impact of Loss and Alienation in English Language Learners

by Miguel Abrantes Antunes



LATINO CLUB STREET ART & BROOKLYN HISPANIC HISTORY FIELD TRIP (2016). IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHOR.

I said goodbye to another recently arrived immigrant student in the fall semester in a manner relatively common in my years as a high school educator in urban districts both in New York and Pennsylvania. It is common to bid students farewell during certain periods of the educational year, such as the end of a school year and upon graduation. Educators of immigrants and English Language Learners (ELLs) know goodbyes can happen at any moment. Such was the goodbye I exchanged with this young Latinx student. Her ongoing struggle to find both a physical and emotional home since Hurricane Maria displaced her from Puerto Rico is the experience of many recently arrived immigrants to the United States. This all-too-common experience encompasses the arduous challenge for ELL students to find their place while longing for the past and seeking solace in the promise of the future.

Educational institutions have the capacity to support students through their emotional struggles with racial melancholia, dissociation, and cultural assimilation. However, it is my contention that secondary educational institutions routinely neglect the persistent emotional impact of racial melancholia and dissociation while reinforcing oppressive Eurocentric curricula teeming with white privilege that undermines cultural diversity. Moreover, one underlying reason why much modern curricula is devoid of diversity and humanity is because of its subordination to standardized testing leading to rote, ineffectual academic experiences negating the development of critical thinking skills and critical consciousness for immigrant students and English Language Learners. Through a combination of varied academic resources, personal interviews with former students, and accumulated personal experiences as an educator, I intend to demonstrate the negative impacts of these emotional factors and educational policies on immigrant students who are English Language Learners. Additionally, I will suggest alternative educational approaches that validate them and simultaneously develop their intellectual and literacy skills. These concepts will be explored in two sections, the first focusing on racial melancholia and dissociation experienced by immigrant students and ELLs, the second on the hegemony of Eurocentric, white-privilege-laden academic curricula, and the negative consequences of test-driven curricula on students in general, but particularly for English Language Learners and recently arrived immigrants. My hope is this academic exploration will illuminate these overlooked emotional challenges and systemic educational failures substantially affecting one of the most vulnerable student populations in the United States.

Racial Melancholia & Dissociation

"I was in a dark place when I was first here in the United States" is what one of my former high school students, currently enrolled in college, said in a recent interview about her initial experiences in the United States (Interview "Mercedes," 12/22/2020). This former student from my time as an educator in Brooklyn, N.Y., referred to as Mercedes for the purposes of anonymity, had an extremely difficult transition to high school when she and her family immigrated to Brooklyn, N.Y. from the Dominican Republic.

Apart from the obvious challenges of language acquisition, cultural acclimation, and economic survival, Mercedes was dropped down two grades compared to her academic progress in the Dominican Republic. As an incoming student to high school in New York City, she was placed in the 9th grade when she would have been starting the 11th grade in her home country, a practice that happens with surprising frequency. The "darkness" Mercedes felt lingered for months and exemplifies the racial melancholia experienced by many recently arrived immigrant students. In *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation in the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*, David Eng and Shinhee Han explored this phenomenon among Asian immigrant populations. According to Freud, melancholia is "a mourning without end." Eng and Han state that "Interminable grief is the result of the melancholic's inability to resolve the various conflicts and ambivalences that the loss of the loved object or ideal effects. In other words, the melancholic cannot 'get over' this loss." This complex and lingering sensation of loss and sadness is precisely what my former students express in their interviews. Mercedes recalls how these feelings resurfaced multiple times throughout her high school years. As such, I wholeheartedly agree with Eng and Han that "melancholia presents a compelling framework to conceptualize registers of loss and depression attendant to both psychic and material processes of assimilation" (669-671).

Mercedes recalls that, "These feelings returned when I was alone.... This was my process of adapting to this new country." This experience is applicable to recently arrived English Language Learners from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. The sensations of loss, grief, sadness, and trauma are comparable among varied immigrant groups, and we as educators must be cognizant of their profound impact. The process of assimilation - a compromise against one's own identity - is complex and cannot be restricted to a particular period to overcome this grief. Compounding this strife is the emotional volatility and fragility experienced by teenagers due to the neurological developments occurring at this time in their lives. Hence the recurring feelings experienced by Mercedes throughout high school.

Another former student, Helena for our purposes, explained that when enrolled in high school in North Carolina, "I was always eager to go home from school and would get upset when I knew I had to go back." She continued by stating that there was "No diversity at the school and I didn't really feel that I fit in" (Interview with "Helena," 12/15/2020). There is a longing for the "lost object." Therefore, recollections of one's home, family, culture, language, and personal experiences are newly imbued with one's sense of one's former self as he/she adapts to new circumstances post-immigration. This debilitating emotional "damage" can manifest itself in numerous ways including depression with a "tendency to suicide" (Eng and Han, 670-672). Over the past 15 years, I've had many conversations with recently arrived immigrant students dealing with their thoughts of suicide. The scars on their wrists, arms, and other parts of their bodies purposely kept hidden are the lingering reminders of moments of great despair during their emotional struggles post-immigration. Helena was one of those students. She

cut herself. We discussed those scars and their emotional intensity, their significance. Therefore, my classroom must be a community for my students, a safe space to inhabit like a home. If my students feel safe and trusted in our shared space, then we can explore, mutually learn, and grow.

The intensity of these emotions can be overwhelming as these young immigrant students negotiate the assimilation process. For them, the notions of acceptance and validation are paramount. Recently arrived English Language Learners strive for acceptance yet are frequently ostracized within American mainstream culture. Therein lies the great deceit and cognitive dissonance about the assimilation process. Recently arrived students seek acceptance and stability but are culturally rebuffed because they are not represented in the idealized norms most valued in our country where "whiteness, heterosexuality, middle-class family values [are] often foreclosed to them" (Eng and Han, 670). For them, the sense of belonging supposedly gained through the assimilation process is never truly achievable. Their melancholia can linger perpetually unresolved as assimilation will not provide reconciliation between their dichotomous cultural experiences.

This incessant melancholia and subsequent dissociation, however, can be confronted and partially remedied through acceptance into a community. As Mercedes passionately expressed, "*Having a community is very powerful when you are new to a country.*" The educational experiences she had as a newly arrived immigrant and English Language Learner within a high school community that validated her experiences and cultural autonomy reinforced her self-esteem. Mercedes felt extremely motivated and inspired by the educational and cultural experiences of her high school in Brooklyn claiming, "This is what a community is. To have until you are 60 years old" ("Mercedes," 12/22/ 2020). Here Mercedes refers to the foundational inspiration, celebration of diversity, and academic structures of her former high school that was founded for recently arrived immigrant youth where she always had a voice and felt secure and confident. The significance of establishing these feelings of confidence and empowerment cannot be overstated for immigrant youth. "Having a community is very powerful" precisely because "the experience of immigration itself is based on a structure of mourning." When experiencing great loss and immense mourning, one needs to find an outlet for these emotions. One method to combat this mourning and melancholia is to work towards a specific objective such as "the American dream, for example" (Eng and Han, 679-680).

As an educator working exclusively with English Language Learners and recently arrived immigrant students, I've been repeatedly told by students and their families that their hope is to have a better life. I have heard that phrase, "better life," expressed hundreds of times in multiple languages. To have a better life is undeniably a fundamental aspect of the American dream. Whether immigrant or native born, we all want access to this abstract notion of the American dream that includes financial security, success, acceptance, and prestige. But what if your identity, culture, skin color, or sexuality preclude you from accessing the

American dream? What if your cultural ancestry or ethnic background was previously excluded by American society and culture? Numerous racial and ethnic groups have been demonized throughout American history with some being legally prevented from entering our country. Under former President Trump immigrants who were Muslims were banned from traveling to the US. He also made vitriolic remarks about Mexicans and people from the Global South. Do these individuals have access to the American dream?

I have also taught several students who were DREAMers and DACA recipients prior to that federally funded program's termination during the Trump Administration. These DREAMers were extremely aware of their insecure status and of the constant looming threat of deportation because their parents brought them to the US when they were children without proper documentation. They understand all too well their excluded social status within American society and how the American dream is kept beyond their reach because of their birthplace. They are victims of the duplicitousness of the United States' supposed ideals of liberty, individual sovereignty, and inclusion, and its immigration policy imbued with white privilege. As Mercedes says, "I was not worthy.... It is an ugly feeling that I cannot really explain very well." She explained how she began to think, "I can't do this anymore. Why try?" (Interview, 12/22/2020). These are the potentially life-altering consequences recently arrived English Language Learners confront due to racial melancholia and dissociation.

As educators it is our professional obligation to acknowledge these challenges and make our immigrant students aware that their voices and experiences matter in the context of their educational community as well as in the US. Her sense of belonging and reaffirmation of her self-esteem and identity, consistently reinforced by Mercedes' community of teachers and classmates, nurtured her achievement. Mercedes was a leader of the National Honor Society chapter of her high school, actively participated in numerous clubs in multiple capacities, and graduated as valedictorian of her class. This from a student who spoke minimal English when she entered high school as a 9th grader. Mercedes and Helena's educational community was an essential support for their success.

Overcoming Alienating Curricula & Standardized Testing

Educators must redress the persistent failures of our curricula across disciplines. It is our obligation to reclaim our autonomy in determining curricular trajectories rather than remain beholden to standardized testing and the homogeneous perspectives they perpetuate to the detriment of our increasingly diverse student population. When discussing her educational experiences while living in North Carolina, Helena stated, "I don't really remember anything from those classes. The classes never sparked anything in me." Additionally, she recalled feeling lost and that the limited interaction with students by teachers made it seem as if there were "no warmth in the community." This was

education through textbooks and handouts, devoid of the humanity necessary to forge a personal connection with students through mutual respect and collaboration. Traditional Eurocentric curriculum imbued with white privilege stifles cultural diversity and undermines the essential humanity of our immigrant and English Language Learner populations (Interview with former student "Helena," 12/15/2020). It is up to us educators to help these students confront these discriminatory educational practices while validating their cultural experiences and fostering self-esteem.

As an educator teaching in Brooklyn, N.Y., at a high school dedicated to educating recently arrived immigrant students, validating their immigrant experience and utilizing inclusive academic materials were fundamental practices implemented in all disciplines. These were not "radical" concepts within that educational community, but fundamental principles of action and equity striving to support students in developing their autonomy and the critical thinking skills necessary to wrestle with the complexities of their identities within American society. As Paulo Freire argues in his book, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, "The education our situation demanded would enable men to discuss courageously the problems of their context - and to intervene in that context; it would ... offer them the confidence and the strength to confront those dangers instead of surrendering their sense of self through submission to the decisions of others" (30).

References to these diverse cultures were often dismissive, implying the inevitable destiny of domination by European colonizers and their cultural legacy, as if these indigenous populations and diverse cultures simply surrendered to European dominance.

My professional educational training in Social Studies, English language arts, and ESL forced me to confront the lack of cultural diversity and resources for these content areas available in the state curriculums of New York and Pennsylvania. As a global history teacher in Brooklyn, N.Y., the textbook we could have adopted had extremely limited references to indigenous cultures, Latinx populations, and people of color - the exact opposite of the diverse demographics of my classroom. References to these diverse cultures were often dismissive, implying the inevitable destiny of domination by European colonizers and their cultural legacy, as if these indigenous populations and diverse cultures simply surrendered to European dominance. I could not teach this one-sided historical narrative to my global history students. My goal was to teach my recently arrived immigrant students how "to reevaluate constantly, to analyze 'findings,' to adopt scientific methods and processes, and to perceive themselves in dialectical relationship with their social reality " because this type of education would allow them "to assume an increasingly

critical attitude toward the world and so to transform it" (Freire, 30).

Consequently, I chose to validate the cultural autonomy of my immigrant students while simultaneously supporting the development of their independent critical thinking skills. It is essential that I engage in a collaborative relationship with my students to develop the necessary trust and "buy-in" required for meaningful academic engagement. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire critically examines the reductive narrative character of the teacher-student relationship in which the content "become lifeless and petrified." This is the education of textbooks and handouts previously described by my former students. Freire postulates that "the teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experiences of the students ... Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity" (57).

The opposite should be true when working with recently arrived English Language Learners. The content these students engage in should not be "completely alien" to their experiences. Rather, as another former student of mine expressed during her interview, "Classes were about us." This Latinx student, Jadie herein, recalled how "We were representatives of our own culture" and how classes "encouraged us to think about our own story and then reflect back on the world" (Interview with "Jadie," former student, 12/18/2020). This self-examination validates identity and supports self-esteem, allowing for collaborative work on critical thinking skills. Otherwise, educators engage in the "banking" concept of education" where all student autonomy is extinguished (Freire, 58). As educators of recently arrived English Language Learners, we must "embody respect" as Eric Jensen maintains in his influential text *Teaching With Poverty in Mind*. Jensen asserts that educators should "share the decision making in class." Furthermore, he professes the importance of "giv[ing] respect to students first" while acknowledging that for many educators, "It may require a considerable shift in your thinking" (21).

To "embody respect" and "respect students first" I've asked myself these fundamental questions when creating new content materials: Does this material provide opportunities for all of my students to engage and have a voice? How can students lead and collaborate to successfully engage with the material? By creating materials specifically designed for students and providing them leadership opportunities throughout their inquiries, my class is built on a foundation of respect. This is a student-centered curriculum from its inception. Additionally, when conducting class, I maintain a mild tone and an openness to inquiries related to our content materials. Students are encouraged to reinterpret and critically examine what we are reading to develop their own expertise and share with classmates. I acknowledge my own mistakes and don't present myself as an oracle of knowledge. I consistently acknowledge we are learning together.

For instance, as a global history educator I was tasked with providing instruction about ancient civilizations. I purposefully chose ancient civilizations which existed in several of the countries where my recently arrived immigrant students came from. I intentionally chose to discuss the Triple Alliance (Aztec), Inca Empire (Tawantinsuyu), Taino civilization (Caribbean), the Mali Empire, and Mansa Musa as opposed to focusing on Ancient Greece or the Roman Empire because I did not have any immigrant students originally from Europe. Additionally, I focused much of this instruction on the indigenous populations from these regions and past civilizations because this validated the cultural inheritance of my students. As a teacher responsible for preparing students to pass a New York State Regents Examination, a State mandated graduation requirement, the choices made regarding my instructional focus were a calculated risk. After all, I knew that more attention would be given to the Roman Empire and Ancient Greece on the Global History Regent Examination, not the civilizations I chose for my class. This is an example of how white privilege and Eurocentric perspectives directly influence instruction and assessments. However, by focusing on skill development, such as critical thinking, literacy, and argumentative writing, several students were able to pass these exams on their first attempt. Students often expressed amazement about how little they knew of their own countries' indigenous history because this is rarely taught. This motivated most students to perform very well on group projects and assessments such as argumentative essays. Also, creating materials that were thematically based, such as on economic issues like poverty, allowed my extremely heterogeneous classes to discover commonality and begin eradicating some of their previously held ethnic and racial stereotypes.

As a result, my former student Helena stated how classes were "very eye opening" and asked, "I wonder if I would be thinking the same things if I didn't have that class?" (Interview, 12/15/2020). I entrusted my students with as much autonomy as possible to give direction to my course. As Freire puts it regarding educators, "From the outset, his efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization.... To achieve this, he must be a partner of the students in his relations with them" (*Pedagogy* 62) partnership has the potential to generate profound academic experiences for my students and legitimize their experiences. Recently arrived ELLs have as much capacity for critical thinking and thoughtful engagement as native

born students if we provide an academic environment that is holistic and suited to their needs. Another former Latinx student, referred to as Elsa, explained that "The struggle with language made me frustrated and sad, especially when I wanted to respond and share information about something that I knew about, but felt that I didn't have all the words to say it." This is one of the great obstacles recently arrived English Language Learners must constantly overcome: limited language proficiency doesn't equate to limited intellectual capacity. Educators are responsible for providing the necessary instructional strategies to allow immigrant students to express their thoughts regardless of language proficiency, and the same should be true for teachers of all disciplines. English Language Learners should have access to some form of translation support to effectively utilize translanguaging to communicate their ideas in class. Instructional materials should offer students at various



LATINO CLUB MEETING - PHOTO CREDIT: LUIS PERUSINA. IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHOR.

language proficiencies an appropriately complex version of the information necessary to engage in class. If discussing a theme such as discrimination, why can't students use different materials to reflect on the same topic? I've become relatively adept at differentiating materials in my academic classes, and my students have responded positively to these efforts to support their academic abilities while validating their identities. Their appreciation was often expressed by engaging deeply with academic materials that reflected their own cultural identities and personal experiences. An example is our explorations of European colonialism and the resistance of indigenous and enslaved populations throughout the Caribbean and Central America, where many of my students were from. We researched Mayan and Aztec scientific and cultural contributions and emphasized their significance and legacy. We explored historical records of narratives from some of the first enslaved people brought to what is now New York City. I also led my students on a Lower Manhattan walking tour past Trinity Church and Wall Street

to the site of the first slave market established in New Amsterdam to demonstrate the living history of the vast city my students called home.

Elsa eloquently discussed this concept when recalling her high school experiences in a recent interview: "What I loved the most about this class was exploring what we are going through including gender roles, our reality. It was important to learn these terms and the specific language for them." These academic experiences had a profound impact on her self-esteem and personal identity. She claimed that "everyone has the capacity to do the same things as others. I learned that a Latinx woman like myself can achieve much more than the societal expectations based on stereotypes." Elsa described this experience as "the light in the darkness." (Interview, 12/28/2020).

Educators need to create meaningful and empowering educational experiences by focusing their academic inquiries on the issues that directly impact their students. "In problem-posing education, men develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves ... and thus establish an

reflection, and critical consciousness for recently arrived English Language Learners. Tragically, in these academic courses students routinely read the literary works of "dead white men." How is literature of this kind relatable to students who, upon arrival, are quickly codified within our society's racial hierarchy? Limiting the number of literary works written by people of color is a form of cultural hegemony through exclusion. As an English Language Arts and ESL educator, I was troubled to discover that high school students in this predominantly Hispanic school district were exposed to only one novel written by a Latinx author. Clearly the four-year English curriculum does not reflect the demographics of this school district. Excluding the literary works of people of color, whether intentional or not, reinforces the students' sense of cultural inferiority and devalues the intersectionality and complex identities of our immigrant students and ELLs.

In response to this dilemma, my Communication Arts course entitled "Literature About Our Lives" features intersectionality and diversity while simultaneously examining the social justice issues relevant to our immigrant students and English Language Learners. The novels I've featured in my "Literature About Our Lives" course include the following texts: *Gabi, A Girl In Pieces* by Isabel Quintero, *The Book of Unknown Americans* by Cristina Henríquez, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. Additional novels I intend to teach are *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *How Dare the Sun Rise* by Sandra Uwiringiyimana, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz, *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago, *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, and *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. These varied texts share beautiful and poignant expressions of intersectionality and the struggle to reconcile complex identities with commentaries on social injustices from the perspectives of the individuals who suffer them.

Unfortunately, these alternative texts can be dismissed and vilified for their stance on social justice issues. While *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell is considered a literary and cinematic classic, Angie Thomas' contemporary novel, *The Hate U Give*, is considered controversial because it includes some explicit language in the character dialogue and critically portrays police brutality in the United States. This stark contradiction demonstrates the challenges of including alternative texts within a literature curriculum



LATINO CLUB OPENING FIESTA (2017). PHOTO CREDIT: LINDA PONCIANO. IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHOR.

authentic form of thought and action" (Freire, *Pedagogy*, 70-71). When considering which high school experiences shaped her perspective when she became a college student, Jadie said the "encouragement to write about her own story" and "consistent reflections back to her own experiences" (interview with "Jadie," former student, 6/18/2020). This student-centered educational approach empowers immigrant students to embrace and critically examine their complex identities within the context of their lived experiences.

The high school discipline of English Language Arts provides many opportunities for validation, experiential

beholden to traditional narratives, primarily from white, male authors. I've taught my curriculum focused on *The Hate U Give* twice, and on both occasions the response from students was overwhelmingly positive. This was reflected in their overall class performance through daily engagement and final grades. Class discussions often demonstrated the nuance and complexity of the central issues explored in *The Hate U Give*. Routinely our discussions returned to issues of policing and the violence that minority communities face. Heated debates occurred between students with differing views on who is to blame for Khalil's death in the novel. Some vehemently believe the police officer in this novel is guilty of homicide while others claim Khalil brought on his own demise. Whatever their individual opinions may be, these English Language Learners are readily exploring a relevant topic that may impact their own lives and is reflected constantly in our media culture.

Equally oppressive to the exclusion of alternative texts within English curriculum is standardized testing. As Dianne Ravitch contends in her compelling book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, "No Child Left Behind (NCLB) changed the nature of public schooling ... by making standardized test scores the primary measure of school quality." More pointedly, due to the implementation of the No Child Left Behind program enacted in January 2002, standardized testing "... became the purpose of education" (17). In explaining how the No Child Left Behind program directly changed instruction, she states that "In light of punitive sanctions, states were incentivized to lower their standards so that most students would meet 'proficiency,' however, it was defined." This was because of NCLB's mandate that "test scores go up every year until 100 percent of students were 'proficient.' It was an impossible goal, but it was the law" (Ravitch, 23). I've witnessed the implications of these federal policies on recently arrived English Language Learners throughout my educational career. While teaching Global History in Brooklyn, N.Y., I had two annual cycles of after-school Regents prep for my 10th grade students who needed to pass their Global History Regents Examination to graduate. In the fall my Regents prep "class" was two days a week after school from 3:00-4:30 PM beginning six weeks prior to the dreaded Regents week. In the Spring semester, it was the same. All my students were recently arrived ELLs, but no exceptions were made for testing at that time. They were all required to pass the same five Regents Examinations as their American born peers with limited testing accommodations including only word-to-word translation dictionaries, translated versions of the Regents Exams depending on which languages were available, and additional time. As such, we faced several instances where students passed all their required classes but still could not graduate because they lacked one or more of the required Regents Examinations.

Unfortunately, the experience for my immigrant students in Pennsylvania is even worse. The immigrant ELLs I teach are subjected to at least six different standardized testing sessions per year including the Pennsylvania Keystone Exams, WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) Exams, and school district mandated

writing assessments. There are multiple Keystone, WIDA, and school district writing assessments throughout the school year, resulting in immigrant students sacrificing vital instructional time in six out of the ten months of the school year to comply with the standardized testing schedule. As Ravitch declares, "The gains in test scores at the state level were typically the result of teaching students test-taking skills and strategies, rather than broadening and deepening their knowledge of the world and their ability to understand what they had learned" (Ravitch, 116). Standardized testing reinforces the implementation of academic curriculum that is increasingly divorced from student experience. This is the antithesis of "problem-posing education" (Freire, 70-71). The prevalence of standardized testing is doubly dehumanizing because it hinders the autonomy of both educator and student. Educators responsible for a "tested course" are beholden to a curriculum purposely aligned to their academic discipline's standardized test leaving limited time for additional academic materials to be introduced during the school year. As such, their students have limited exposure to academic materials supporting the development of additional intellectual skills and offering varied perspectives. Consequently, students lose opportunities to engage in empowering and validating educational experiences that speak to their daily struggles.

Education should be uplifting for our students. As Jadie reminisced, English classes were like "looking at your soul." She explained this by stating that "The books in English class were somehow related to our history and culture. They always had something to do with us so they were always interesting and we were motivated to read them" (Interview "Jadie," 12/18/2020). This is why I chose the novels above in my literature courses. I want to provide my current students in Pennsylvania the same academic experiences my colleagues and I previously offered Jadie and her classmates in Brooklyn. The implications are far greater than just intellectual preparedness and the development of skills necessary to navigate the complexities of our world.

My intent here is to illuminate the emotional struggles experienced by recently arrived immigrant students and English Language Learners as well as their potential impact on academic performance. This can be done by implementing curricula that are student-centered and relevant to their cultural identities and experiences. Throughout my career I have worked with wonderful young immigrant students and English Language Learners. These young people arguably taught me more than I taught them. I am grateful for the educational collaboration and positive relationships we shared. Had my teaching of these recently arrived immigrant students and English Language Learners been driven by traditional curricula and overlooked their emotional needs, I doubt we would have accomplished as much together as we did. What is at stake for these students and educators is meaningful collaboration for mutual learning that validates diverse identities while addressing social injustices relevant to the lives of these remarkable young people.

Works Cited

- Alexie, Sherman. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Berlin: Cornelsen, 2009.
- Antunes, Miguel. Interview with Elsa - Pseudonym. Personal, December 28, 2020.
- Antunes, Miguel. Interview with Helena - Pseudonym. Personal, December 15, 2020.
- Antunes, Miguel. Interview with Jadie - Pseudonym. Personal, December 18, 2020.
- Antunes, Miguel. Interview with Mercedes - Pseudonym. Personal, December 22, 2020.
- Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. New York: Soho Press, 2015.
- Diaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2008.
- Eng, David L., and Shinhee Han. "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia." *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2000, pp. 667–700.
- Eng, David L., and Shinhee Han. *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: on the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Freire, Paulo. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. London: Bloomsbury Academic an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Herder and Herder, 1972.
- Henriquez, Cristina. *The Book of Unknown Americans*. New York: Vintage Books, 2014.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Amistad, 2006.
- Jensen, Eric. Essay. In *Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About It*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2010.
- Quintero, Isabel. *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2014.
- Ravitch, Diane. Essay. In *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*. New York: Basic Books, 2016.
- Santiago, Esmeralda. *When I Was Puerto Rican*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*. New York: HarperCollins, 2017.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



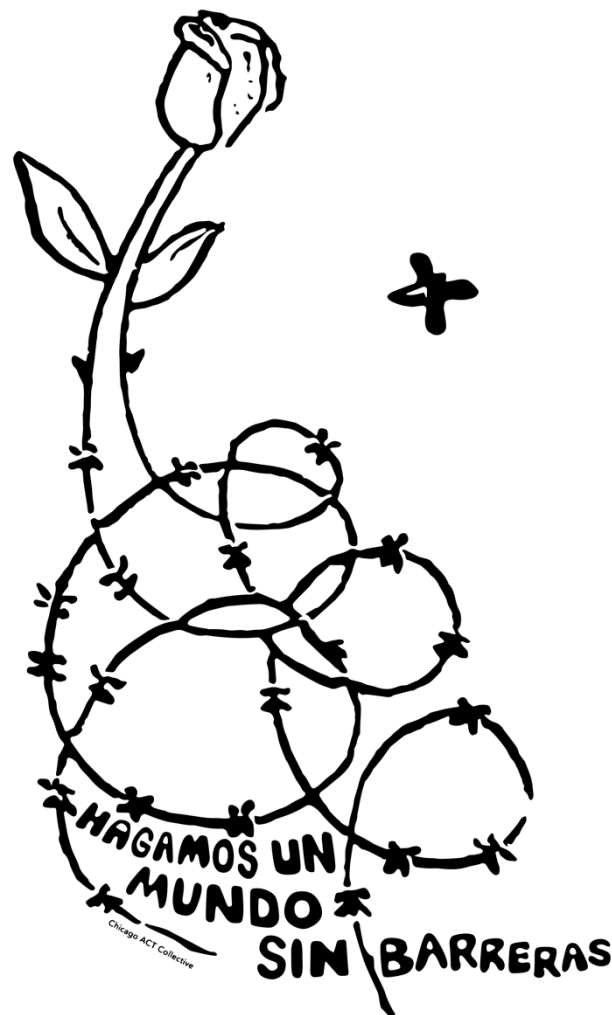
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/d-scribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Refugee Higher Education & Participatory Action Research Methods: Lessons Learned From the Field

by Hadas Yanay and Juan Battle



"WORLD WITHOUT WALLS" BY IVÁN ARENAS, CHICAGO ACT COLLECTIVE (2020) VIA JUSTSEEDS

In the following article, we review an online, higher education research initiative involving refugee learners, their experiences, and learning outcomes. Educators and other readers concerned with methods for participatory pedagogical practice in the digital realm may find our reflections of particular relevance and interest. It is no secret that the effects of COVID on higher education have been felt most dramatically by already underserved communities--delaying graduation for many in the best-case scenarios or contributing to higher drop-out rates and lower enrollments in the worst cases. Students, teachers, and academic administrators have had to adapt and find creative solutions to ensure higher education carries on uninterrupted. This article demonstrates a way, among many, in which technology and online education, as tools for adaptation, have transformed the way students access learning during COVID.

While technology requirements may have placed additional barriers in the way of completing a college degree for many students, for others, like GEM's refugee learners who are already well-versed in online learning, access to digital learning platforms represents a critical solution for expanding opportunities for skills-development and community-building beyond the refugee context. Combined with a participatory action research approach, learners also build a sense of agency and possibility--driving many to consider ways to support their own communities as problem solvers and changemakers. In this article, we demonstrate this participatory process and impact by reviewing a case study of a pilot research internship project, as part of the Global Education Movement (GEM), a program which partners with the South New Hampshire University (SNHU) to offer accredited, online college degree programs to refugees.

To help contextualize the role of higher education and GEM's participatory action research internship within the refugee context, it is important to point out that very few of the world's refugees are able to either return home, legally settle in the country to which they have fled or resettle to a third country. These options laid out by the international refugee response system are known as the "durable solutions." But with today's scale of displacement, the number of refugees that actually have access to these options is very small. That leaves the vast majority of refugees stuck in limbo in their host countries, dependent on aid and denied key rights such as the right to work, move freely, own property, and access public services. This reality requires us to think differently about how we can create new opportunities for refugees to lead a better quality of life. Fortunately, this growing recognition has led many humanitarian actors to prioritize alternative approaches, such as education and employment-based programming among other "complementary pathways," alongside resettlement.

Like other humanitarian actors and scholars, we believe a focus on higher education opportunities could be a welcome shift away from the historical tendency to view refugees as vulnerable or unable to determine their own futures. By contributing towards bolstering the agency of refugees to proactively find solutions to better their own lives and their communities through higher education, we

can begin to move away from this reflexive, self-defeating narrative. Making efforts to engage refugees meaningfully as active participants in the identification and design of refugee solutions is fundamental to create this shift in perspective among refugees. Of course, this participatory action approach is not limited to the refugee context but can be applied to educational paradigms involving other underserved or marginalized communities. In the case of our research internship, skills-development is a participatory and applied experience in which refugee learners are given the opportunity to ask the hard questions, engage their own communities, and think through the answers based on their own life experiences--acknowledging the value of their own individual histories and perspectives.

This participatory approach can be a powerful catalyst for learners to reimagine themselves and their futures, despite the many uncertainties present in their lives. It can provide a unique sense of agency and possibility which is not typical in a traditional educational relationship of teacher to learner. For example, Deirdra (a pseudonym), a Congolese refugee living in a refugee camp near Cape Town, South Africa explained to me that she could never have imagined herself as a researcher. "That was always someone else's job," she said. She described coming into the program as a rather shy, but curious person. Going out and connecting with her community through the research assignments has made her want to learn more about her community members and find solutions to issues that she observes. As part of her degree, she is now taking part in a leadership training and volunteering in a women's support group for refugees.

But even beyond skills-development and building agency, the online internship has provided a unique opportunity to bring together refugee learners from multiple geographic sites within GEM's network, expanding the learning community across the boundaries of each physical location. For example, Trevor (a pseudonym), a refugee intern living in Kigali, Rwanda described the close bond that he formed with Deirdra from South Africa while working in the same group on research projects. Trevor hopes to be able to visit her one day. We were also struck when learning how exposure to interns from other sites may have stripped away some preconceived fears and cultural assumptions. During a conversation with Amina (a pseudonym), a Syrian intern living in Lebanon, she shared that at the start of the internship, she was concerned with how the other interns from outside Lebanon would perceive her dressed in a niqab, a type of face covering worn by some Muslim women. Amina felt uncomfortable turning her video on during online meetings for fear that she would be judged or misunderstood. But over the course of the internship, she explained that she realized that she actually had a lot in common with the other interns: "I actually started to feel like I was part of a family."

Participants, including interns as well as faculty become part of a global learning community in which they engage in a reciprocal learning experience. While the faculty serve as an essential bridge and resource to future professional development and networking opportunities, they also gain valuable exposure to the complex realities of being a refugee. Displacement may be the daily experience that

may last several years; but an online learning community presents opportunities for meaningful connection and belonging to a wider community and where participatory learning approaches have the capacity to build new bridges and possibilities for a better future.

Introduction

Currently, only three percent (3%) of refugees have access to higher education. Even as the rate of enrollment has improved from one percent (1%) since 2018, the results still pale in comparison to the global rate of higher education enrollment at 37% (UNHCR 2019). There is no shortage of barriers making higher education as well as technical and vocational training inaccessible for young refugees. Poverty, marginalization, conflict and crisis all contribute to long periods of interrupted secondary education for many refugees. Proof of school certificates, language requirements, host country enrollment restrictions towards refugees, and the high costs associated with higher education add even more obstacles for refugee's accessing post-secondary education (UNHCR 2016). [Please note some scholars use the terms: post-secondary education, tertiary education and higher education interchangeably. For purposes of this article, we employ the term higher education.]

Yet, in an era when a refugee spends an average of 26 years in exile and as the number of forcibly displaced people continues to rise every year (UNHCR 2016), it becomes imperative to find accessible and sustainable solutions to bring higher education to refugees. While global initiatives and international agreements, like the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees or the 2019 Global Framework for Refugee Education call attention to this gap by pledging to ensure "an inclusive and equitable quality education" for all, there still remains work to be done to sufficiently address refugee barriers (UNHCR 2018). This includes raising completion rates and helping refugee graduates find suitable employment (Crea et al., 2015, Crea et al., 2016., Crea et al., 2017; Reinhardt et al., 2018). What *is* promising is the growth in partnerships between local host communities, the private sector and academic institutions, which are paving the way for innovative solutions to fill this gap (Al-Husban et al., 2020). These consist of flexible or connected learning approaches that combine online and in-person teaching with mentoring and internship programs.

The Global Education Movement (GEM) is one such initiative that seeks to bridge the higher education gap among refugees by providing them with flexible learning opportunities. Partnered with the Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU), GEM offers competency-based, online university degrees to refugees in five different countries. Launched in the Kiziba refugee camp in Rwanda in 2013, the program has expanded to sites in South Africa, Kenya, Malawi and Lebanon, where students earn fully accredited and internationally recognized degrees (Russel et al., 2019). For students to apply and continue to build new skills and competencies, GEM combines online based instruction with paid internship opportunities, offered in partnership with

local public, private and humanitarian institutions. The program currently serves over 1,000 students with 50% of participants being female and 98% of total participants graduating with an associates degree within two years (GEM 2020).

In 2020, continuing to expand its internship offerings, GEM, in partnership with faculty from the Graduate Center's City University of New York (CUNY), launched the Participatory Action Research (PAR) internship. Over the course of five months, three researchers and one graduate student provided online instruction to 21 refugee learners in qualitative and quantitative research methods. In this article, we review the current context of refugee higher education, its benefits and barriers facing refugees and the role of online learning within this context. We then describe the novel, pilot internship program and its use of the PAR framework. Next, we present the internship's approach and process and conclude with a discussion of its key findings, and recommendations for refugees and practitioners in the field.

Literature Review

Access to higher education plays a critical role in the lives of displaced people, as a transformative tool for self-empowerment and long-term stability, amid uncertain futures in their host communities (Crea 2015, Crea 2016, Arar et al., 2020). Higher education accelerates adaptation and improves life standards among refugees, while it potentially even mitigates future displacement from occurring (Arar et al., 2020). Here we discuss the importance of refugee higher education as well as the numerous challenges that make higher education unreachable for refugees. With a focus on the Global Education Movement (GEM), we then discuss the growth in innovative solutions to help meet this gap through blended or connected learning modalities that integrate blended learning models with professional development opportunities, such as the GEM PAR internship. As an experiential pedagogical practice, the PAR approach offers new insights for building agency and critical thinking among refugee learners, while providing an innovative research platform for the GEM program.

Building Resilience through Refugee Higher Education

Millions of refugees are living in protracted refugee situations, both in refugee camps and in urban areas. Of the 25.9 million refugees worldwide, over half are of school age children, with over four million not attending school. As refugee children get older, this education gap only widens, with roughly 23 percent of refugee children attending secondary school, compared to 84 percent globally (UNHCR 2019). Yet, even as the largest gap remains in refugee higher education, existing literature suggests that when higher education opportunities are made available, refugees are more likely to become self-reliant, confident and better

able to cope with the complexity of their daily lives, often in protracted crisis conditions (Crea 2015, Crea 2016).

As a tool for building resilience, higher education offers refugees the opportunity to develop a “critical consciousness” by empowering students to have a voice and to serve as leaders and peacebuilders in their communities (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2010). Refugees understand that progressively higher levels of education lead to self-reliance, future livelihoods, and stability (Dryden-Peterson 2012). By engaging in higher education, refugees improve qualifications and gain the knowledge, skill sets, and self-efficacy to develop personally and professionally for long-term employability. Connecting to academic institutions enables refugee learners to build networks with teachers and peers, building their social capital in different contexts and helping them to establish pathways for future employability -- an essential step towards translating newly acquired degrees and skills into employment (Dryden-Peterson 2012; Crea 2016). While boosting levels of self-esteem and equipping refugees with the tools to problem solve and support their own communities, access to higher education increases their potential to engage as changemakers in their communities (Dryden-Peterson et al. 2012). Completion of higher education among older refugees alone serves as a “pull factor” for other younger refugees, driving many to complete their primary and secondary studies; thus, producing a rather significant ripple effect in the context of promoting self-sufficiency among refugees (WUSC 2018).

But providing accessible pathways to higher education is not only beneficial to the refugees themselves, it also benefits the host communities at large. Refugee learners perceive higher education as a key mechanism for being able to successfully integrate and contribute towards the social and economic fabric of the host country (Arar et al., 2020). With the socioeconomic means to support themselves, refugees also become less dependent on external aid to support their families (UNHCR 2016). In short, higher education expands livelihood opportunities for refugees who are then given the chance to advance and support themselves as professionals in their local communities.

Despite the clear benefits of higher education, for refugees, there is still limited access and countless hurdles. These barriers contribute to lower motivation levels among young refugees and deprives future generations of the knowledge and competencies necessary to contribute to the host country as well as potentially rebuild their home communities (Gladwell et al., 2016). Diminishing these roadblocks and finding ways to adapt educational modalities to fit the needs of refugees is an important strategy for improving refugees’ social and economic stability.

Barriers to Accessing Higher Education

Ensuring higher education opportunities are accessible for refugees as well as equipping them for suitable employment is not a simple feat. Refugees wishing to enroll and successfully complete their studies face countless barriers. From the vantage of the host country, refugees

are often identified as outsiders to the nation-state and may be excluded from a host country’s higher educational system by lacking the required documentation or resources to participate (Zeus 2011; Al-Husban et al., 2020). The high costs associated with higher education institutions remain a major obstacle for refugees who are reliant on humanitarian aid to support them and their families (UNHCR 2019). As refugees grow older, they are expected to take on greater responsibilities in their families. Many have little choice but to go to work, often illegally or in the shadow economy, leading many to forgo a secondary education to provide for their families. Low enrollment in secondary education results in an even lower number of refugees in higher education.

But even for those who have completed secondary studies in their home country, school certificates, such as diplomas or birth certificates, are often left behind by refugees who flee their homes suddenly, which prevents many refugees from enrolling in local universities. But even when these documents are provided to host country universities, qualifications are not always perceived as equivalent (Naylor et al., 2019; UNHCR 2018). Similarly, language requirements in the host community are another way that higher education becomes inaccessible to refugees (Donald 2014; Gladwell et al., 2016). Despite being able to enroll in higher education, refugee learners also face limited access to electricity, technological devices, network connection and a lack of other infrastructural supports taken for granted in many developed locations. Nonetheless, while significant barriers exist to refugee higher education, research shows that leveraging technological advancements offers promising results to increase access (Dahya et al., 2016).

Pathways to Refugee Higher Education: The Role of Technology

While still underdeveloped, the emergence of digital technology within higher learning models has become a prominent approach in refugee higher education. Expanding the reach of higher education for refugees, these connected learning formats offer education opportunities in remote, low-resource communities typically excluded from formal schooling systems (Bauer 2020). For those refugees forced to work or stay home as caretakers, online learning offers a student centered, flexible format, which accommodates student schedules and other limitations that come with uncertain life circumstances. Being online means that instructors have a role in guiding students to self-learn and construct their own knowledge online, reinforcing the importance of basic to advanced computer skills. This method enables students to communicate, collaborate with peers and share resources, while using a wide range of internet-based tools (Crea et al., 2017). In the midst of uncertainty, an online education can provide a source of stability and growth for refugees, while access to technology helps them stay connected to each other, their families and other peer networks (Al-Husban et al., 2020).

However, even with access to higher education, refugee learners may find themselves better educated, but lacking work opportunities and pathways to employment (McGrath 2012). Within blended learning models, which combine online learning with mentoring and internships where students can apply the skills they are learning, technology plays a central role in supporting refugee students beyond degree requirements. It helps refugee learners stay on track and connected to their peers and teachers (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2012). Such holistic approaches with additional non-academic support, including mentoring and career development, can have a significant impact on their wellbeing and employment prospects (Dryden-Peterson 2012).

Later in the article, we discuss in more depth the topic of the 2019 Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and its impact on the program. However, here, we would like to mention that in many ways, COVID-19 has accelerated global recognition of the essential role of technology and online learning in providing and maintaining higher education opportunities for refugees. The GEM program discussed in the next section was clearly ahead of the curve concerning online learning.

The GEM Model

Host governments, donors, and academic institutions are increasingly recognizing the value of connected or blended learning models for strengthening refugee prospects. This, in addition to the lower costs associated with implementing online education, are intensifying efforts to offer connected or blended learning opportunities in refugee communities, paving the way for partnerships with accredited degree programs. These initiatives have opened the doors to universities in higher resourced environments and to a larger pool of social and academic networks (Crea et al., 2016).

The Global Education Movement (GEM) is one such initiative which partners with the Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) to offer a competency-based learning model that enables refugee learners to complete their studies at their own pace and practice acquired knowledge and skills during an internship. The goals or competencies outlined within a certain degree program or project are defined based on current industry standards and guidance from industry leaders and subject matter experts (Russell et al., 2019). For student assessments, direct feedback is provided by local faculty, known as reviewers, who provide input on a student's progress towards achieving a certain competency within the context of a project assignment.

Studies indicate that refugee higher education models that include internships linking learning programs to real world work scenarios boost motivation levels and sharpen the soft skills needed to succeed at any given job (UNHCR 2020; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017). An online format helps ensure that refugees are equipped with both the technical and professional skills to engage in a digital work environment. Further, it can help educational programs

engage directly with experts and practitioners active in their field, without the costs and delays of travel (UNHCR 2018). Internships that bring in experts with the latest technical skills and social capital can enhance the success of such professional training opportunities (World Bank 2019). Despite these clear benefits, scholars also highlight that distance-based staff and support would benefit from increased training and understanding related to the nuanced challenges commonly faced by refugees in these complex contexts (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2017). Within these online learning programs, it may be easy to overlook the complicated circumstances that many refugees face when not in the digital classroom.

Though successful, many of these educational initiatives have found it challenging to replicate at scale--to deliver a high quality and sustainable program and resolve unstable power sources and the resulting intermittent internet issues (UNHCR 2016; Reinhardt 2018). While this article does not seek to directly respond to these challenges, it describes the GEM model as one blended learning model that continues to expand its program offerings through partnerships with private, public, and academic institutions.

The GEM program, though nascent in its development, has made significant strides in scaling its learning opportunities to refugees in five different countries, including the participatory action research (PAR) internship. Offering the GEM PAR internship to multiple sites leveraged GEM's well-established support infrastructure and technological capacities to engage students based in multiple geographic locations. Additionally, it provided a unique, reflexive research platform to assess GEM programming and student experiences across sites in a collaborative environment.

Participatory Action Research

Beyond innovative modalities for helping refugees access higher education, existing literature also calls for dynamic pedagogical approaches. Especially needed are practices that can provide interactive and experiential programming that develop self-agency and critical thinking skills (Al Husban et al., 2020). As mentioned earlier, refugee protracted circumstances require different policies and pathways in order for refugees to be able to integrate into higher education (Arar et al., 2020). Introducing a participatory, learner-centered approach that values refugee experiences and perspectives helps refugees develop these critical thinking skills (Dryden-Peterson 2012).

Participatory Action Research (PAR), as a collaborative form of applied research, integrates social science inquiry with participant action and self-agency. While it engages participants in research practice and intervention simultaneously, the approach recognizes that participants have knowledge about how their own life situations could be improved and can contribute to the achievement of a more sustainable and effective outcome (Collie 2010). In short, the goal of this project, in line with the principals of PAR, was to utilize the expertise of the refugee learners in helping

to develop the research project, collect the data, and interpret the results; all with the intent to make a positive contribution to the overall program and the lives of the refugee learners/researchers.

As the topic of (forced) migration grows within scientific scholarship, it becomes all the more relevant to equip displaced learners with the basic qualitative and quantitative skills necessary to conduct research in partnership with academic institutions, NGOs, UN agencies, the private sector, as well as all of their intersections. Such employment opportunities enable refugees to become changemakers--identifying issues impacting their own community and engaging its members to find their own solutions, as a way to bring about sustained impact.

We employed the PAR approach within the context of GEM's research methods internship because of its iterative and global approach. By iterative, we mean the entire research endeavor is an ongoing conversation between researchers and those being researched. The participants are involved in deciding which questions are asked, gathering the data, and most importantly, helping to interpret it. This leads to a 360-degree process where information is both gathered and produced by researchers, participants, and subjects, those who are studied, yet do not gather data. The following sections describe the GEM PAR internship pilot method and the resulting conclusions of this approach in teaching qualitative and quantitative research methods and its implications for refugee learners and educators.

Methods

As facilitators of the GEM PAR internship, we perceived the project as a developmental internship, one that equipped refugee participants with basic qualitative and quantitative skills and perspectives to become eligible to go on to support both academic and applied researchers. The internship program was supported by both GEM staff and volunteer researchers from the City University of New York's Graduate Center, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign. Below, we describe the internship program structure and process.

Recruitment

Refugee participants in the GEM's PAR internship consisted of 21 interns (10 females and 11 males) from five different countries where GEM offers educational programming -- four interns from Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi, three from Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, five from multiple refugee camps in Lebanon, three from South Africa, and six from Kigali and Kiziba refugee camp, both located in Rwanda. An internship program of this magnitude, being offered by GEM to all of its sites, had never been considered prior to the GEM PAR program. Therefore, the initial design, planning and coordination were new to both the GEM team as well as the program facilitators who would be leading the internship.

In consultation with the lead researcher at the CUNY Graduate Center, interns were selected by GEM and its staff based on the quality and relevance of student CVs, cover letters, and English language proficiency. It was expected that the majority of interns had little to no prior instruction or experience in research methods. It is important to note that in addition to the skills and developmental professional experience offered by the GEM internship, the program provided all interns with a weekly stipend of \$50.00 for their participation. Such stipends are an important incentive for refugees to both enroll and maintain engagement. Out of a total of 63 applicants from all program sites, GEM shortlisted 31 students, and ultimately 21 students participated. As for internship facilitation, the lead supervisor, a Presidential Professor CUNY's Graduate Center invited three additional supervisors, two researchers from the University of Illinois and one graduate student from the Graduate Center to co-lead the internship within a tiered organizational structure, described in more detail in the next section.

Given that the GEM program and its students were already engaged in an online learning modality, all interns had access to the necessary technology, namely a computer device and an internet connection. Later, we will go into more detail to discuss the advantages and implications of this technology access and experience in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic. What is important to note here is that the majority of participating interns were already familiar with general online conduct and the basics of navigating online applications for effective engagement in a remote learning environment.

Internship Management Structure

The internship took place over a period of five months through an online-based platform and was divided into two phases: qualitative and quantitative research methods. To enhance collaboration among the interns and to ensure that we were able to provide direct and ongoing support, interns were divided into three groups, according to their respective geographic locations. Weekly, 90-minute sessions were facilitated by the lead supervisor. These sessions, where attendance was required by all interns, introduced new topics and assignments. These sessions were complemented by weekly two-hour meetings, organized by the group supervisor. The two-hour sessions served as an opportunity for interns, in a collaborative format, to receive more direct support on class content and assignments. Through this tiered structure, interns were exposed to their refugee peers from multiple sites, while they also received direct support from their immediate GEM PAR supervisors. GEM also provided additional support mechanisms by way of local partners at each GEM site.

PAR Framework

PAR's radical method, which perceives the subject as researcher, examines a research topic from the perspective of those who experience it, emboldening research subjects to become problem-solvers and active agents in the

research process. Within the context of the GEM PAR internship, the lead supervisor, in collaboration with GEM staff identified research topics of particular relevance and utility to the GEM program and its refugee learners as a whole. As the internship was divided into two modules -- qualitative and quantitative research methods -- each module generally examined the impact of Coronavirus on their college going experience and ultimately culminated in one research paper and/or presentation in which each group of interns worked collaboratively. During the first module on qualitative methods, each intern conducted a set number of interviews using the same set of questions and interview protocol in their respective site.

Consistent with this approach, within the second module on quantitative methods, we asked interns to investigate the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the educational experiences of GEM students compared to non-GEM students. Through the use of a survey administered in person, over the phone or online, interns identified non-GEM refugee learners and gathered the data individually. However, it was during the synthesis and presentation of the research in each module that interns shared their insights from their own experiences as GEM students -- discussing implications of the findings and proposing recommendations that could impact their own lives as well.

As an introductory course on the fundamentals of qualitative and quantitative approaches to research, interns were expected to leave the internship with a demonstrated understanding of the differences and applications of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Most assignments were completed as a group; individual interns completed specific tasks individually, which ultimately contributed to a larger assignment submitted by each group. This approach enabled interns to practice online team collaboration and the soft skills, including communication, interpersonal and time management skills, needed to work as a team in an academic or professional setting. Projects that required the use of Microsoft or Google applications, such as research papers, presentations or basic data analysis, demonstrated the hard skills necessary to excel in an academic research and/or a professional work environment.

Learning Outcomes

During the first module, focusing on *qualitative* research, interns:

1. were exposed to a variety of qualitative methods for gathering data; however, emphasis was placed on focus groups and one-on-one interviewing
2. individually developed proposals for a qualitative research project; each proposal had to answer (a.) what do you want to know, (b.) why do you want to know it, (c.) what do you think the answer is, and (d.) how will you find out?
3. given their proposal (see #2 above), individually developed an appropriate interview protocol

4. via scholar.google.com, individually collected academic articles related to the content of their proposal as well as its methodology (one-on-one interviewing)
5. within their groups, merged their individual interview protocols into one interview protocol that would be administered by each intern
6. given #5 above, individually piloted the interview to three people
7. collaboratively worked within their groups to figure out which questions to keep versus alter versus jettison
8. individually administered the approved interview protocol to five people
9. collectively pooled and analyze all interviews
10. developed an appropriate white paper, explicating: (a.) the problem, (b.) the research question, (c.) the methodology, (d.) findings, (e.) given the findings, recommendations
11. using PowerPoint, collectively presented findings to internal and external stakeholders

During the second module, focusing on *quantitative* research, interns:

1. were exposed to a variety of quantitative methods for gathering data; however, emphasis was placed on surveys
2. individually developed proposals for a quantitative research project; each proposal had to answer (a.) what do you want to know, (b.) why do you want to know it, (c.) what do you think the answer is, and (d.) how will you find out?
3. given their proposal (see #2 above), individually developed an appropriate survey
4. via scholar.google.com, individually collected academic articles related to the content of their proposal as well as its methodology (surveys)
5. within their groups, merged their individual surveys into one survey that would be administered by each intern
6. given #5 above, individually piloted the survey to several people
7. collaboratively worked within their groups to figure out which questions to keep versus alter versus jettison
8. individually administered the approved survey to 30 people -- 15 GEM college students and 15 non-GEM college students
9. using excel, coded 30 interviews
10. collectively pooled and analyzed all surveys

11. developed an appropriate narrative, explicating: (a.) the problem, (b.) the research question, (c.) the methodology, (d.) findings, (e.) given the findings, recommendations
12. using PowerPoint, collectively presented findings to internal and external stakeholders
13. Lastly, a final session of the internship focused on ways to translate their knowledge and skills gained during the internship onto the current job market. External research professionals and recruiters were brought to discuss some additional context on the relevance of research skills in the current job market.

Findings

Again, as a reminder and in keeping with the elements of participatory action research, the interns were actively involved with analyzing the data, deciding which 'stories' to tell from the findings, and then actually presenting those findings. Here, we discuss in some detail what those findings were. Even as connected learning initiatives play a crucial role in expanding higher education opportunities and employment pathways for refugee learners, it is not without its challenges (Bauer et al., 2020; Bolon et al., 2020; Crea 2016; Dahya et al., 2016). The GEM PAR internship reinforced the importance of having access to a reliable computer device and internet connection to ensure refugee engagement goes uninterrupted. During the internship, it was not uncommon to have interns absent from weekly meetings due to poor internet. In several of the locations where GEM's refugee learners are living, electricity is intermittent, computers or mobile devices are shared with family members, making computer and/or internet access weak or unreliable. Although GEM partners offer computer labs to its students, local crises do not always make it possible for students to travel to these sites when needed.

The GEM PAR pilot program was initially conceptualized as primarily an online internship, with international faculty teaching online and on-the-ground support staff in each GEM site. As the pilot evolved, it confirmed the importance of direct support mechanisms for refugee learners within flexible and connected learning models (Dryden-Peterson 2012). During the development stage of the internship, there was some concern that too large an internship might weaken the one-on-one support systems available to interns. However, the internship's tiered structure with multiple layers of direct supervision and weekly meetings meant that interns had access to numerous resources, including GEM PAR online supervisors as well as site specific, in-person GEM mentors available at each site. In fact, this tiered system provided skill and knowledge mentorship, as well as emotional and social support -- factors scholars claim are critical non-academic support mechanisms that boost refugee success in higher learning (Dryden-Peterson 2012).

Despite the advantages of online learning to promote digital skills building in an era increasingly reliant on digital platforms (Bauer et al., 2020), supervisors observed

substantial variation in the levels of basic competencies across program sites. This variation in capacities to conduct basic tasks, such as using computer applications caused some supervisors to have to spend more time on teaching these hard skills directly instead of on the research methods concepts, contributing to delayed or incomplete assignments and adjustments to the overall internship syllabus. Feedback from program supervisors reinforced the need for further orientation before the start of the internship for participants and supervisors (Crea et al., 2017). As the program evolved, it became clear that a revised recruitment strategy, combined with a pre-program orientation would be beneficial to ensure interns are coming into the internship at the same level, while supervisors can prioritize teaching the primary content of the internship -- research methods.

Supervisors' dismay at participant skill-levels also supports the need for adequate orientation for the supervisors on refugee circumstances as well as on the internship curriculum prior to the start of the program (Crea et al., 2017). Without sufficient knowledge and awareness of the complex life situations of refugees, supervisors may have come with mismatched expectations on refugee learner academic capacities. Providing additional context and preparation for supervisors could help manage these expectations. Furthermore, supervisors also called for a reassessment of the recruitment strategy of interns, in addition to a pre-program developmental orientation, as mentioned above.

A compelling advantage of the online format was GEM's ability to extend the reach of the internship to multiple GEM sites *simultaneously* -- something that had never been done before due to foreseen logistical challenges and inadequate support structures for refugee learners. The program's novel approach to engage multiple GEM sites during one internship enabled cross border collaborations and comparison between GEM sites (Crea et al., 2017). Program supervisors and interns alike reported favoring the multi-site approach to the internship. One supervisor even remarked how the ability to work with interns across sites made it feel like we were all part of the same learning community. Despite the internship structure, which grouped participants by geographic area (e.g., all Syrian refugees in Lebanon in one group), participants enjoyed interacting and learning with other students from different regions. Reviewing each other's work during a peer review process, as well as listening to each other's presentations on a given assignment, enabled knowledge exchange on refugee circumstances across geographic areas. In fact, supervisors also learned about the experience of being a refugee through their interns in ways that may have not been possible without a remote learning platform, bridging refugee learners with overseas faculty. Supervisors advocated to mix the groups across program sites to enable more exchange and collaboration across the geographic areas and participant experiences.

In addition, language barriers may be hindering some students from fully engaging in the GEM PAR internship. As the overseas faculty facilitated the internship in English, there was some concern that delayed student submissions

were due, in part, to English language proficiency levels among participants. Interns commented on the fast pace at which the classes were taught. One student repeatedly noted that they relied heavily on the session recordings that were shared after each class to fully comprehend class concepts and assignments. Others with low English proficiency reported relying on their peers to understand class content and expectations. Supervisor feedback also reinforced the fact that classes were communicated, using American colloquialism, which not all students were familiar with. An adjusted pace and use of more 'global' English could enhance class comprehension.

Though still early to know the full implications on participant employment outcomes, bringing international faculty from well-resourced universities has great potential to expand GEM's intellectual and social capital across borders (Crea et al., 2016). While gaining new knowledge, GEM interns have the opportunity to expand their networks to a wider pool of educators, scholars, and professionals, which studies suggest boosts employment outcomes (El-Ghali et al., 2019).

Impact of COVID

This paper would be incomplete if we did not include some discussion on the negative and unexpected (positive) impacts of COVID-19 on refugee learning. COVID-19 was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. After the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and a pandemic in March 2020, countries around the world began experiencing the first wave of virus infections (WHO). Shortly after the U.S. declared COVID-19 as a public health emergency, a variety of sweeping lockdown measures were implemented across the country. These included the temporary closures of most businesses and restaurants that involved in-person interactions or public gatherings. Additional measures to stop the spread of the virus included mask-wearing, social distancing, travel restrictions, and more. However, for many of those fortunate enough to have access to technology, remote working and learning has become the new normal, including for most U.S.-based universities.

Throughout Africa and Lebanon, where GEM sites are located, COVID-19 first appeared in February 2020 and has had drastic implications for those in schools. In Africa, measures to contain the virus varied across the continent, as many countries banned public gatherings, including sweeping school closures starting in May 2020. In Lebanon, all educational institutions were ordered to close shortly after the country identified its first case in February. For forcibly displaced communities in these contexts, COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on all aspects of their lives, including health, safety, education, and community access. While many primary and secondary schools in refugee contexts have resorted to deliver lessons through broadcast radio, outdoor classes, among other creative solutions, others have had to delay school lessons for extended periods of time, lacking the personal protective equipment or

sufficient measures in place to ensure safety for teachers and students (UNHCR 2020). However, for many refugees, access to technology and online learning has served as a lifeline in preventing delays in studies.

For the GEM PAR internship, a fully online based internship was a unique opportunity, given travel and social distancing measures, to leverage GEM's technological capacities and infrastructure. Three of the four supervisors are professors who all had to adapt to teaching remotely from their own campuses starting in March 2020. As the GEM PAR internship began in June, supervisors had several months to adjust to this new online modality. The interns, having already been exposed to GEM's blended learning model were largely familiar with the basics of online learning. Because their curriculum was already 100% online, GEM students were somewhat protected from the full negative impact of having to learn via Zoom.

COVID-19 also factored into the content of both the qualitative and quantitative research. Each module had questions focusing on how COVID-19 affected the learning process, comparing GEM students with non-GEM students. Because COVID-19 prevented face-to-face interviewing, the Lebanon group utilized Google applications to administer their survey, learning to leverage digital tools to overcome research limitations. The results of this research across sites demonstrated that GEM students were better prepared to be fully online and more insulated from COVID-19 related interruptions to their studies, compared to other university students who experienced considerable delays.

Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

Given the qualitative nature of the data, we are not able to generalize our program or the findings from data collected by the interns to other refugee populations or higher education programs. Data was only collected over the course of five months, a relatively short-time frame and may not fully capture changing dynamics of online education delivery within and across sites. Although the study tries to capture the perspectives and feedback of GEM staff, internship supervisors and students, it does not capture the view of on-site program staff, who could certainly enrich the study in understanding how student performance and capacities for participating in GEM PAR compare with others at each GEM site.

These limitations notwithstanding, it is clear that engaging students in participatory action research methods, and especially across multiple sites, provides a powerful reflexive learning community. As the internship looks to its next phase of implementation, it has expanded its scope to more than double the number of interns to more than 50 and increased the number of supervisors from three to six. One novel addition to the next phase of the program is the recruitment of interns from the first internship pilot to serve as program managers who will provide support to the supervisors.

As programs seeking to provide higher education to refugees are on the rise, there is a need for sustained focus on evidence building and sharing best practices across various program models and relevant stakeholders. Future research on online educational programming could look at comparing in-person and online support mechanisms on refugee study outcomes. Even more relevant to the GEM PAR would be to examine employment outcomes as a result of the GEM PAR internship on refugee participants. This could help to better identify skill-gaps among refugees interested in building further their research skills and/or ways to merge a PAR learning experience with other competencies to enhance their career prospects.

Finally, given what we have learned from the GEM PAR program in its first iteration, here we highlight practical recommendations for consideration among scholars, practitioners, and others interested in planning and implementing a similar project for refugee learners. First, supervisors should be mindful that English is a second language for most interns. Interns are at once learning new research methods skills, while also learning the English language. Adjusting vocabulary and pace of speech can help ensure comprehension. Second, interns across different sites can be grouped together to maximize academic collaboration and cultural exchange across geographic sites. More specifically, if there are five sites, then each group should have interns from all five sites. Third, once assessed for both technical skills and English language capacities, interns can be grouped across skill-level to allow for peer learning opportunities when collaborating on group assignments.

Fourth, to orient and prepare incoming GEM PAR supervisors to work with refugee learners, GEM staff can consider providing a brief introduction on the cultural and political context of each refugee site, as well as guidance on working with and supervising refugee interns. As some supervisors were unaware of the lack of certain technical capacities among the interns at the university level, GEM can consider clarifying the intent of the internships as more of a developmental internship that seeks to help students to gain necessary hard and soft skills before being eligible to apply for internships at a prospective employer. Fifth, to prepare prospective interns to take part in the GEM PAR internship, GEM staff can consider providing a prerequisite study skills workshop, which could include basic writing skills, drafting a presentation on PowerPoint, collaborating on Google drive, taking notes during class, etc. Team building activities can also help interns learn to collaborate with one another and demonstrate commitment to a group project or task.

References

- Al-Husban, N., & Shorman, S. (2020). Perceptions of syrian student refugees towards blended learning: Implications for higher education institutions, International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET), 15(1), 45-60.
- Arar, K., Kondakci, Y., & Streitwieser, B. (2020). Higher Education for Forcibly Displaced Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Higher Education Policy, 1-8.
- Bauer, C., & Gallagher, M. J. (2020). Education for Humanity: higher education for refugees in resource-constrained environments through innovative technology, Journal of Refugee Studies, 33(2), 416-436.
- Bolon, I., Mason, J., O'Keeffe, P., Haeberli, P., Adan, H. A., Karenzi, J. M., ... & Martins, S. B. (2020). One Health education in Kakuma refugee camp (Kenya): From a MOOC to projects on real world challenges, One Health, 10, 100158.
- Collie, P., Liu, J., Podsiadlowski, A., & Kindon, S. (2010). You can't clap with one hand: Learnings to promote culturally grounded participatory action research with migrant and former refugee communities, International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34(2), 141-149.
- Crea, T. M., & McFarland, M. (2015). Higher education for refugees: Lessons from a 4-year pilot project, International Review of Education, 61(2), 235-245.
- Crea, T.M. (2016). "Refugee higher education: Contextual challenges and implications for program design, delivery, and accompaniment," International Journal of Educational Development, Elsevier, vol. 46(C), pages 12-22.
- Crea, T.M., Spannon, N. (2017). Democratizing education at the margins: faculty and practitioner perspectives on delivering online tertiary education for refugees, Int J Educ Technol High Educ 14, 43.
- Dahya, N., and Sarah Dryden-Peterson. (2016). Tracing Pathways to Higher Education for Refugees: The Role of Virtual Support Networks and Mobile Phones for Women in Refugee Camps, Comparative Education (December): 1-18.
- Dryden-Peterson, S., & Giles, W. (2010). Higher education for refugees. Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees, 27(2), 3-9.
- Dryden-Peterson, S. (2012). The Politics of Higher Education for Refugees in a Global Movement for Primary Education, Refuge, 27(2), pp. 10-18.
- Dryden-Peterson, S. (2016). Refugee education: The crossroads of globalization. Educational Researcher, 45(9), 473-482.
- Dryden-Peterson, S. (2017). Refugee education: Education for an unknowable future, Curriculum Inquiry, 47:1, 14-24.
- El-Ghali, H. A., Alameddine, F., Farah, S., & Benchiba, S. (2019). Pathways to and Beyond Education for Refugee

Youth in Jordan and Lebanon. Beirut: Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI), American University of Beirut, and Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education.

Gladwell, C., Hollow, D., Robinson, A., Norman, B., Bowerman, E., Mitchell, J., Floremont, F., Hutchinson, P. (2016). Higher education for refugees in low-resource environments: research study, Jigsaw Consult, United Kingdom.

Global Education Movement (2020), <https://gem.snhu.edu/>.

McGrath, S. (2012). Vocational education and training for development: a policy in need of a theory? *Int. J. Educ. Dev.* 32, 623-631.

Naylor, R., Terry, L., Rizzo, A., Nguyen, N., & Mifsud, N. (2019). Structural Inequality in Refugee Participation in Higher Education, *Journal of Refugee Studies*.

Russell, C. & Weaver, N. (2019). Going Global to Meet the Needs of Refugee and Displaced Learners, *EDUCAUSE Review* 54, no. 4 (Fall 2019).

Reinhardt, S. (2018). Exploring the Emerging Field of Online Tertiary Education for Refugees in Protracted Situations, *Open praxis* 10.3 (2018): 211-220.

UNHCR. (2020). Coming Together: For Refugee Education. 2020 Report.

UNHCR. (2019). Tertiary Education out of Reach. 2019 Report.

UNHCR. (2018). Turn the Tide: Refugee Education in Crisis. 2018 Report.

UNHCR. (2016). Aiming Higher: The Other One Percent. 2016 Report.

World Bank Group. (2019). The Changing Nature of Work. 2019 World Development Report.

Zeus, B. (2011). Exploring barriers to higher education in protracted refugee situations: The case of Burmese refugees in Thailand, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 24(2), 256-276.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the entire GEM team and its partners, including Christina Russell, GEM's Executive Director; Nina Weaver, Director of Partnerships and Research; Nadia Asmal, Associate Director of Livelihoods and Advocacy, and Emmanuel Ushindi who provided ongoing support and made the GEM PAR internship possible. A big thank you also to the supervisors of the GEM PAR internship, professors Dov Cohen and Natalie Bennett for their valuable commitment and facilitation during the internship. A special thanks to all the GEM PAR interns who participated in the first cohort.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

On Teaching Im/Migration in an Undergraduate Classroom

by Amrita Dhar



BORDER CROSSER BY [PETE RAILAND](#), FROM 2012'S MIGRATION NOW! PORTFOLIO PRODUCED WITH CULTURESTRIKE VIA JUSTSEEDS

In the course of my university-level teaching career in the United States, I made, a couple of years ago, a momentous transition in my own standing in the country: from non-resident alien to resident alien. It was in my updated alien-ness, therefore, that I found myself planning a course on “Studying the Margins: Language, Power, and Culture” (English 4589 at The Ohio State University) in late autumn 2019. I would teach this class in the winter-spring term, that is, in the first half of 2020: a time when the world would go into multiple lockdowns over a pandemic, the US would see a phenomenally reality-challenged leadership (one which has to date led to the deaths of over 600,000 people in the country), and during which our semester would be broken sharply into halves of “in-person” and “online” instruction. In autumn 2019, I did not know any of this. But I was newly a parent, and in all my ins and outs with US Citizenship and Immigration Services—“look this way” and “roll your finger over that way;” “submit L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z documentation,” “resubmit W, Y, Z papers,” “wait here,” and “come back in *n* days”—I was thinking, every day, of the children at the southern border of the US: children who were being taken from their parents and asked to shoulder grief and terror that no native adult in this country had to; children who often didn’t have full (or any) means of their native language to communicate their needs or their story; children who were being deliberately denied care and belonging; and children for whom, unbelievably, the US government seemed to have lost track of parents. I rolled my fingerprints on to the biometric machine with such force that the whites of my fingers showed. (“Good pressure,” said the officer.) I exited another waiting room and stood in the street for a long time. I breastfed and cried afterwards. My alienness cost me sleep, money, hours, stress, and repeated visits to USCIS and to medical providers to yet once more bio-certify that I was not a mobile incubator of various diseases.

I needed to do all this to remain in the country, to retain my employment, to keep my family together. Yet, my alienness was as nothing compared to the alienness daily manufactured for the children and parents at the border. Warsan Shire wrote earlier in our dehumanizing century of terrible migrations: “No one leaves home, unless home is the mouth of a shark” (“Home”). And I wondered: what must it be like to make your children leave home? To make your children leave—and thus take your home with them? To be a child and be made to leave home, parents, language, friends, food, landscapes, soundscapes? To be a child and leave with your family—and upon arriving, against many odds, be separated?

Even before I came to title my course “Movements, Migrations, Memories,” I knew that I wanted the class to grapple with the critical and historical vocabulary of making strange, making home, making other, making own. Every immigration *to* somewhere is an emigration *from* somewhere. Othering and belonging are, among other things, matters of vocabulary—and those vocabularies have histories. Also, I have never had the option of *not* teaching migration, just as I have never had the option of *not* teaching race, in the US. I look and sound “foreign” and

“strange,”—and until I came to know better, I would ask all sorts of “weird” questions among friends, colleagues, students. (“Why are there advertisements in the middle of a football game?” “What—why—is student debt?” “There seems to be a non-consensus about healthcare for everyone?”). Only, now, I would make time for us to examine those vocabularies of othering and belonging. We would focus, by virtue of the subject of the class, on the language and literature of a matter that currently affects over 270 million worldwide.¹ In my course description, I wrote that I wanted us, together, to “consider contemporary texts in a variety of genres as we examine how movements, often at the intercontinental and planetary level, form and inform our current sense of human inhabitation of the earth and our responsibilities towards each other in an era of unprecedented mass migrations and human influence on the natural world.” The course goals were:

1. a thoughtful sampling of a variety of contemporary works exploring movements, migrations, and margins;
2. developing awareness of and empathy for familiar and unfamiliar ways of longing and belonging in the world;
3. inculcating methods and strategies for interpreting complex ideas and language; and
4. explaining those interpretations in precise oral and written work.

Perhaps the greatest privilege of teaching literature classes is that I get to read—and teach—stories. I had long been aware of the numbers, worldwide, for migration and human mobility. In my part of the world, rising temperatures and therefore sea-levels have had clear and terrible consequences.² I did not have the luxury, as even the most earnest “first world” climate activists do, of not perceiving through my own settings and experiences the appalling effects of global warming. For good tactical reasons, long-time climate-change activists in the US, such as Bill Kckibben, talk about a possible window of opportunity within which we, as a planet, can yet perhaps halt the worst.³ But I came from a land that is increasingly marsh and sea, and has already tipped into no return. And I knew the numbers and shapes of the picture. “India’s coastal regions, home to about 170 million of the country’s 1.4 billion people, are on the front lines of a shifting climate, experiencing sea-level rise, erosion, and natural disasters such as tropical storms and cyclones.”⁴ “It has been estimated that by 2050, one in every seven people in Bangladesh will be displaced by climate change.”⁵

Yet, I also knew that statistics, by themselves, do not enable the empathic connections that create lasting human commitments to ideas, actions, change. For my literature class, therefore, I deliberately chose a selection of phenomenal—and accessible—storytellers for us to read together. My final reading list reflected a blend of short and long writing, poetry and prose, fiction and non-fiction, traditional writing and graphic composition, memoirs and the fantastic. I also prioritized the voices of writers who, through subject positions within the global South, have had to shoulder the burden of *knowing* migration in a way that

more privileged demographics and geographies in the world, such as the global North, have not. Thus, we should read: Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do* (New York: Abrams, 2017); Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019); Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017); Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2017); Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (London: Vintage, 2008); several of the *Refugee Tales* from the three volumes edited by David Herd and Anna Pincus (Manchester: Comma Press, 2016, 2017, 2019), and an assortment of essays from the two collections entitled *The Good Immigrant*, the first edited by Nikesh Shukla (London: Unbound, 2016) and the second by Shukla and Chimene Suleyman (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2019).

In addition to these readings, I also brought into class a specific set of short readings for students' oral presentations. Since these presentations set the tone for both the historical awareness my students developed over the term *and* the frank conversations they had with me and one another for the rest of the semester, I shall open my discussion of the classroom in this essay with a fuller account of this exercise.

For my students' class-presentation-oriented reading, I brought the deeply-researched, open-access *TIDE Keywords* (<http://www.tideproject.uk/keywords-home/>) into my class as testaments to the changing valences of words that we think we know, but which have multifarious and sometimes surprising histories of usage.⁶ I wanted my students to grasp that language is not neutral, that it has a history, and that that history is not unconnected from prevailing ideology. Students were asked to read the *TIDE Keywords* "Introduction" for an orientation as to *why* words such as "stranger," "alien," "settler," "traveller," "vagrant," and "exile," for instance, warrant a closer look, especially from our vantage in the twenty-first century. Then, they were asked to pick one keyword (out of the 39 available) to read thoroughly about and present to the class on.⁷ As I told the class, the goal was to collectively hear about as many keywords as possible—we were a class of seventeen—and we therefore didn't want to "repeat" keywords. The questions that each presentation would address were:

- What is the history of the keyword in question? Please provide a brief summary of what you read in your *Keyword* chapter.
- What in the history of the keyword you read has been surprising to you, as you encountered that history from a twenty-first-century perspective?
- Having read the keyword of your choice, what contemporary examples/issues/matters come to mind, and why? (i.e., how would you connect what you read to the world around you today?)
- and finally, open-endedly: what questions would you like to bring to the class for us to talk about?

Each student would present their keyword for fifteen minutes, with up to fifteen more minutes for subsequent discussion. After the day's presentation, the student presenting would also summarize the main points of their talk into a single-page document and submit it through the class website. In my evaluation, I would grade along the following criteria: the student's ability to address the assignment prompt; the student's clarity of comprehension *and* clarity of presentation (i.e., their care about the comprehension of the rest of the class); their engagement with what they read and their ability to make cogent connections with the world they lived in; their ability both to ask substantive questions of their classmates and field questions that they received. Students were welcome to bring presentation slides, if they wanted to.

As students picked their keywords, the choices varied between what they thought they knew, and what they knew they did not. For instance, if "Foreigner" was an apparently known concept, "Denizen" was not; if "Jew" was potentially known, "Blackamoor" was not; if "Merchant" was possibly known, "Mercenary" was not. Since the editors of the *TIDE Keywords* have provided a rich array of known-unknowns and almost-knowns, and since the appearance of the keywords on their web-page encourages scrolling and browsing, students had no trouble picking seventeen different keywords on the day of the sign-up. The choices came accompanied with comments such as "I know what this word means now, or I think I know—but I wonder what that word meant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," or "I mean, it's still English, but is it the same English?" or "I've never heard that word before, I want to know what it means." In the class, most of the students called the US, and central Ohio, home; most were white; and all of them owned their positions as coming from families that had immigrated to this country in the near or not-so-near past. Thus, I found the students curious about a history that they knew to be, in an inalienable way, also their own.

Whether the presentations happened in person (before the lockdown) or online (after the lockdown), students consistently demonstrated both genuine curiosity and engaged attention with one another. I see this as a testament both to the intellectual integrity and generosity of my students, and to the accessibility of the keyword chapters. The students *wanted* to do the reading. And in a few cases, students also "read along" with their classmates even though they were not themselves responsible for presenting particular keywords. This led to even richer discussions, with the work of a few helping to propel the whole class into deeper conversations. In keeping with my pedagogical principle of facilitating situations where students can and even must teach each other, I usually held back for the first ten minutes of the question-and-answer period unless specifically asked for a response. (If I was specifically asked, it was usually when a student wanted to double-check with me about historical context).

Being obliged to present on a keyword ensured that students paid meticulous attention to details as they read their selected essays. Engaging with materials already

imbued with cultural etymology also helped, I noted, to encourage students to go back and forth between the *Oxford English Dictionary* online, and their keyword essays. Suddenly, the early uses of words mattered: the texts of early uses, the contexts of early uses, and the changes in meaning of a word with every subsequent use. Since I had explicitly stated, too, that the weight of the class discussions during this exercise was on them, and that they must take care to be intelligible to classmates who had *not* read the essay assigned to the presenter, the presentations and following discussions proved to be focused, accessible, and wide-ranging. Some of the best launching-points for later chats were in students' articulation of the associations they made between their reading and their own lived histories. What might it have meant for a family arriving in the US in the early twentieth century—and what might their path to citizenship in a strange land/country mean? When a student called the US and central Ohio "home" today, but was close to her grandparents who emphatically *didn't* call the US home, what did *that* mean for the family's position of belonging? One student's non-US-citizen boyfriend had been asked to resubmit papers for US entry—yet, their mutual affection, she told the class, mad them want to refus the border that wer now being imposed on them by the visa and immigration system. One student was in the class on an F1 visa, a student visa—and after his degree, he wanted to go home. He thought aloud on whether he even wanted to call himself an "immigrant" in this country. *Is one an immigrant while one thinks of oneself only as passing through? One student talked of a great-grandparent who was Native—"but that's not the culture I was brought up in."* How should such a person understand reparation and repatriation?

Here are some of my favorite instances from the questions and comments I had the pleasure of responding to or building on:

"You know, being a denizen sounds like being a second-class citizen—like if you're from Puerto Rico [and in the US]. We like your taxes, but we don't like you."

"You're saying that being a pirate was actually legal?!"

"I knew that people couldn't have been calling *themselves* pagans—it was the Christians calling them that. Which explains some of the things they [the Christians] said about them [the pagans]."

"I'm seeing that *Merchant of Venice* speech about an 'alien' plotting against a 'citizen' now in a whole new light."

"The word they're using is 'rogue,' or even 'gypsy,' but really, they're using these categories to define disability, in a way. Otherwise why go on about the 'sturdie' beggar or vagabond?"

"The way we refer to people, that is, the terms we use, has consequences for how people are legally treated."

"Wow, I didn't know that passports were something that not everyone could get!"

"Can one become a stranger in their own home/country?"

"So, the nervousness about the alien is a nervousness about their *allegiance*, isn't it? I also thought about how we hear a lot of 'yes, please bring your diversity to this country [the US]' but at the same time, 'now please learn English and perform your belonging'."

"That reminds me, did you know that a study found that a whole lot of US citizens could not pass the US citizenship test?"

One result of this emphasis on discussion was that we often spent half the class period on the presentations and the lively deliberations and debates that took off. In a class time of 80 minutes, we frequently spent 45 minutes on two *TIDE Keyword* presentations. I don't regret this, because as the days passed, I developed some important skills myself: of explicitly building aspects of the students' discussion into my own lectures (for instance, of an "alien" condition as having parallels in the lives of unaccompanied minors crossing the US-Mexico border, as Valeria Luiselli's book discusses); of offering summative comments and remarks to further contextualize the keywords for the class (for instance: yes, "Indian" remains a fraught word, especially in the US, with this country's history of Native genocide); and of generating keywords-related study-questions for texts we were about to read (for instance: in Amitav Ghosh's novel, what picture do we get about the belonging and loyalties of a *global* "citizen"?).

It is also always a joy for me when the point-following-kind of discussion that I have modelled for my class is taken up and emulated by students—and I can sit back for a while and simply steer. But when I do this *TIDE Keywords* assignment again, I shall provide a little more scaffolding—telling students, for instance, how much time to spend on each part of their presentation (I shall recommend no more than 3 minutes for each), and asking each student, before their presentation, to send on to the rest of the class a paragraph of about 300 words outlining the thrust of their initial interest and findings (something along the lines of "I started this research because I thought I knew or wanted to know X, I found out Y, and I shall talk in class about the connections with Z"). This will help maximize time for the analytical aspect of the students' presentations, and also allow more time for the subsequent discussion.

In a midterm check-in, and in end-of-term reflections, students documented how valuable they had found their engagement with the keywords. One student wrote: "Much of my learning in this class came from our in-class discussions that followed our keyword presentations. The presentations were great because they allowed me to learn the origins of key English words and how those words were used to push ideologies and oppress marginalized groups. And with this, our class discussions that followed allowed us to address tough questions regarding these topics of oppression, and receiving varying viewpoints on these questions helped open my mind to various possibilities." Another wrote: "[Without the *TIDE Keywords* assignment] I would have never seen parts of history repeating itself again and again. I learned so much from my own keyword project that I would have never expected to learn."

Most of our class time was dedicated to discussion of our readings. In this section, I want to talk about some specific payoffs of the texts we considered and indicate how they opened intersectional lenses for our thinking. For it is relatively common today to register, for instance, that a story or a narrative is “about” race, or gender, or sexuality, or disability, and so on—and to use the specific analytic as either the only or main lens through which we read or engage with that text. But the reality of our lived condition in the twenty-first century is that the most devastatingly marginalizing factors based on identity and context seldom operate alone, or even in conjunction with *an* other definite dynamic of discrimination. I wanted us, in the classroom, to register the *multiple* and often impossible-to-fully-address-with-global-North-vocabularies factors at play in the lives of the people we were reading about. And I wanted us to grasp some of the profound, terrible, commonalities through which mechanisms of human disqualification work across the world. I also wanted us to note the frightening versatility of these mechanisms across geographies and even political contexts. Finally, I wanted us to continue, in the model of the *Keywords*, to register the discourses through which disadvantages and detriments were systemically *manufactured* for peoples, and even demographics, in order to render those peoples expendable in and through various arenas.

Throughout, I also wanted us to read and use the power of the stories we were considering—stories of love, loss, movement, belonging, fear, grief, nostalgia, courage, and peace—to *counter* those systemic oppressions. I neither subscribe to nor teach narratives of easy subversion. Thus, it was not my goal to in any way underplay the magnitude of the problems confronting peoples, or to sugarcoat the trauma of the persons (and characters) we studied. But, both temperamentally and pedagogically, I also cannot indulge in easy cynicism, which is itself another means of shirking responsibility. Thus, I both modelled and taught the work required of a reader’s hard empathy and harder hope. Further, since it is never enough for me to “generate awareness” about an issue without discussing positive and actionable onward steps to address that issue, I made deliberate room for discussions of how the self-criticality and awareness we now had could translate into policy and change, and what that might look like. By example of some of the finest writers anywhere—the example presently on my mind is that of the poet and polemicist John Milton, author of the landmark *Paradise Lost*—I understand literature is a means of taking in and responding to the world. In my literature classroom, therefore, I was teaching a mode of study that I hoped would result in my students being better citizens of the world. And I was teaching, I hoped, means by which my students, most of them citizens of what is today the biggest and most pernicious global empire, the US, might be able to confront this nation’s part in continued colonization and devastation of the planet, and work towards a more just future for all.

Valeria Luiselli’s *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* worked brilliantly as a first text for this class—

both firmly placing our center of beginning in our current geography, and simultaneously decentering our focus to enable what Luiselli calls a “hemispheric” imagination. Luiselli’s impassioned yet restrained prose, both confronting and negotiating a difficult subject—that of unaccompanied minors crossing the US-Mexico border—made it possible for us to read all our texts in this class with both anger and urgency. Reading Luiselli’s *Forty Questions* also effectively shattered my students’ obliviousness about US border and foreign policy that the overwhelming majority of US nationals live in.

For students themselves considering a career in law or policy, for instance, the book and our discussions sparked curiosity about how the law itself could be used to demarcate, oppress, exclude—even those policies that were created by a federal administration purported to be “welcoming” of immigrants, a government that called itself thoughtful and “humane,” a President, Barack Obama, whose election had been seen as a watershed in terms of racial dynamics in this country. With our own newspapers now running stories of “children in cages” at the US Southern border, we had to ask, after considering the evidence provided by Luiselli, how much of the inhumanity that was currently in action had been enabled by the previous “progressive” and “liberal” government. The US stands, after all, on four pillars: colonialism, slavery, genocide, and war. We wondered if there had ever been, or *could* be, in our lifetimes, a government truly confronting that devastating legacy in its entirety.

Another big takeaway for students was that most problems confronting our time didn’t just happen out of the blue, but were created, even created with deliberate design, and that someone, or a group, profited from deploying that problem.⁸ For no discussion of the US and its place in the world can be complete without a reckoning of its pernicious capitalism, its prioritizing of profit over human or planetary worth. An unexpected remuneration, for me, was also in hearing students tell me, usually after class or in office hours, that they appreciated having facts and research with which to talk to more conservative family members. For instance, they could now address the right-wing look-how-reasonable-we-are comment “Of course we support immigration, we only don’t support *illegal* immigration” with “And how are unaccompanied minors fleeing drug cartels supposed to activate this legal immigration if both the language and the spirit of the law is stacked against them? Or should we just say that we don’t give a damn about those children, let them die, not our problem?” Another student asked: “This immigration crisis—how did it happen unless powerful governments allowed it to happen? Not just in America but also Europe?”

Javier Zamora’s poems, from his book *Unaccompanied* (Copper Canyon Press, 2017), were particularly good as a next set of texts. A Salvadoran-US poet who writes in a brilliant bilingual register, who discusses matter-of-factly the US-enabling—with direct funding—of the Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992), and who poetically documents his own migration to the US across Guatemala, Mexico, and the Sonoran Desert, Zamora came across to my students as a

deeply accessible writer blending memory and documentary evidence. We read his poems “from The Book I Made with a Counselor My First Week of School” and “Second Attempt Crossing.” The volume is full of many other fantastic options for a class on teaching im/migration.

In a future version of this class, I want also to bring in the work of Indian-Guyanese writer David Dabydeen, whose poems (especially, for instance, “Coolie Mother” and “Coolie Son,” both in the collection *Coolie Odyssey*, Hansib Books, 1988), in a different bilingual register, talk about the movements of caste in indenturement and the reality and aftermath of slavery. Similarly, I wish to include, the next time I teach this class, some poems from the challenging but again profoundly accessible *Zong!* (Wesleyan University Press, 2008) by M. NourbeSe Philip. Especially the poems from the book’s first section, “Os,” stand to provide just the kind of reckoning and orientation that can lead even new readers of poetry to the rest of this volume, while also training students in methods of research, creative work, and understandings of collective memory. A great deal in this course, but *Zong!* perhaps in particular, asks for a content warning.⁹ I assert, however, that the experimental and accessible poems from this book are urgent for discussions not only of poetry and migration, but also for what counts as a record of the past and what that record means for the world we have inherited.

The next cluster of texts were probably, for my students, the most unexpected and exciting: two multiple-award-winning graphic memoirs, Thi Bui’s relatively recent *The Best We Could Do* (2017) and Marjane Satrapi’s relatively older but already-acquiring-the-status-of-a-classic *Persepolis* (2008). I had chosen these texts out of a conviction that many students, steeped as they are today in a visual world dominated by images, films, montages, advertisements, and visual-materials-packed-social-media, are adept at analysis of visual or visual-adjacent texts. Sure enough, not only did students do their “reading” with great promptness, but their midterm essays, which asked for close readings of sections of these texts, exhibited their intuitive reading of sketches, colors, graphic spreads, visual mood, and verbal minimalism.

To me, another significant pedagogical payoff was in implicitly communicating that literature takes many forms, and that these forms, such as graphic memoirs, for instance, can bear serious critical unpacking.

The stories in the graphic memoirs belonged to crossings between Vietnam and the US, and Iran and Europe. Thus, my students found themselves engaged in “researching the history that isn’t really taught in schools, you know.” But the stories of the protagonists in the texts—Satrapi and Bui themselves—made the lives of these young girls and then women also strangely “relatable” for my students. “I don’t want to say it’s the same thing at all, me

here in Ohio and Thi Bui’s mother in Vietnam during the war,” as one student said, “but the story of wanting to belong and wanting what is good for your children really spoke to me.” Another student reflected on the reality of growing up in the midst of war: “Who wouldn’t want to leave, or at least want their children to leave?” To me, another significant pedagogical payoff was in implicitly communicating that literature takes many forms, and that these forms, such as graphic memoirs, for instance, can bear serious critical unpacking. The skills of close reading apply here too, and our world is richer for our being able to pay attention across genres and forms.

In a future iteration of this class, I should like, especially having noted how fast my students read the graphic memoirs, to include another recent work that speaks to matters of childhood, belonging, displacement, political precariousness, and coming-of-age in an uncertain world: Malik Sajad’s *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (Fourth Estate, 2015). There should not be a class on migrations that does not teach about Kashmir, which has been under military occupation for decades, and violent and overtly contra-human-rights military occupation since August 2019. (In August 2019, the Indian government breached the fundamental conditions of the Instrument of Accession by which the former Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir had acceded to India in 1947). Earlier in this class, we had looked at Malik’s op-art essay entitled “An 18-Month-Old Victim in a Very Old Fight” (*The New York Times*, 19 January 2019), which documents the Indian state’s attack on its own citizens, even its youngest citizens. Sajad’s heartbreaking essay remains a powerful work through which to talk about military occupation, borders, citizens’ rights, and migrations; in future classes, I seek to pair the op-art essay with his graphic memoir *Munnu*.

The final movement of the course was in a duo of novels, both nominally “based” in South Asia, but spanning worlds and globes, and thinking across borders, climates, changes, and even species. Mohsin Hamid’s poetically rendered little novel *Exit West* reads fast—with readers held to the uncertain ties and fates of the two protagonists navigating human matters of love and longing as the world begins to disjoint and repair around them. Amitav Ghosh’s longer *Gun Island* reads even faster—with readers taken for voyages and flights through time and geography. Both novels speak in a measured, practiced, deeply generous voice—the kind that comes from a novelist knowing their craft, loving it, and doing it well. And in their own ways, both novels end with what can be called miracles and hope. It is a gift of these books to make hope itself look necessary. For *Gun Island*, in particular, it was useful to pair our reading with excerpts from Ghosh’s meditation on the climate crisis and the nature of fiction: *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (University of Chicago Press, 2016). Consequently, the decentering of us and ours that Luiselli’s book had achieved for the class early in the term now became more radical: as Ghosh’s fiction taught also a decentering of the human itself, and a genuine rumination on the non-human world around us.

In the teaching of this class, therefore, I was able to articulate for myself and my students that it is not enough to think of migration along only human terms any more. We must also think along the scale of our planet. In relation to this interconnectedness of the human, the political, the international, and the planetary, one student recommended to me Ai Weiwei's vivid documentary film *Human Flow* (2017), whose opening shot, he asserted, brought home to him as never before the sheer planet-scaled vastness of the *journeying* undertaken by refugees and displaced migrants in our time. Another student noted the irony of our world's boasted "connectedness" in terms of high-speed internet, access to information, and so on, alongside the fact of hardening borders and the increasing dispensability, as it would appear, of human life and planetary resources. Not for the first time, nor the last, we found ourselves mapping the lines between our continuing conditions of global colonialism/neo-colonialism, advanced capitalism, border-control and "homeland security," for-profit carceral systems of the global North, white supremacy, "maintenance of 'our' way of life," climate-change-denial and extractive destruction of the earth, and corporate systems' rendering of human life itself as collateral for the profit of a few.

In this final section of my essay, I shall discuss the second set of "presentations" undertaken by the class, and close with my students' comments about their most significant takeaways from the course. Students' comments, alongside the depth and range of their final projects, will provide a sense of the class as a learning experience that encouraged students to inhabit the world as a place where their learning *and* their actions matter.

To begin with, the second set of class presentations (after the first set on the *TIDE Keywords*) was planned to be on essays picked by students from the *Good Immigrant* and the *Refugee Tales* collections. I had placed all five volumes in course reserves at our Library and flagged early for my students that I wanted them to read, browse, and pick an essay to talk to the class about. They could pick either a *Good Immigrant* essay or a *Refugee Tale* to talk about. They should discuss: Why did they pick what they did? What in the essay arrested their attention? What did they connect to? What had they learnt about the journey, and possibly the life, of the writer (in the case of the *Good Immigrant* writers), or the person written *about* in the *Refugee Tales* (for these tales are not conventionally "authored" by the refugees/asylum-seekers/detainees, but instead, told to and documented by established and emerging writers working with the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group in the UK)?¹⁰ Unlike the previous presentation, this one would be shorter, more informal, more conversational. The goal was simply to put more migrant voices on the table, and for the class to know of multiple reasons, modes and means of travel, arrivals, and (since many *don't* know of the possibility of this) of *non*-arrivals and lives put inhumanely on hold, in the form of indefinite detainment. But even as we read in the volumes, our own world was drawing closer to a lockdown, and suddenly, one day, we had already met in person as a class for the last time.

With the final half of the term now online, and with early Zoom fatigue setting in in our newly-rendered-to-the-screen workday reality, I opted not to continue with the class presentations. Instead, I asked my students to upload—with the possibility of sharing among the class—a "Letter to the Immigrant" (from the *Good Immigrant* books) or a "Letter to the Refugee" (from the *Refugee Tales* books). I suggested a length of 3-4 pages, but the letters could be as long as they needed to be. When the submissions came in, they made for strangely moving reading. My students had written to their own "Good Immigrant," sometimes a well-known one, such as Himesh Patel or Riz Ahmed or Alexander Chee or Chigozie Obioma, with genuine curiosity and even admiration for their achievements. ("I read your book recently," or "I love your acting and follow your work, but I didn't know this part of your story.") And they had shared their own stories—sometimes along lines of confluence with the immigrant's story, and sometimes to explicitly say that they, the student and the Good Immigrant, appeared to come from different worlds.

But most students wrote to the "Refugees" they had read about. The *Refugee Tales* take their name from Geoffrey Chaucer's Middle English *Canterbury Tales* (written in the later fourteenth century and first printed by William Caxton in 1476). The *Refugee Tales* explicitly announce their literary indebtedness to the names of their predecessors (such as "The Miller's Tale" or "The Wife of Bath's Tale" or "The Clerk's Tale" or "The Man of Law's Tale") with such present-day titles such as "The Lover's Tale," "The Chaplain's Tale," "The Interpreter's Tale," and "The Mother's Tale." Many of my students owned that they had picked their *Refugee Tales* based on the titles of the tales. And now, writing *back* to their necessarily anonymous addresses, whom they could not know but whose lives we had *some* knowledge of, my students wrote with heart, heat, tenderness, anguish, indignation, helplessness, and a kind of hope. The questions surfaced again and again in their letters: "What can I do for you [the refugee I have read about] now? What can I do *but* listen? What can I do *more* than listen?" or "How can I help you [the detainee I have read about]? *Can* I help you within the system we are both in? Or do I have to break the system to do so?" or "May I tell your story [that I just read] widely myself? Do you even like having your story told? To strangers like me? But I feel as though I know you now?"

Students were aware that the refugees themselves could only have spoken—and told these sections of their tales—under conditions of unforgiving anonymity. They were aware, too, that they were reading each *Refugee Tale* through the necessary mediation of a narrator, who was often a well-known writer, such as Ali Smith, Kamila Shamsie, Bernardine Evaristo, Patience Agbabi. Yet, according to my students, the *details* of the travellers/refugees/asylum-seekers/detainees themselves, *their* pain and *their* loss, *their* reasons for leaving and belonging, came through. One student told me: "I didn't know you could tell stories like that, but it makes sense." Another followed up: "How else would these stories get told?" Another wrote: "The final Immigrant Tale assignment,

in which you had us write a letter to our selected immigrant, was particularly effective in this [class goal of developing awareness and empathy], as it compelled us to involve our own personal histories and experiences with the experiences of the immigrant.”

As the semester neared its end, students climbed into and out of their final projects. What might earlier—in non-lockdown and libraries-open conditions—have been a research or literature-review paper (“How does immigration law operate for unaccompanied minors?” or “What is the experience of immigrant mothers giving birth in the US when they don’t know English and cannot access traditional forms of care?”) now became a close reading paper or an opinion paper or a research plan for a future project (“How does Thi Bui depict her experience of her own giving birth and her mother’s giving birth, and what do these depictions tell us about intergenerational dynamics in this Vietnamese-American immigrant family?” or “What is the significance of the final miracle in *Gun Island*, and what can it teach us about hope in the face of what Ghosh himself calls [in *The Great Derangement*] the ‘unthinkable’?” or “Why are US immigration laws so different for Mexican immigrants than for other immigrants coming across the Southern border?”).

What I saw persist in my students was a desire to think hard, to continue their learning on the topic of im/migration and em/migration, and to convert the term’s scholarship into future organizing and educating at the community-level and beyond. As we travelled deeper into the pandemic, and our own physical movements wound down, students continued to think across greater expanses of place and space. One student wrote: “I loved the relevancy to current issues surrounding migration. This course was extremely eye opening, and I would recommend it to anyone. This course will make you more empathetic, worldly, a better writer, and a more critical reader.” Another reflected: “I particularly liked that the course challenged us to think of movements and migrations pluralistically. In other words, rather than thinking of movements and migrations as just a movement of people from one place to another, there are also movements of ideas, technologies, words, cultures, power, and even climate, all of which are deeply intertwined with the movements of people. [...] I should also mention that the diverse sampling of literary works is also a boon for any lover of [writing in] English: the sample shows the rich artistic contributions that movements and migrations have had upon the [English] language.”

Notes

¹ See the United Nations International Organization for Migration *World Migration Report 2020*, p. 2 (https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/wmr_2020.pdf.) It is important to underscore, however, that nearly two-thirds of this number pertains to labor migrants, who are the most disenfranchised in rights, livelihoods, and opportunities for themselves and their children. (In 2015 alone, more than 65 million people were forcibly displaced.)

² See, for instance, the report “Climate Displacement in Bangladesh,” by the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change (2012), https://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/groups_committees/loss_and_damage_executive_committee/application/pdf/ds_bangladesh_report.pdf; “The Country Disappearing under Rising Tides,” *BBC Future* (2 September 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190829-bangladesh-the-country-disappearing-under-rising-tides>; and “Climate Change Creates a New Migration Crisis for Bangladesh,” *National Geographic* (24 January 2019), <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/01/climate-change-drives-migration-crisis-in-bangladesh-from-dhaka-sundabans/>.

³ See, for instance, McKibben’s ongoing series *The Climate Crisis*, *The New Yorker’s* newsletter on the environment: <https://www.newyorker.com/contributors/bill-mckibben>.

⁴ Architesh Panda, “Climate Change, Displacement, and Managed Retreat in Coastal India,” <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/climate-change-displacement-managed-retreat-india>

⁵ See the report on “Climate Displacement in Bangladesh” by the Environmental Justice Foundation, <https://eifoundation.org/reports/climate-displacement-in-bangladesh>.

⁶ The multi-year TIDE Project is hosted online through the Universities of Liverpool and Oxford, and funded by the European Research Council, 2015-2020.

⁷ Nandini Das, “Introduction,” *TIDE Keywords*, <http://www.tideproject.uk/keywords-home/>.

⁸ See especially Luiselli, pp. 45-46 and 84-87.

⁹ Here are the first sentences from the back-cover of *Zong!*: “In November, 1781, the captain of the slave ship *Zong* ordered that some 150 Africans be murdered by drowning so that the ship’s owners could collect insurance monies. Relying entirely on the words of the legal decision *Gregson v. Gilbert*—the only extant public record document related to the massacre of these African slaves—*Zong!* tells the story that cannot be told yet must be told.”

¹⁰ See <https://www.refugeetales.org/>.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



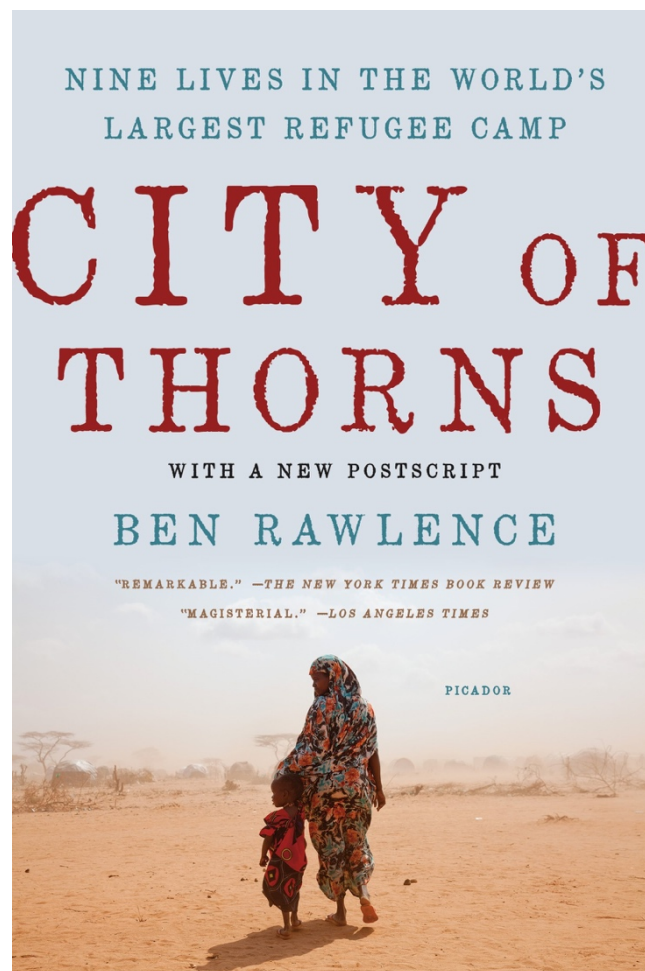
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the University of Pittsburgh as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Changing the Narrative of Displacement in Africa: Counter-Narratives, Agency, and Dignity

by Husseina Dinani



CITY OF THORNS BY BEN RAWLENCE (2016). PICADOR PRESS

Discourses on displacement in Africa in humanitarian campaigns and the media tend to either sensationalize the suffering of displaced individuals, reducing their subjectivity to abject victimhood, or portray them as security threats. Both tropes, which lack nuance, context and human agency and dignity continue to circulate and proliferate as the number of displaced peoples continues to rise globally. The various social and digital platforms that humanitarian and development institutions are able to utilize to raise awareness and reach a wider audience to solicit funds from has further expanded and intensified the metanarrative of displacement centered on Africans' enduring suffering or enacting violence over the last few decades. Considering these factors and the recent resurgences of xenophobia around the world, particularly targeted at immigrants, it is imperative for instructors to disrupt the normative narrative of displacement based on the victim-perpetrator binary so that the agency and multidimensionality of displaced peoples across different eras and geographical locations can occupy center stage. Moreover, attuning students to comprehend displaced peoples beyond the various totalizing categories of victim or perpetrator ascribed to them – "stateless" and "refugee" or "terrorist" and "militia/rebel" – galvanizes young adults to view displaced individuals first and foremost as humans, thereby restoring dignity to them.

Drawing on my experiences of teaching two particular works in various undergraduate courses in History, African Studies, Women's and Gender Studies and International Development Studies at the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) in Ontario, Canada, over the last five years, this essay discusses some of the successful and challenging experiences of teaching about displacement and mobility in Africa. While these works were part of introductory and mid-level courses that covered overlapping and different time periods in Africa and encompassed a wide range of themes beyond displacement, they could very well be part of a course that specifically concentrates on (forcible) migration and mobility in different locales and eras in Africa or has a global and comparative focus. "How to Write About Africa" by Binyavanga Wainaina powerfully critiques the stereotypical ways in which "Western" media and literary works have characterized Africa, which includes reducing African experiences to abject suffering to over-emphasize the largesse and success of the "Western" humanitarian enterprise in Africa. *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp* by Ben Rawlence offers a nuanced and balanced rendition of displacement and mobility in Africa by highlighting the structural factors and hierarchical relationships compromising displaced Africans' welfare and security while also demonstrating displaced peoples' persisting commitment to live meaningful lives.

It is important to detail the diverse backgrounds of students in my courses as this factor significantly shaped the ways in which students engaged with the works during class discussions and assignments and my facilitation. The majority of the students in my classes are racialized individuals and almost half of them are African, either international students from or second or third generation Canadians tracing their lineage to various African countries including, but not limited to, Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia,

Ethiopia, Eritrea, The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and Liberia. While very few of the students had experienced displacement, many had family members who had previously been uprooted from or compelled to flee their homes and were separated from kin and loved ones due to various political crises and instabilities. Several of the elderly kin of the second and third generation African-Canadian students had immigrated to Canada as asylum seekers and shared their first-hand accounts of displacement and resettlement with their children and other family members, some of whom were students in my courses. Additionally, regardless of their backgrounds or whether they or their family members' had experienced displacement, most students had been exposed to the contemporary politics of displacement as the Canadian government had launched "Operation Syrian Refugees" towards the end of 2015, which aimed to resettle more than 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada in 100 days.

My teaching experience of the two works, and others that I will be unable to discuss here, demonstrates that pushing forward the pedagogical agenda of locating the human and affective dimensions of displacement in Africa provides an inclusionary space for students, particularly for those who or whose family members had previously experienced displacement. The works discussed prompted students in my courses to articulate rage, discomfort and uncertainty as they were propelled to grapple with the simplistic ways in which mainstream (and some scholarly) narratives have continued to flatten and depersonalize African human experience and because some aspects of the works resonated with their own life and familial trajectories of displacement and immigration. Some students organically weaved their and their kin's experiences into discussions, at times even declaring solidarity with some of the more contemporary African actors they were learning about. Other students expressed a position of indifference on the politics of representation and challenging the status quo of knowledge production and dissemination, perhaps due to their distance (both in terms of time and geographical location) from a particular event and set of historical actors, and a general fatalism about the hegemony of narratives that victimize Africans and those residing elsewhere in the "Global South." The entanglement of students' various experiences with those of diverse migrant African peoples they encountered in the assigned works resulted in incredible moments where students critically engaged in the production of narratives of displacement that foregrounded the diversity of human experience.

Challenging the Stereotype of Victimhood

"Among your characters you must always include The Starving African, who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West. Her children have flies on their eyelids and pot bellies, and her breasts are flat and empty. She must look utterly helpless. She can have no past, no history; such diversions ruin the dramatic moment. Moans are good. She must never say



"HOW TO WRITE ABOUT AFRICA" BY BINYAVANGA WAINAINA

anything about herself in the dialogue except to speak of her (unspeakable) suffering." – Binyavanga Wainaina (2005)

In many of my undergraduate courses I assign Wainaina's satirical essay "How to Write About Africa" in one of the first weeks of classes (Wainaina, 2005). I normally assign with it a scholarly and primary source to examine the politics of representation in Africa. Wainaina's creative use of humour and irony to guilelessly expose mainstream media's and literary works' stereotypically negative, generalized and vague narratives of the continent and its peoples functions as an excellent icebreaker and provides me, as an instructor, with a poignant way to foreground the importance of considering African perspectives and seeing Africans as agentive actors.

In one version of an introductory undergraduate course entitled "Experiencing Development in Africa," the above excerpt from Wainaina's essay prompted a student, who was seated at the beginning of the front row of an auditorium classroom, to stand up and turn to face her peers during discussion so she could express her frustration with western media's and humanitarian aid campaigns' persistent characterization of Africans as helpless individuals awaiting the "west's" generosity. The student argued that the victimizing and depersonalized ways in which African refugees have normatively been represented did not align with her and her family members' experiences of displacement. Although the student did not provide details about her experiences of displacement, she confirmed the impoverished circumstances of people in camps but pointed out that many took care of themselves. When she turned around to take her seat, I noticed that the student had tears in her eyes. The student remained facing the front of the classroom with her back to her peers for the next few minutes of the continuing discussion. I was able to briefly ask her if she was all right, to which she responded with a nod and smile and subsequently turned to join the discussion. After this incident, the student would frequently visit me, sometimes accompanied by other students from the class, during and outside of office hours to continue class discussions and form new conversations, which were usually focused on various past and unfolding political issues in Africa. She and her peers were excited to talk about matters that resonated with their and their family members'

experiences. These students and many others in my courses brought their own experiences and histories to bear on course readings and materials.

The student's rejection and invalidation of the predominant tropes of African victimhood based on her and her family members' divergent experiences of displacement is illustrative of the numerous instances where African students in my classes challenged western-centric frameworks that reduced their and their peoples' multifaceted experiences to a one-dimensional narrative of victimhood and suffering. Students organically used their experiences and familial stories to establish counter-narratives of African experience within and beyond the continent that included nuance and diversity, and simultaneously recognized African agency and suffering. Following the student's intervention and contribution to the larger unfolding class discussion on (mis)representation in humanitarian and development discourses, a second-generation Somali-Canadian student pointed out that even though the instability and insecurity caused by the Somali civil war significantly contributed to her parents' decision to leave their birthplace in the mid-1990s, their decision was strongly based on their aspirations for a stable and secure future for themselves and their children. The student underscored that her parents made difficult and critical decisions that prioritized what they perceived was best for their family and pointed out that these narratives never receive much attention in the media. Students in this course and in other courses drew from Wainaina's essay and argued that the media normatively bombards viewers with visuals of masses of displaced Africans, particularly women and children, or a dejected looking individual, who become representative of all refugees. By drawing on their own and family members' experiences of immigration to engage with the hegemonic narrative of displacement in media and humanitarian discourses on Africa, students critically contributed to the construction of narratives that veered away from interpreting human experience merely "through a *negative interpretation* (Mbembe, 2001, 1) or as reduced to "bare life" (Agamben, 1998).

Embracing the palpable energy culminating from class discussions about Wainaina's and Aubrey Graham's research on "humanitarian crisis images" consistently perpetuating

the victim-perpetrator binary over the course of a hundred years in the DRC, I often urge students to go beyond negating or correcting accounts that over-emphasize African suffering by asking them to think about why these particular narratives continue to have dominance and a wide reach (Graham, 2014). The shift in focus results in a lively discussion about how the (visual and discursive) trope of the perpetually struggling African, particularly the displaced African, in mainstream media and humanitarian aid campaigns strategically enables institutions to accrue the much needed funding and resources without having to acknowledge the deeply political dimensions that contribute to the dislocation of people and poverty and environmental and health crises more generally. Additionally, and also in reference to other sources discussing similar issues about (mis-)representation, students pointed out that people tend to sympathize more with other people's plight when their pain and hardship is simplistically presented, i.e. when they are framed as victims. Students emphasized that this streamlined narrative of victimhood propels viewers to donate, which explains the hegemony of depoliticized and depersonalized narratives of human suffering in humanitarian campaigns. Some students offered introspective reflections revealing that they and others in their households had a few times responded to donation calls from various organizations, such as World Vision Canada and Save the Children, which depicted displaced peoples in various parts of Africa (and also Syria, probably due to the unfolding Syrian civil war at the time and Canada's commitment to resettle a significant number of Syrian refugees) as being destitute and desperate. They noted that at the time they did not pause to ponder the complicated historical and political reasons for why these groups were dislocated and needed help. Nor did they question the scripted nature of the visuals and accompanying texts. Some candidly admitted that they felt sorry for the individuals and were saddened to learn about their circumstances. Many students recalled seeing and feeling distraught by the viral photograph of the three-year old Syrian boy, identified as Aylan Kurdi, who drowned in Mediterranean waters, along with family members, and whose body washed up on Turkish shores in 2015. Students pointed out that the image and many others like it that captured the plight and death of various refugees crossing turbulent waters on unsafe boats to seek asylum in Europe impelled them and their family members to make donations.

These discussions would often concretize into students having a shared perspective that donors, including themselves, their kin and friends, play an important role in providing support and resources but that their uncritical participation inadvertently perpetuates and reifies the victimizing narrative of displaced peoples. In thinking about how donors could perhaps change their engagement with dominant narratives of Africans as abject victims, students would debate between the need to provide resources to vulnerable people, particularly during emergency situations, and the importance of presenting them as nuanced individuals, who could express a range of emotions and have multitude aspirations. Many students came to the conclusion that the reductive narrative of victimhood imposed on displaced peoples, particularly in the context of conflict, would persist because it generated the strongest (emotional

and material) humanitarian response from people. Yet students argued that because humanitarianism predominantly thrives on narratives of human suffering, it becomes critical for people, especially donors, to be exposed to diverging narratives so that they are self-aware when responding to solicitations. They pointed out that scholarly work, such as Wainaina's and Graham's individual works, offer nuanced accounts of African experiences and contexts, but that mainstream media and literary works should also be responsible for disseminating these narratives because of the tremendous capacity these channels have to reach a larger and wider audience.

The critical discussions that works such as Wainaina's and Graham's have sparked amongst students in the various courses I have taught at UTSC has enabled me to learn more about them, their past(s) and how they make sense of the world they inhabit and their positions within it, than straightforwardly asking them to introduce themselves to me and their peers. Additionally, the spontaneous and energetic discussions Wainaina's essay has propelled in many of my classes has facilitated students to form relationships of friendship and solidarity with their peers based on their shared histories and backgrounds, which have extended beyond the classroom and after the conclusion of a course. In many ways, teaching a source like "How to Write About Africa" in the first or second class of a course that has a substantial number of students identifying as African, racialized, and the children and grandchildren of immigrants, including previously displaced peoples, can unexpectedly create an inclusive and productive classroom environment for the remainder of the semester, where students feel safe to share and critically reflect on their personal stories and forge communities beyond the parameters of group assignments and discussions. Moreover, by using their and their family members' personal experiences to approach course materials, students participated in creating an enriched archive on displacement and African experience that engaged with contexts beyond those assigned in the course. In so doing, students established a range of counter-narratives on African (and human) dislocation to the dominant narrative of the perpetually struggling and voiceless displaced African.

Struggle, Agency and Dignity in the Everyday Lives of Refugees at Dadaab, Kenya

While Wainaina's essay has pushed students in my courses to establish their own counter-narratives on African displacement, informed by their own personal and familial experiences, *City of Thorns* has offered students with powerful counter-narratives to the hegemonic narratives of displaced peoples being victims or security threats. In my classes I have assigned the prologue, epilogue and chapters from the book that centrally focus on two of the nine displaced individuals featured. The prologue and epilogue provide students with critical historical and political context to understand the conflict and ensuing political instability in Somalia and the eastern horn of Africa more generally and how this situation led to the establishment and expansion of

Dadaab, resulting in an unprecedented situation of protracted refugees – those who have resided in camps for five years or more – from the 1990s and onwards. The remaining chapters focus on the life stories and everyday experiences of Guled and Kheyro in Dadaab. Guled, who was born in Mogadishu in 1993, made the difficult decision to flee his birthplace for Dadaab in 2010 after he was taken as a child-soldier by al-Shabaab – a militant group connected to al-Qaida – leaving behind his sister and newlywed wife. Kheyro arrived at Dadaab with her mom, Rukia, when she was two years old in 1992. In 2015, both Guled and Kheyro continued to reside in Dadaab. In addition to providing students with the rich and varied perspectives of displaced Somalis, the stories of Guled and Kheyro expose students to the multiple actors and power dynamics shaping the daily operations of camp life.

In the few times that I have taught this book, I have had the majority of students reveal to me that prior to reading the assigned chapters in my course they had not before heard of Dadaab or realized that many displaced peoples had lived in camps for the entirety of their life. “Protracted” refugee was a new category of displaced peoples for many students. In one class, a student from Nairobi, Kenya, abashedly told his peers that he had been unaware of Dadaab despite, as he learned from *City of Thorns*, it (at the time) being the world’s largest refugee camp, which had been in existence for more years than he had been alive and located in his country of residence. The student said that many of his friends in Nairobi were equally ignorant. The student admitted looking up the camp’s location online. To emphasize to students that there were many others who did not know about displaced peoples that were geographically proximate to them, I shared with the class that while I was growing up in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in the 1990s, I too was unaware of the existence of refugee settlements in the northwestern parts of the country, which at the time were expanding due to the influx of refugees from Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire and Somalia and added that my knowledge of these camps developed more over the last fifteen years as a result of my research interests and teaching. I also pointed out to the class that most refugee camps were located in the “Global South.” This conversation allowed me to encourage students to rethink their initial articulations of disapproval of the Kenyan government towards the camps and refugees it hosted. Using material from *City of Thorns* on the economics of maintaining expanding camps like Dadaab, and pointing out the high unemployment and continuing internal political tensions in Kenya, I would encourage students to reevaluate the antagonistic approach of the Kenyan government

towards inhabitants in Dadaab and displaced peoples within its borders more generally. I also directed students to consider the role of prior historical tensions between Somalia and Kenya, going as far back as the colonial period, in shaping the mistrust and xenophobia that citizens in both nation-states had for each other and particularly towards displaced populations. To nuance their understandings of the impoverished conditions in Dadaab, so that they were not simply attributed to the Kenyan government’s negligence, I would ask students to consider the role of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in providing emergency relief rather than sustainable development. Additionally, I would ask students to think about Rawlence’s arguments about member countries’ individual political agendas and material support shaping UN humanitarian initiatives, which diminished the prospects for encamped refugees to be resettled. By guiding students to think about the multiple and complex factors that *City of Thorns* discusses to explain the birth and continuing longevity of Dadaab, my goal has been to urge students to think beyond simplistic frameworks of accountability that inadvertently foreclose discussions of displacement as a global issue.

The remainder of this section will discuss class discussion and student assignments on the assigned chapters from the book in “Experiencing Development in Africa,” offered in Winter 2021. (Wherever I reference the identity of students and their published work, I do so with their permission.) When I asked students in this course to think about why they may not have known about Dadaab, they drew on the prologue of *City of Thorns* to substantiate their claims of underlying religious and racial xenophobic elements contributing to western countries’ and institutions’ negligence of Dadaab. These students specifically pointed to Rawlence recalling that the members of the National Security Council, who he met with at the White House in 2014, were more concerned about whether the refugees at Dadaab were on the path to becoming radical extremists or members of al-Shabaab than about their welfare or the longevity of their stay in Dadaab. One student pointed out how the voices of African refugees at Dadaab were absent at this meeting and that this type of omission is not new and particularly reminiscent of the colonial period and contemporary development policy in Africa. Kruti Sukhadia powerfully articulated some of these sentiments in a multi-layered visual she submitted as part of an extra-credit assignment (see Figure One). The visual has an image of Dadaab in the background, with an animated image of individuals who look like they have been walking in harsh conditions over a long distance placed on top. The visual is framed with António Guterres’ quote -- “Refugees are not terrorists. They are often the first victims of terrorism.” –



FIGURE ONE

which was part of an address he gave in 2005 when he was the United Nations' High Commissioner of Refugees. Kruti conveyed to me that she deliberately used an animated image to represent displaced peoples making their way to Dadaab rather than an image that contained (unidentified) Somali refugees in order to be respectful of and avoid depersonalizing the identity and experiences of African refugees. In her explanatory paragraph, Kruti mentioned that the book dispels the normative view of African refugees as posing a security threat and her image attempts to do the same. Kibati Femi-Johnson also reiterated the theme of refugees at Dadaab wrongly being labelled as terrorists in stanzas two and three of a poem titled "A Refugee's Resiliency," which he wrote for his assignment (see end of section).

To further push students to think about why refugees at Dadaab continue to be neglected, I asked students if they thought Dadaab's geographic location might, in part, play a factor. A couple of students pointed out that the refugees at Dadaab were not the ones who reached European shores after crossing the Mediterranean Sea, and therefore they were not on the radar of the "Western" world and mainstream media outlets. Students substantiated their viewpoint by pointing out that the Canadian government and Canadians more generally have over the past few years been assisting Syrian refugees over those located elsewhere in the world, particularly in Africa, because their European allies have been paying attention to this particular group of displaced peoples. Two Eritrean students pointed out that the current conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia, and the resultant displacement of Ethiopians from the region, is barely receiving any attention by Canadian media and major international news sources. Students' responses highlight that they held mainstream media responsible for their unawareness of Dadaab. Moreover, they held western nations, including the Canadian government's uneven resettlement policies towards different groups of displaced populations, accountable for the protracted refugee status in Dadaab. By bringing their presentist lenses to understand the continued marginalization of Dadaab, students constructed critical interpretations about displacement that engaged with and went beyond the frameworks offered in *City of Thorns*.

After discussing the structural and historical factors accounting for the establishment and durability of Dadaab, the remainder of the class focused on the individual stories of Guled and Kheyro. Guled's story sparked varying reactions and conversations from students. Some students interweaved their family members' experiences of resettlement when discussing Guled's displacement.

Students were struck by the challenging and dangerous journey Guled had to undertake in order to leave Mogadishu and gain entry into Dadaab. Guled's experience reminded one student of her father's long and challenging resettlement journey several decades ago when he left Eritrea on foot, heading towards Egypt through Sudan, and then immigrating to Canada. This story resulted in a couple of students expressing their surprise and awe at the long distances displaced peoples are compelled to undertake when their security and welfare have been severely compromised. Other students pointed out how these stories significantly departed from the dominant ones featured in the news, which focused on displaced peoples crossing dangerous waters that led to Europe. Another student articulated his admiration for Guled, perceiving his decision as courageous--to leave his home and family, including his new wife, knowing that the journey ahead was unsafe. He argued that refugees like Guled are rarely, if ever, portrayed as brave in dominant discourses. Similarly, for her assignment, Afomia Selemon drew a picture to capture Guled's strength and resiliency, while also portraying the numerous challenges he faces in Dadaab (see Figure Two). In her accompanying commentary, Afomia mentions that Guled's story reminded her of her parents' decision to leave Ethiopia "to seek a better life and protection so that [they could] build their family away from the violence and chaos

." Afomia explains that the jagged red line in the middle of the image represents the Somalia-Kenya border, as well as Guled's and refugees' "sense of separation" and hope for "a better life." Afomia used consistently darker shading on the Somali side of the border versus a combination of light and dark shading on the Kenyan side to represent the better security refugees encountered in Dadaab, particularly in terms of access to education, healthcare, food and shelter.

Afomia includes a radiant sun and some birds in the sky on the Kenyan side of the border versus the automated rifle and a crescent with a star to represent the Islamic Courts Union on the Somali side to further reiterate the relatively greater stability Somalis had in Dadaab. But Afomia also acknowledges the obstacles and hardships that refugees face in Dadaab, which she represents through the patches of darker shading. Some of the obstacles Afomia lists are: the permanency of Dadaab, "the emergence of diseases," and the challenges of navigating the bureaucratic process of accessing food rations from the WFP, which were often inconsistent and insufficient due to inadequate donor funding, concurrent crises elsewhere and poor security conditions within the camp.

In addition to highlighting for students the physical and material hardships displaced peoples endured while travelling to and residing in Dadaab, Guled's story drew



FIGURE TWO

students' attention to the psychological adversities they experience. Students empathized with Guled's continuing fear and sense of dislocation after he had successfully escaped from al-Shabaab. Two Eritrean students were struck by Guled feeling homesick and helpless when his wife, Maryam, left Dadaab with their children to return to Somalia while he could not join them because he feared al-Shabaab would target him. The students shared that Guled's vulnerability resonated with them as family members dear to them continued to feel similar longings for "home" after they left Eritrea several decades ago. The students mentioned that the current conflict in Ethiopia, which involved Eritrea, reminded their families that returning home was not a possibility and confirmed to them that they had made the right decision to leave Eritrea. Bryanna Blake expressed feeling shocked when she read about Guled being taken as a child-soldier by al-Shabaab while he was attending school and realized the prominent role that (psychological and physical) violence played in the process of displacement. Like her peers, Bryanna recognized Guled's

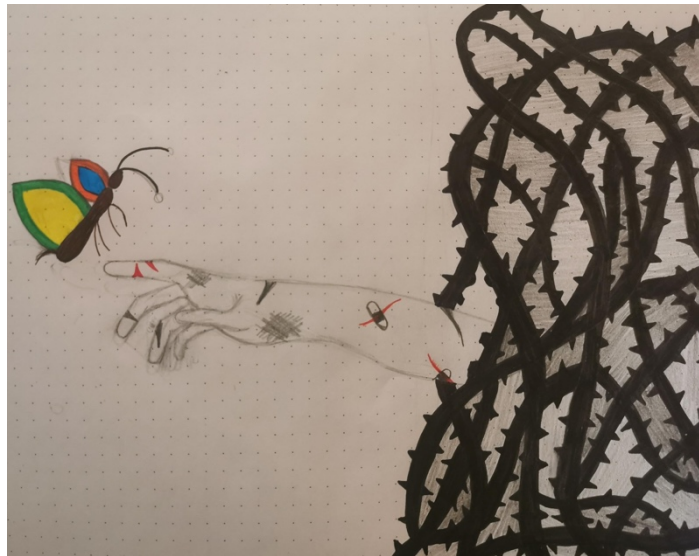


FIGURE THREE

continuing embodiment of dislocation and feeling of imprisonment, yet Bryanna also acknowledged the hopefulness of refugees at Dadaab. Bryanna strikingly illustrated these sentiments of refugees through an illustration that depicted a hand that had bandaged cuts and bruises on it reaching through an opening from barbed wire to touch a colourful butterfly, which signified hope (see Figure Three). Bryanna explained that while her illustration depicts the manifold "struggles or hurdles that the people within the city of thorns [Dadaab]" face, it also recognizes the inspiring factor of hope shaping the lives of refugees at Dadaab. Contrary to the uncertain and bleak future Rawlence sees for refugees at Dadaab, Bryanna's visual signifies a hopeful outcome. Afomia (mentioned earlier) also evokes a more positive outcome for refugees at Dadaab, basing her perspective on the relatively improved political stability in Somalia today than when Rawlence was writing.

Students similarly evoked the themes of hardship and hope when discussing Kheyro, yet they found her story more relatable than Guled's because of her aspirations for post-secondary education. Due to "the demands of providing for the family" Kheyro was forced to drop out of school a few times so that when she was nineteen she was in form four – equivalent to grade nine in Canada and USA (156). Most students in my courses are a few years younger than Kheyro and while they had not fallen behind in their education to the extent that Kheyro had, students shared that they too had experienced similar challenges as Kheyro when it came to their educational performance. Many students in my courses, and at UTSC more broadly, simultaneously juggle

familial commitments and part-or full-time employment. For Daniel Cherkas, who was enrolled in my winter 2021 course, Kheyro's story, particularly her desire to successfully complete secondary high school so she could attend university in Canada through a scholarship from World University Service of Canada (WUSC), was relatable because he recognized that "even in the best of conditions the pressure around school can be difficult." He pointed out that these challenges have increased for students over the last year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, Daniel

pointed out that many of the challenges Kheyro faced – "the difficulty and dangers of her everyday living conditions, pressures of needing to care for her family, the threat of war and terrorist attacks, and even the corruption in the very academic system that is providing her hope" – are specific to her being displaced and residing in Dadaab, making her situation "unimaginable" and reminding him "how fortunate" he and others are to live where they do. Daniel recognized that

Dadaab provided Kheyro with greater educational

opportunities that "would [not] have been possible in her home country of Somalia due to the socio-political situation" but he realized that the challenges of Dadaab kept her dream of studying in Canada "out of reach." To visually represent the challenges Kheyro faces, Daniel constructed a collage made of different images taken from the web; in the center of it is a girl who is attempting to navigate an unsafe landscape while balancing a stack of books on her head and carrying a child on her hip (see Figure Four).¹

In contrast to Daniel's nuanced account that captures both Kheyro's difficult circumstances and her aspirations to exit Dadaab through WUSC, the majority of the discussion about Kheyro centered on students expressing their astonishment and admiration for Kheyro's disposition and accomplishments within Dadaab. For instance, one student mentioned that when Kheyro found out she achieved lower than the C+ she required to be eligible for a WUSC scholarship, he was surprised by her calm behaviour and resolve to attempt to earn a higher grade in the next round of the exam. The student shared that he is rarely composed like Kheyro when he receives an unsatisfactory grade on an assignment, and he does not have the enormous financial and emotional caretaking responsibilities that Kheyro does. The student's surprise with Kheyro's behavior continued when Kheyro selflessly abandoned her educational goals for a paid job within the camp because her mom refused Kheyro to retake the examination, arguing that it was her turn to



FIGURE FOUR

contribute financially towards the household. Another student in the class was equally impressed with Kheyro's maturity. The incredible support Kheyro and her household members extended to each other amid precarious and challenging circumstances stood out for this student. The student pointed out the extensive encouragement and material resources that Kheyro's mother had extended towards Kheyro's education over the years at the expense of her own health and mentioned that this supportive element was something that she too had experienced from her own family, although her socio-economic circumstances were drastically different. Moreover, the student found Kheyro's individual successes – completing high school, becoming a certified teacher, and teaching at a school in Dadaab – particularly the transformative impact they had in augmenting Kheyro's own and her family's well-being, inspiring.

Guled's and Kheyro's individual stories provided students with concrete and some relatable examples of the multifaceted experiences of displaced peoples. The commonalities that students identified between themselves and the refugees at Dadaab that they were learning about enabled students to better empathize with the latter's everyday experiences. In class discussion and assignments, students identified Guled's and Kheyro's individual hardships, triumphs, affective relationships and self-presentations, while they also considered the varying structural and historical factors that shaped their everyday lives. Kibati's poem below is a powerful example of the ways in which a work like *City of Thorns* can equip students to create nuanced narratives of displacement that simultaneously attend to context and displaced people's agency and dignity, thereby disrupting the normative binary

framework of perpetrator-victim used in humanitarian and media discourses to characterize displaced Africans.

A Refugee's Resiliency

Have you ever, with a thousand other people, stared at the night sky?

Have you ever, with a loved one, in pain locked eyes?

Have you ever, with a family, choose who should be safe?

You may say yes, but your experience is unlike mine.

Welcome to the Horn of Africa, the arc of instability,

Plagued by extremism but saved by humanity,

Ignore me, I am not a terrorist, know I pose no threat

They've already taken my freedom, they cannot have my dignity.

You argue politics and religion to decide if I live or die,

I am neither Christian nor Muslim, nor left nor right,

Yet my life is bought by your prevailing ideologies,

I choose to be alive, you cannot determine my price.

Our camps are full, but our stomachs are empty,

Black steel birds amidst plastic white houses,
Cries of orphaned daughters in the silence of the city,
Opposites attract but I will find serendipity.

In your world, children skip classes, but where else
would we be?

You never know the value of a thing till you only see it
in a dream,

Education is now my escape route,

My mind will set me free.

Among us are football players and teachers and
everything alike,

We each have our ambitions when we daydream in the
night,

As circumstances crush curated passions,

We turn our minds to our delight, and not to our plight,

Refugees flood in and trickle out, but water never comes,

My confidence is bold, I will strive till I am done,

The scorching sun ignites a fire in my heart,

I will not be discouraged; not till I have sung.

There's no place like home, there's no place I call home,

Even in the Land of the Free, it seems I am not
welcomed,

The home of a refugee is wherever will accept them,

So I accept myself, I am where I am from.

Conclusion

Although my teaching experience on displacement in Africa has thus far been limited, the works discussed in this essay have served as effective teaching tools for me to encourage students at UTSC to widen their perspectives about displaced Africans beyond the victim-terrorist binary employed in mainstream discourses. The effectiveness of these works largely comes from the strong counter-narratives that each provides and the relevance each has to past and contemporary narratives of displaced Africans and other populations. By considering historical and contemporary context and perceiving displaced Africans as multifaceted humans that have agency and dignity, these works equip students, regardless of their background, with critical tools to question the normative depoliticized and depersonalized accounts of dislocation in Africa and

elsewhere in the world. Moreover, these works galvanize students to identify and deconstruct their implicit biases, particularly when it comes to how they may have unknowingly contributed to the continuing portrayal of displaced Africans in victimizing ways, either through their uncritical humanitarian participation as donors or their narrow understandings of political identity being tethered to the nation-state polity.

In addition to providing students with the critical skills to think about displacement in nuanced ways that take into account historical context, gendered, cultural and religious dynamics, and varying African subjectivities and identities, these works empower students who have themselves or have family members who previously experienced dislocation to share their experiences and use them to build counter-narratives. In so doing, students construct an enriched archive of displacement that goes beyond the frameworks offered in course materials. Moreover, students can utilize this archive to understand processes of displacement beyond the particular contexts discussed in the classroom.

Notes

¹For one of the images used in the collage, Daniel Cherkas referenced Saltytowel. (2013). *The lost city of Thorns* [Digital Painting]. Deviant Art, <https://www.deviantart.com/saltytowel/art/The-lost-city-of-Thorns-388990862>.

References

- Agamben, Giorgio. (translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen) (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Graham, Aubrey. (2014). "One Hundred Years of Suffering? 'Humanitarian Crisis Photography' and Self-Presentation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." *Social Dynamics* 40:1, 140-163.
- Rawlence, Ben. (2016). *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp*. Penguin Random House Canada.
- Mbembe, Achille. (2001). *On The Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wainaina, Binyavanga. (2005). "How to Write About Africa." *Granta* 92.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Introduction to the Sanctuary Syllabus

by Molly Nolan



SCOTT RICHARD, *SANCTUARY CITY* (2017). PHOTOGRAPH BY TORBAKHOPPER / FLICKR

In 2017, President Donald Trump both banned entry into the United States by foreign nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries and repealed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) and thereby deprived 800,000 people of their right to work, study and remain in the U.S. Suddenly, issues of immigration, refugees, sanctuary and citizenship came to dominate national, municipal and university politics. In response, a coalition of NYU faculty and graduate students worked to protect our DACA and Muslim students and lobbied—without success—to make NYU a sanctuary campus that would protect undocumented and otherwise at risk students, staff and faculty. We also sought to learn more about these issues and help others learn and teach about them by putting together the Sanctuary Syllabus. Our syllabus explains the historical and structural causes of immigration, migration, and displacement in the US and globally, and explores the intellectual and social history of the sanctuary movement. It analyzes the regulation of citizenship and its effects on undocumented citizens as well as racially, religiously, and sexually marginalized groups. Finally, the syllabus offers resources and strategies for studying, organizing, and creating sanctuary. The syllabus brings together a variety of materials, some analytical, others artistic; some journalistic, others autobiographical. Every week offers examples of policies and tools for change and resistance. After completing the syllabus in the fall of 2017 and publishing it on the Public Book website, we decided we needed to teach the course right away, given the multiple crisis around migration, travel, DACA and sanctuary. Since we all had already committed to courses for the spring, we called on colleagues to join us in a team taught undergraduate course. Two dozen faculty from a variety of disciplines agreed. Each week two faculty gave half hour lectures with discussion and then the fifty students broke up into small groups to plan their collective projects, which were presented at the end of the semester. It was a rewarding experience for the very engaged students and for the faculty and graduate students who had a chance to hear about the amazing work their colleagues were doing. Unfortunately, the course has not been taught again as some of the main faculty retired or left for other schools and moved on to focus on other pressing political issues. Nonetheless, even under President Biden, the issues remain pressing as does the need to educate ourselves and teach others about them. And the format of a course taught with multiple teachers suggests how to address pressing political issues by drawing on diverse fields and wide expertise and how to recruit people to participate above their normal teaching load.

Here is the link to the Sanctuary Syllabus on the Public Books website: <https://www.publicbooks.org/sanctuary-syllabus/>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Introduction to Migration Curriculum in Women's Human Rights Teaching and Advocacy Resource

by Eva Richter



JOSE (LUPE) ORTIZ (2020), FOR THE PEOPLE ARTISTS COLLECTIVE & JUSTSEEDS COLLABORATION

In an explicit pivot from policy to implementation, Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres has moved the United Nations firmly towards concrete practices and solutions to the many problems that bedevil societies everywhere in the world. The general lack of social protection safety nets, widening inequalities of status, lack of or inadequate access to justice, education, health, and housing all contribute to conflict and exacerbate violence, xenophobia, and racism. People migrate in search of a better life and find integration into host societies difficult. The teaching, learning and advocacy resource presented here is designed to facilitate the creation of a college or university course for practitioners that will both provide an understanding of the overarching policies and purposes that motivate specific interventions to create progressive change, especially for the benefit of migrant and refugee women and girls, and give them some of the essential information and tools to bring about such change. It might also be used for advanced high school groups or socially conscious study groups that want to understand the current migrant/refugee situation in a human rights context.

Each locality in which a practice is carried out is unique and different from any other. Cultural, political, economic, and social entities and structures vary from one country to another, and the local structures may also vary widely. Each policy implementation, each good practice or strategy must be tailored to the needs of a particular locale and its governing structures, though general principles of delivery and implementation, such as mapping and gathering evidence apply to all. The goal is to make the policies and the ideals on which they are based -- fairness, justice, equity, equality, women's empowerment and gender equality, all in the context of a human rights framework -- work for the good and the harmony of an entire community. The goals and the policies are common; the practice is unique.

When embarking on finding solutions to the many and varied challenges presented by migration and the integration into a given society of any group, it is necessary first to define terms, to understand the difference between migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless people on the move and the various benefits to which they are or are not entitled under specific circumstances. Practitioners need to know what they are dealing with, the scope, nature and origins of the crisis under examination, and where the areas of greatest concern are located. Disaggregated data are essential for the creation of targeted policies and practices to alleviate the problems that arise at each stage of the migration journey: pre-departure, transit and crossing borders, arrival at destination, and return.

Principles for advocacy concerning migrants need to be formulated in terms of the human rights that must frame all interventions, and they must work also to empower women. Available protections, principles of equal access that afford a 360-degree perspective and leave no one behind (both of these stated principles of the United Nations), and the concept of gender justice that addresses issues of impunity, stereotyping, and cultural norms and practices, all must be considered and integrated into the creation of effective practices.

Basic methods and tools of advocacy must be taught, such as identification of needs; mapping in a cultural, economic, social and political context; the inclusion of migrant voices as information sources and advocates; identification of good practices and evaluation of replication appropriate to individual situations; and finally, the creation and adoption of evidence-based, community-specific, durable solutions.

All the major policy instruments covering issues of migration are listed in the **Teaching and Advocacy Curriculum**, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, together with its 1967 Optional Protocol; the "International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Their Families; the New York Declaration for Migrants and Refugees; the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact on Migrants (GCM -- for safe, orderly and regular migration). In addition, since this guide was developed in connection with CSW 65, the annual meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the United Nations is listed, this year (2021) belatedly celebrating the Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995. Major UN policies and documents relevant to migrant women and girls are also listed, together with brief descriptions of their subjects and purpose. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and its optional Protocols and Recommendations; the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995; and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015), together with their specific migration targets.

Relevant UN Agencies and entities concerned with migration are listed next, together with some description of their specific mandates and interests and some of the relevant, major documents that could serve as guides for the student or practitioner.

Finally, some of the major relevant civil society organizations are listed, together with their major contributions. Such organizations include but are not limited to the Civil Society Action Committee; the NGO Committee on Migration; the Women in Migration Network; the Women's Refugee Committee; Migrant Forum in Asia; and Alianza de las Americas. The list is comprehensive but by no means exhaustive or complete. It can be added to as issues develop and change and as developments on the ground bring new perceptions of how best to handle the many complex issues that migration entails.

There are many reasons that cause people to migrate, but most leave to seek what they think of as a better life with more opportunities for advancement for themselves and for their children. They migrate for economic reasons, to seek better job opportunities, better schooling for their children, more stable lives for themselves; they migrate as a result of political instability, conflict and outright war; they migrate because of domestic and/or institutionalized violence and crime; they migrate because they have been targeted as a hated minority group and have been deprived of their citizenship; they migrate because of natural disasters, their homes and land devastated by outsize hurricanes, exacerbated by climate change; they migrate because a volcano has rained death and destruction on them

and on their land, or an earthquake has reduced their homes and towns to rubble; they migrate when their water sources have dried up, turning their land into desert, the result again of climate change and/or poor resource management; they migrate in search of a healthier environment, when untreated sewage and general degradation has caused disease to spread, and climate change has worsened the problem; they migrate when their rivers and other water supplies have become polluted with toxic waste runoff from exploitative companies upstream from them, or when a pandemic has decimated their communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly exacerbated some of the thornier problems of migration, criminalizing such movement, requiring tests, often expensive and even unavailable, quarantining both before and after arrival at a given destination, denying the migrant access to basic facilities like clinics and hospitals, especially if the migrants are undocumented, increasing xenophobia while fixing blame for the spread of the virus on various targeted groups. A good example of this is the escalating number of attacks on Asians in the United States, where they are being blamed as carriers of the disease that reputedly originated in China. Criminalization of migration is all too common, fear of spreading the infection dictating that migrants be arrested and detained without hearings and for an unlimited amount of time in jail-like facilities, instead of being released into the country of destination and in many cases, being reunited with their families, pending a hearing. Forced repatriations and deportations are being carried out at an increasing rate, and home countries, often unwilling to let the returning migrants in, increase the difficulties of reintegration while pleading lack of resources, ramping up fear of infection and blaming specific groups of migrants for the spread of disease.

Each of the migration issues addressed here has been extensively written about and commented on, but this advocacy resource is not intended to present a comprehensive bibliography on the subject. Instead, it presents relevant facts and definitions, good practices, what needs to be done in general, and relevant resources. Depending on the interests of professors, teachers, mentors, and group leaders using this resource, any of these topics could be a very rewarding research project, a source for evidence-based approaches and durable solutions to individual migration issues, and a source of fruitful inquiry, comment and suggestions for advocacy and action, especially in the context of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic.

To access the Migration Curriculum, go to this link and then open the .pdf under Subtopics: Migration: <https://whrtlar.wordpress.com/poverty-eradication-social-protection-and-social-services/>.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

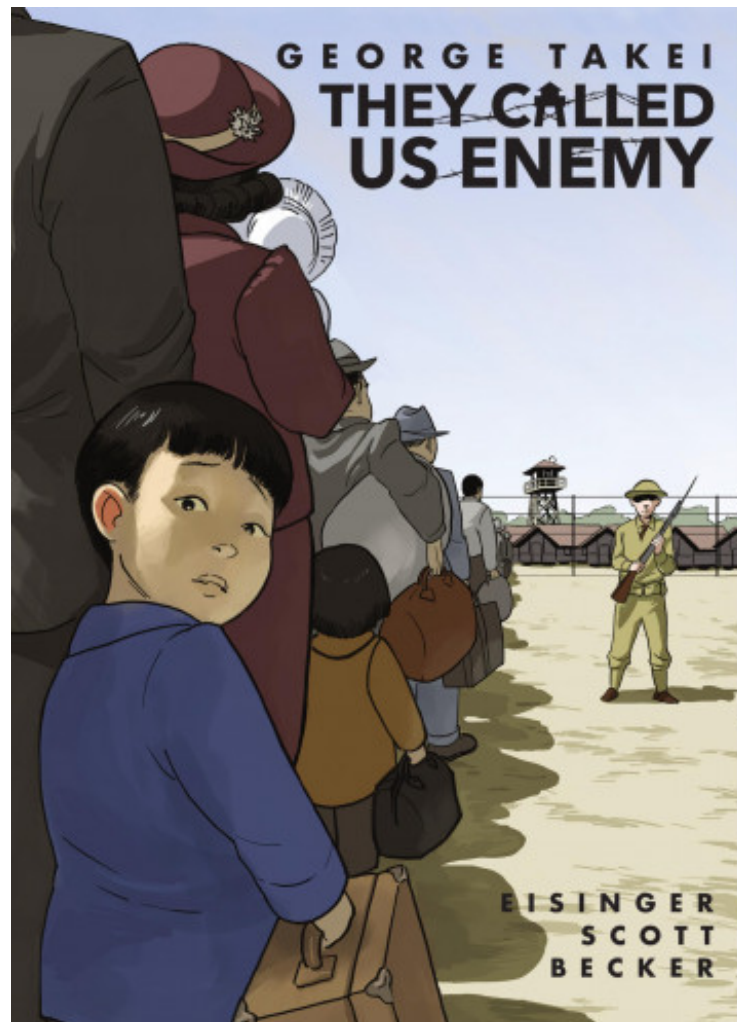
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Note

They Called Us Enemy: Offering Possibilities for Teachers to Problematize Their Assumptions About Students and Parents

by Abby C. Emerson



While teaching a class titled Multicultural Approaches to Teaching Young Children for both pre-service and in-service teachers, we read George Takei's (2019) text *They Called Us Enemy*. This powerful graphic novel provides Takei's autobiographical account of living in the United States' internment camps or "relocation centers" for people of Japanese descent. The powerful imagery and dialogue demonstrate his lived experiences in the centers, from the minute details about curtains and food to larger themes such as what resistance can or should look like.

This was my first time teaching this course at Teachers College, Columbia University and I wondered how to make this text that was so rich in narrative history relevant to the classroom teaching of early childhood educators. The 14 educators I had the privilege of working with were a diverse mix of racial identifications, ethnicities, nationalities, and ages. Some of them were three months out of college and some had been teaching for many years. We read this text during the week where the theme was Transnational Identities, Multicultural Classrooms: Immigration, Race, and Dehumanization. I started our time together with an activity called Circle of Voices, that comes from Indigenous cultures, as a way to allow everyone an opportunity to share their thoughts (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). In this activity, I first shared an assumption or mindset common in school settings: *Some parents care more about education than others*. By offering this statement forward for analysis, I sought to give students an opportunity to make connections between that mindset, Takei's text, and the students they would or did have in their classrooms.

For the activity, everyone had two minutes to silently think and jot notes about those possible connections. Following that thinking time, in Zoom breakout rooms (this course took place virtually during Covid-19), students took turns speaking about the provided assumption and text for one minute uninterrupted. After everyone had a chance to speak in their small groups, they then had an open small group discussion where they responded directly to what others said. I encouraged them to disagree, ask questions, notice similarities or differences, and make connections to other course readings.

We came back together for our whole group conversation and a few key themes emerged. The first theme revealed that they were questioning unfair assumptions teachers make about students and their families. The teachers discussed that caring for children in circumstances made challenging by systemic racism can look different from the stereotypical white norm that many teachers hold. They contemplated different forms of resistance that parents might have to engage in because of institutional structures inside and outside the school building, from Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings to immigration policies. Just as in the text Takei had to trouble how he narrowly conceptualized fighting back against oppression, the teachers had to trouble how they

narrowly conceptualized parenting, especially parenting done by parents marginalized in big and small ways in a society mired in racism. The teachers wondered if some parents have to resist more than they realized.

The second big theme was regarding media consumption and gathering enough information to have the "whole picture." They questioned narratives they had been taught in school and that they learned through various forms of media. The teachers discussed the importance of seeking out counternarratives like Takei's that would disrupt the problematic stereotypes they hold of parents from diverse backgrounds. A preservice teacher starting her teaching career reflected in her final paper:

When I read, *They Called Us Enemy* (Takei, 2019) I was shocked to find out the United States had placed hundreds of thousands of Japanese Americans in concentration camps. I had been taught about the Pearl Harbor event, but I never knew about any of the events that occurred after this. I really questioned why I had never heard about this huge injustice in any history course I took both in high school and in college. Reading these books made me realize how the education I have received growing up was a very white-washed version of history. As an educator, it is my job to not only teach my students the real story about what happened in the past and is still happening today, but to also continue to better educate myself about these false realities I have always thought to be true. I plan to engage with a variety of materials that help me to learn about the real stories and the true history of the United States.

On the whole, Takei's text offers a wealth of possibilities. Older students could read it alongside more traditional historical texts. Younger students could do shared readings of a few key pages to understand the history of dehumanization in our country. Or even, as I have offered here, teachers could use it as a way to problematize the assumptions they hold about students and parents.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully thank Dr. Mariana Souto-Manning for building such a rich syllabus for me to work with in the course mentioned above.

References

- Brookfield, S. & Preskill, S. (2005). *Discussion as a way of teaching: Tools and techniques for Democratic classrooms*. Jossey-Bass.
- Takei, G. (2019). *They called us enemy*. Top Shelf Publications.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



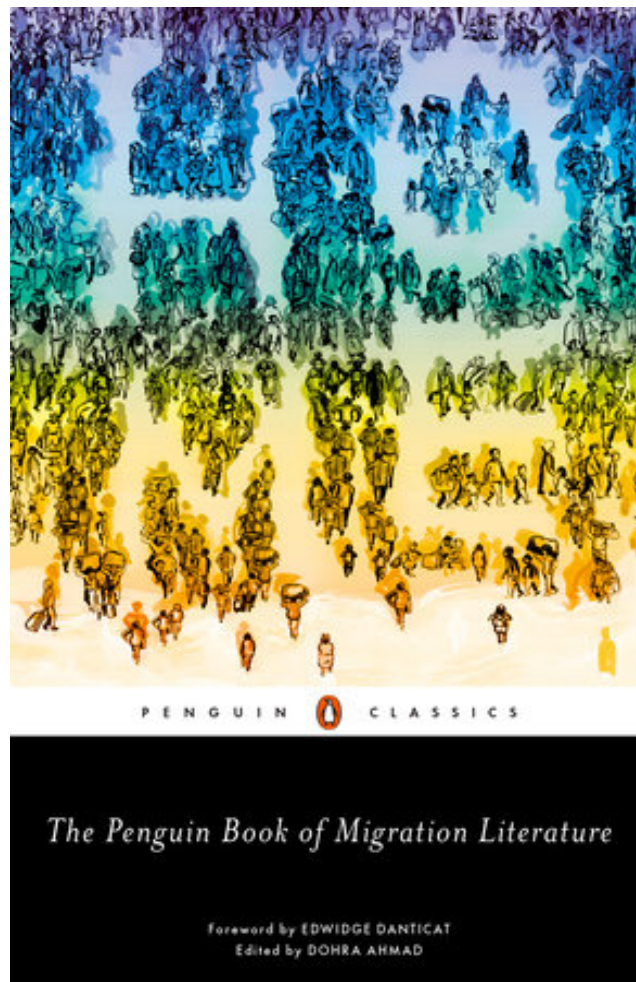
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Note Teaching The Penguin Book of Migration Literature

by Tuli Chatterji



THE PENGUIN BOOK OF MIGRATION LITERATURE (2020) PENGUIN CLASSICS

At a time when words such as borders, walls, xenophobia, and immigration have become part of our everyday discourse—nationally and globally—it is difficult to ignore the repercussions of such words and phrases on immigration policies and ultimately our understanding of humanity. Dohra Ahmad's *The Penguin Book of Migration Literature*¹ is the first collection to offer "a global comparative scope" to the diverse and complex journeys of migrants across time and space, offering the reader a literary kaleidoscope of pangs and longing around a place called home. Radically inclusive in its approach, Ahmad's choice of texts critiques "existing discourses and stereotypes" to offer a more nuanced understanding of migration. References to slavery, often erased from migration literature, provide fresh perspectives to displacement narratives through the lens of shared experiences of the "descendants of enslaved and indentured people as well as refugees." At a time when anti-immigrant policies and attitudes violently target immigrants in different parts of the world, Ahmad's collection bears witness to the complex humanity of the journeys.

Diverse and multigenerational in its ensemble of poems, novels, short stories, memoirs, and graphic novels, *Migration Literature's* innovative four-point structure—Arrivals, Departures, Generations, and Return—expands the purview established by previous anthologies of immigrant literature. These categories create such capacious and unexpected possibilities for literary connection that it becomes almost impossible to create a singular "migrant" narrative. Here in Ahmad's world, Japan, Jamaica, the United States, and Egypt -- as seen through texts such as Julie Otsuka's "Come, Japanese," Claude McKay's "The Tropics in New York," Joseph Bruchac's "Ellis Island," and Pauline Kaldas's "A Conversation" -- share the same literary space, making the migrant experience all the more inclusive and performative.

Curious to identify how my students would respond to Ahmad's collection, I decided to teach the text in my Spring 2020 ENG 103 course titled "The Research Paper." In this course, students learn how to choose an academic research topic, pose research questions, and acquire the skills to explore a theme from diverse perspectives. *Migration Literature* became an apt forum to inspire research into migration, a topic both personal and political to many of my students. I soon realized that like Ahmad's stories, each of my students had a tale to tell. Coincidentally, at a time when the pandemic compelled introspection about various forms of socio-economic borders, narratives of migration gained a deeper significance in the hands of the students, thereby encouraging them to explore their own positionality in the context of migration.

By introducing Ahmad's *Migration Literature* to my students at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, I wanted to express gratitude to Dr. Ahmad who, as my dissertation advisor at St. John's University, played an integral role in shaping my own understanding of migrations, crossings, colonial histories, and postcolonial narratives. Reading the stories with my students brought back memories of how as a recent immigrant myself, I found it challenging to navigate the different cultural and linguistic

spaces—experiences that many of my immigrant students shared during the discussion.

One of the most diverse colleges in the country, LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York, the largest urban public university in the US, has over 36,000 students who hail from 158 countries and speak 89 languages, making LaGuardia a vibrant space where nations, cultures, languages, and histories continually meet and intersect. With close to 60% of LaGuardia students born in countries other than the United States, narratives of migration are deeply embedded in our hallways and classrooms.

In such an environment, *Migration Literature* mobilizes a conversation in which students' own lived experiences of migratory crossings combine with the anthology's narratives, helping to both analyze texts and critique present national and global political climate. After initial discussion of each reading, students did a free writing of their first-impression of the work that included cataloguing 6-8 words that captured the theme of migration as mentioned in the text. This was followed by a short reflective assignment where students narrated their own crossings from the perspectives of the words catalogued earlier. The third step included a critical close reading of the text by contextualizing it through the lens of personal crossings and how contemporary political discourses on migration² reinforce xenophobia, racism, and white supremacy. Ultimately, students generated texts that blended analysis of their own migrations (literal and metaphorical), those of one of the anthology's writers, and some research on the topic that they chose for their final paper.

What emerged from the narratives in the collection is that students, irrespective of their identities, reflected on their own journeys and engaged in a dialogue with the socio-political events of the time.

Ahmad's different categories for understanding migration—Departures, Arrivals, Generations, and Return—opens up opportunities for students to reflect, explore, and connect with their own roots and identities. Moved by Francisco Jimenez's portrayal in "Under the Wire," where the author highlights risks often taken by immigrants when crossing borders for a better future for their families, students reflected on the privilege of US citizenship and voiced the need to use that privilege for the benefit of migrants and refugees looking for a chance across borders. They wove insights from the stories to critically reflect on their own migration to not only analyze their journeys but also conduct research on the issues that inspired them.

For instance, after reading Egyptian writer Pauline Kaldas's "A Conversation," a bitter account of how a couple were often rebuffed by natives who could only see foreigners preying on their country, a US-born Chinese student wrote: "This xenophobia is inexcusable, but it did not come from nowhere. The stereotype of an inferior people was not

downloaded into American brains overnight by a terrible alien invader. It was a sore made to fester by countless media projecting a certain image of displaced people until it was the only image to be familiar with. In the words of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, this is the danger of a single story.” Ahmad’s selection encouraged her to read Adichie and identify patterns between Kaldas, Adichie, and contemporary socio-political scenarios.

Further, inspired by Ahmad’s reference to slavery and forced migration as the precursor to contemporary migrations, a student who identifies herself as African-American on account of her family lineage, chose to do her research on the identity crisis that most African-Americans like her experience when they are neither seen as migrants nor as natives. By reflecting on the work of Ira Berlin, Henry Louis Gates, and W.E.B. Du Bois, the student analyzed Algerian-French writer Mehdi Charef’s *Tea in the Harem* to come to terms with her own identity against popular attitudes of what defines a “real African-American.” She admitted that Ahmad “allowed [her] to think through the heterogeneity of Black American experiences” and inspired the need for a collective cry against institutional and systemic racism primarily based on “colours of skin” (Ahmad 202).

Another student, a political refugee from Nepal, chose “Illegal Immigrants: The Rhetoric and Politics” as the topic for her final essay. Throughout her essay, she reinforced the need to be mindful against normalizing and legitimizing terms like “illegal” immigrants, suggesting that use of such terms by people in power could have long lasting impact on individuals escaping from war, poverty, violence, or/and religious/political persecution in their own countries. Reading Ahmad helped her to un-silence her pangs of being addressed as “illegal,” to which she writes: “Words matter!” and unabashedly critiques the popular usage of the term that “masks over the complex realities experienced by immigrants thereby denying them the right to create and tell their own stories.” Drawing her argument from the collection’s reference to David Dabydeen, Warsan Shire, Francisco Jimenez, Mehdi Charef, and Pauline Kaldas, the student reflects on her identity as a “stateless person” in “perpetual search for a home.” What emerged from the narratives in the collection is that students, irrespective of their identities, reflected on their own journeys and engaged in a dialogue with the socio-political events of the time. This intersection of personal narratives, narrative analysis, and political events provided students with an agency that was both personal and political.

While *Migration Literature* offered an engaging platform for students in an immigrant-friendly classroom, it could also do such work in a classroom where people don’t perceive themselves as immigrants or are hostile to migration. These stories of common people with everyday struggles and memories make the book a gateway for understanding diversity, transnational literature, and the interdependent relationship of our natural, social, cultural, and political worlds. Further, by offering a wide variety of immigrant

narratives to unacquainted readers, the book could help counter anti-immigrant rhetoric and prevent people from pitying, exoticizing, or homogenizing immigrant experiences.

In a final, powerful crossing of routes, this book brought Ahmad and me, both immigrants and academics, together again in a Queens classroom where all students identified themselves in some way or other as immigrants. When I invited Dr. Ahmad as a guest speaker to my class, it turned out to be a celebratory moment of recognizing untold crossings and journeys. Upon Dr. Ahmad’s request, students all shared the meanings and origin of their names. This created a beautiful collage of narratives about families, countries, cultures, and religions: each name symbolized a story of migration. While this could be deemed a Queens-based project—Queens being one of the most diverse boroughs in the country—*Migration Literature* weaves cultures, borders, times, and space and proves that we all have migration stories to tell.

Notes

¹*The Penguin Book of Migration Literature* edited by Dohra Ahmad, foreword by Edwidge Danticat (2019), 281 pages.

² Reports in *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and “Fox News.”



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Note
We Are Not Your Soldiers

by Stephanie Rugoff



ENOUGH !!!

"ENOUGH!" BY CHRIS STAIN (2018) VIA JUSTSEEDS

We Are Not Your Soldiers – What is it?

A project of World Can't Wait¹, which opposes U.S. aggression against other countries and the criminal acts carried out in our names, We Are Not Your Soldiers brings veterans into high school and college classrooms to share their experiences in the U.S. military where they were part of the vast machine carrying out policies of domination via wars, interventions, police actions, surveillance, drones, or bases. While the rest of the world knows first-hand what happens, it is the people in the United States who know so little about how members of the U.S. military are trained, and then what actually occurs when another country is attacked. Hearing directly from veterans speaking from their hearts, often revealing very personal insights, is therefore a life-changing experience for many students.

How Did We Are Not Your Soldiers Develop?

We Are Not Your Soldiers unofficially started in 2006, at the height of anti-war activity here in the United States, when World Can't Wait began visiting high schools with recent veterans. Along with being the apex of the anti-war movement, it was also when the military was at its most desperate to recruit young people and was putting out its dragnet as widely as possible. In 2008, the organized We Are Not Your Soldiers project officially began, and the "tours" really got going when some veterans at a World Can't Wait meeting got into a discussion about reactions when people thank them "for their service."

To give a sense of the broad reach of our program, since the 2014-15 academic year, we have visited and often revisited some 40 educational institutions, primarily high schools and colleges but also a couple of middle schools and a youth program. In those visits, we have spoken with about 250 classes (including JROTC, GED and after-school programs), engaging in in-depth discussions on the U.S. military with thousands of young people. While these visits were largely in New York state, especially New York City, we also have gone to Philadelphia and spoken at schools in North Carolina, Maine, Nebraska and Indiana.

What Happens at a We Are Not Your Soldiers Visit?

The veterans share vivid stories of how they were affected by the military and of the wars where so many have lost their humanity or their lives. They also speak about the effects on people in the countries under attack. Most of the veterans were part of the "War of Terror," although one of our speakers served in the 1990s and another in Vietnam in the late 1960s.

The effects on these veterans and on the people in the countries where they were deployed share many similarities despite considerable differences in time or space. Students are encouraged to voice ideas and questions in an environment where each person speaking is treated with

respect. The students respond, showing great empathy for the veterans while also expressing shock at the information they communicate. Responses are profound and questions are many, the most frequent being about PTS and whether the veteran would enlist again if given the choice.

In college classes, most of the time, students who are veterans will nod their heads in agreement but not say very much. From time to time, they will disagree with some things, but the discussion has always been respectful in both directions. On one unusual occasion, one of the veterans/students came with us to the following class and joined us in the presentation.

In both high school and college, at times differences are voiced by the students, mainly questioning what can be done other than using the military to settle disputes between countries. In one case, a high school student who lived on a military base with his family felt that we were implying that his father must be abusive. This came out in a private conversation after class when we noticed that the student looked upset during the presentation, and we asked him what bothered him about it. The veteran speaker clarified that he had described his personal experiences and when speaking beyond that was speaking systemically and not about every individual involved. It was a beneficial conversation where we all left feeling we could empathize with the other viewpoint and not take it as a personal insult.

We utilize multimedia as well as storytelling: video clips, music and poetry written and performed by the veterans, slide shows, photos, maps, etc. Students are exposed to highly personal and emotional narratives and a perspective about which they otherwise would not know. This includes bringing the lives of the other inhabitants of the world into the classroom, so that students can see them as people and not as enemies to hate and kill.

We work with educators to develop customized presentations linked to curriculum as needed. As stated in the Common Core State Standards on critical thinking, students can integrate information from diverse sources. Students can delineate and evaluate the arguments and claims to which they are exposed. We provide resources for the educators to both prepare for and follow up on our visits.

We have been invited to speak to students by conservative teachers and administrators and even by a few JROTC teachers who don't agree with all or much of what we say but who do feel that it's important that students hear all sides and make their own informed decisions on what to do with their lives. They are people who care about their students and are aware of the suicide rate among veterans of about 22 a day.

We begin each presentation by telling students not to believe us just because we are guests in their classroom, any more than they should believe any other "authority figures." We urge them to do their own research to verify information – whether from us, the media, or other sources. Again, this has given us the possibility to present in schools where administrators believe in the free exchange of information but not necessarily with our analysis. They also know, from their own friends and family, the difficulties that veterans often face, physically and/or emotionally upon their

return home. Therefore, they can accept much of what is shared with the students when veterans speak openly about their own lives, honestly revealing, as a number of students point out (especially surprised that men can do this), their own vulnerabilities. Since 2008, we only have had two experiences where we were barred from returning to a school.

How Do We Connect to the Students?

We start by asking the students if any have family or close friends currently serving in the military, if they have veterans in their families, if any have been in a war situation, and if anyone is considering enlistment. In college classes we also ask if anyone is currently in the National Guard or a veteran. We raise the possibility that some family members may have had similar experiences to our speaker but that most people find it very hard to talk about them. We then suggest that perhaps the students can use any insights gained during the presentation to open up a discussion with family members in a supportive manner.

We focus the students at the start of the visit with some essential questions or words. One is "morality," knowing the difference between right and wrong and considering what to do if you know something is wrong. Often, the other is "enemy." If there is an enemy, can you describe who that is? If there isn't, why do you think we are led to believe we have an enemy?

Story-telling is an important way to connect. And engaging in discussion, sometimes very deep discussion, is a major part of what we do. For the students, hearing the voices of the veterans can prove incredibly powerful.

We make it clear that we understand what students face in terms of the high cost of post-secondary education and the difficulties of finding a job, let alone one that pays a living wage. Yet we ask them to consider what it means to go into someone else's country, where people have even worse living conditions than we have here, and bring them violence and destruction. What does that do to those people? What can it do to the students we're speaking with, both physically and emotionally?

Speaking openly and forthrightly is difficult and not many veterans can do this. We are very grateful to each of our speakers. All of them, in one way or another during their presentations, speak to the racism, misogyny, brutality and the brainwashing of basic training. Anti-war activist veterans, like many other veterans, struggle with post-traumatic stress, unemployment or underemployment, housing or family disruptions, and a myriad of other difficulties. On top of that they tend to suffer from moral injury.

The COVID 19 pandemic has also been a challenge for us to the degree that it has been challenging for educators and students. We have therefore had more difficulties in arranging visits. On the other hand, distance visits to places

that had been beyond our travel capacities have, with additional planning, been conducted via remote technology. Such remote visits have become routine for local schools too, and we are now prepared to do any visits easily, if need be, via whatever remote technology a particular educational institution is utilizing.

How Do We Reach Teachers?

We constantly reach out to educators so we can interact with more students offering our program, which entails no charge to the schools due to our constant fundraising. We network through former colleagues, friends, and family as well as other anti-war or peace organizations. We meet teachers at demonstrations and events. We attend educational conferences. We email and call administrators and counselors – and follow up regularly. We join educator list-serves and utilize the email list of World Can't Wait. Of course, we have our website, WeAreNotYourSoldiers.org, and Facebook page. We encourage all the readers of this article to visit these sources where much more information can be found. Contact us if you'd like to arrange a visit to your class.

Notes

1. <https://www.worldcantwait.net/>
2. <https://www.wearenotyoursoldiers.org/>
3. <https://www.wbai.org/archive/program/episode/?id=18830>
4. <https://www.wearenotyoursoldiers.org/meet-the-veterans-in-we-are-not-your-soldiers/>
5. <https://www.facebook.com/wearenotyoursoldiers>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



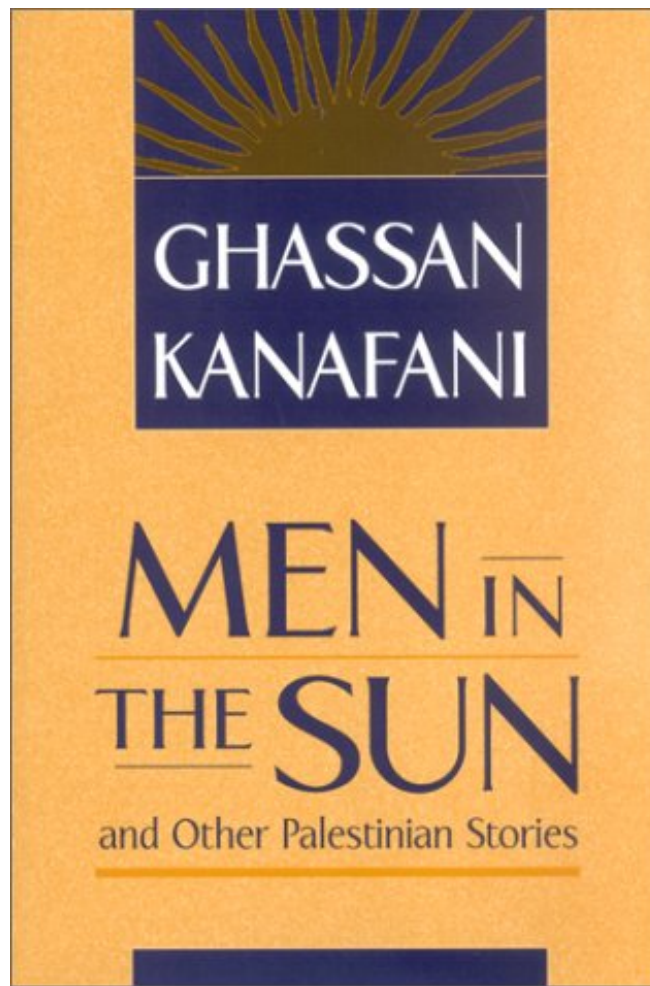
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Note
Ghassan Kanafani's "Men in the Sun"

by Linda Dittmar



MEN IN THE SUN AND OTHER PALESTINIAN STORIES BY GHASSAN KANAFANI (1963)

Inescapably, much of Palestinian literature is about loss of homes and lands and family and dispossession, where the initiating event was the Nakba: the 1948 "catastrophe" of mass exile, when Israel expelled some 750,000 Palestinians from their villages and towns in what was becoming Israel. It's a devastation that continues to this day. The writing that responds to this trauma is a literature of mourning, protest, and resistance, written above all to sustain one's own people and for the world to see.

Among these narratives, Ghassan Kanafani's novella, "Men in the Sun," may be, to date, the harshest. When I teach it in my undergraduate course in Israeli/Palestinian literature, I pair it with Kanafani's other iconic more directly militant novella, "The Return to Haifa." Each makes for powerful reading, helping American students see both the terrible losses incurred through the Nakba and the dignity of resistance.

Ghassan Kanafani was killed by a car bomb in Beirut in 1972, presumably planted by the Israeli Mossad. He was a Marxist Palestinian journalist and activist killed for his presumed behind-the-scenes role in a massacre at Israel's main airport. The novellas, however, are not about militant violence, though of course war is their inescapably grim backdrop. "The Return to Haifa" concerns a Palestinian couple returning (twenty years later) to see their abandoned house, where unexpectedly they encounter their long-lost son, now in Israeli army uniform. The choice is his: to stay with his adoptive Jewish mother, herself a holocaust survivor, or reclaim his Palestinian identity. "Men in the Sun" tells the story of four Palestinian men's illegal journey to Kuwait.

While the following concerns only "Men in the Sun," "The Return to Haifa" is equally crucial, both as a companion piece and on its own.

The template for "Men in the Sun" is familiar: a few migrants, in this case three Palestinian males, are trying to reach Kuwait illegally. They are now in Iraq, where each lands in the office of the sleazy agent, "the fat man," who offers dubious passage at exorbitant prices. Instead, they each accept improvised passage from a fellow Palestinian driving an empty water-tank lorry.

It's not a spoiler to say that these men come to a bad end. It's a familiar story, unbearable yet recurrent. Like other writers, Kanafani individualizes his characters and the histories and traumas each of them carries. The template is global but the particulars are Palestinian, all originating in a Nakba that is barely mentioned. It is the story of global forces but also a story of the specifically Palestinian tragedy called "Nakba." As individuals, these men engage our empathy; as part of a collective they lay claim to our politics.

The cast of representative characters includes the following: Abu Qais, a middle-aged married man; Marwan, a teenager, who needs to support his family once his older brother's remittances stopped; and Assad, a seasoned young man who already knows the lies and challenges that beset this journey. The lorry driver is Abdul Khaizuran, a former Palestinian freedom fighter who got wounded in battle. Each is marked by his own experiences and yearnings, gradually revealed through conversations and

extended introspective flashbacks. This braided structure allows both our empathy and our understanding to unfold gradually, drawing us increasingly into the tragedy that unfolds here.

The story is beautifully told, with special sensitivity to the landscape as well as the characters' inner worlds. The tension of the narrative is, of course, the need to cross the borders. Abdul Khaizuran maneuvers the passage deftly, having the men step briefly into the empty water-tank at the checkpoint and then shortly after leaving it. But things go wrong at the second checkpoint, where he is delayed by joking border guards. Not accidentally, the jokes are about his having been with a "dancer"--that is, jokes about sexual prowess that are hard for him to bear: Abdul Khaizuran was wounded in battle between his legs.

In each case being cut off from the anchor of traditional communal life and self-sufficiency means damage to the sense of self, on top of the literal privation, that drove them to attempt this dangerous migration.

While this wound is literal, all four men are struggling with vulnerable empowerment. It's a notion of manhood where virility means self-sufficiency, dignity, and self-respect. In each case being cut off from the anchor of traditional communal life and self-sufficiency means damage to the sense of self, on top of the literal privation, that drove them to attempt this dangerous migration. Different in age and life experience, they are united in this damage and in death. At the end they are just bodies Abdul Khaizuran needs to dispose of.

Still, while the narration is powerful and even lyrical, the crux of "Men in the Sun" is in its ending, when Abdul Khaizuran discovers his passengers' dead bodies. Kanafani doesn't spare us Abdul Khaizuran's anguish. A decent man, we see him distraught by his passengers' deaths. But he also has to dispose of them, and ultimately it is not a funeral but a rubbish heap that receives the three men we've come to know and care about. Here, too, the description is merciless, closely evoked down to minor details. Moreover, before leaving, Abdul Khaizuran turns back to the bodies once more, taking whatever money they have, including Marwan's treasured watch.

"Men in the Sun" ends as Abdul Khaizuran, feeling that his head would explode, cries out into the night:

"Why didn't you knock on the sides of the truck? Why didn't you say anything? Why?"

The desert suddenly began to send back the echo:

Why didn't you knock on the sides of the truck? Why didn't you bang on the sides of the truck? Why? Why? Why?

Like many other refugee stories, "Men in the Sun" speaks to us even if we don't know much about the Palestinians. The story--evocative and beautifully written--is not unlike others

from Syria or the Congo, Guatemala or El Salvador, even if the particulars are different. The concluding question of "Why?" resonates not only regarding the men not sounding the alarm but about what set them on this desperate journey to begin with. In this "Why?" the particular and the collective mingle: the Palestinian story and the larger story of displaced people in desperate search for work and refuge.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/press/).

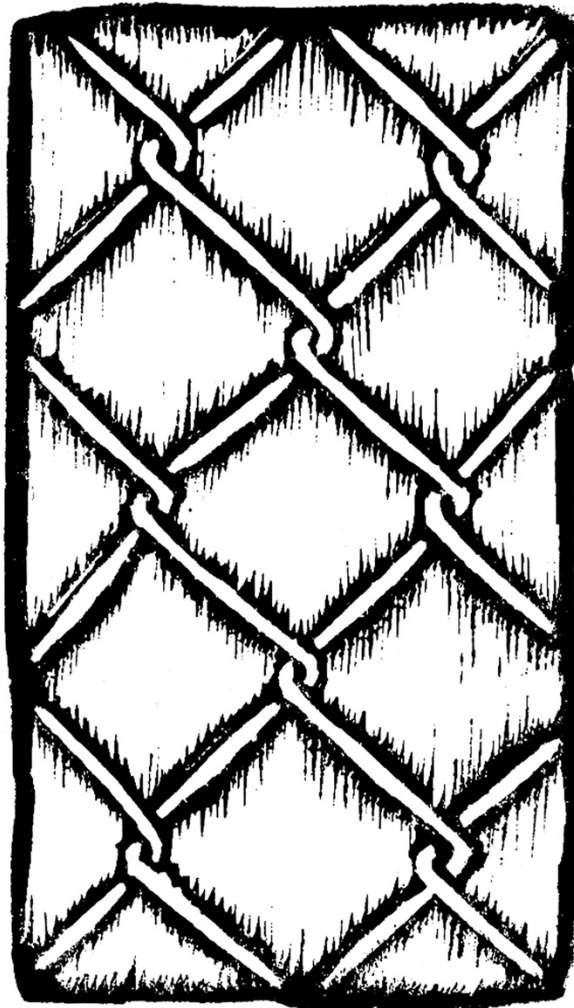
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry

"Emma Goldman's Ice Cream Parlor" and "To Be a Jew, Anywhere"

by Susan Gubernat



Emma Goldman's Ice Cream Parlor

Ephemeral as ice cream, that store
in Worcester where she wore

a starched apron maybe and scooped
chocolate, vanilla for the duped

workers of Worcester, while
the rest of the radical world—idle,

yet eager, discontented, had no
idea of how to revolt.

And then she cashiered the spoon,
started humming the tune

of The Internationale. Plotted
the death of Frick, besotted

with his own wealth. Riots
would follow. When left and right

disowned her there were years
of exile, exile without tears

because of Russia, then Spain.
Revolution, again and again

while the only emperor seemed
the emperor of ice cream.

(And what of her legacy
in this, the next century?

Could it be now the rich will fall
and the rest of us will have it all

with a cherry on top?)

To Be a Jew, Anywhere

Jaffrey, NH

Old Robicheaux never crossed the street
to speak to us, except that one night,
moonless in memory,
his hunched frame making
toward our house like a small bear
nosing her way out of the forest,
lost amid street signs, rushing
water of the dam site, blackened
windows of the old mill, so he came
to us, the neighbor who never
spoke. And said "You people
have any enemies?" Too quickly
the words leaped out of me:
"J. teaches in the high school. Why?"

Old Robicheaux let out a wheeze,
a whistling sigh from between
his teeth. He said a car had sped by,
opened its window wide,
a hand had tossed the pipe bomb
at our front door. We were away.
It started a small fire in a pile
of leaves we hadn't raked.
Autumn. The beautiful time
of change, of burning.
He had stomped it out himself
said Mr. Robicheaux--see the charred
markings on the front steps.

And that was all. We thanked him
for saving our house from the flames
but he'd already lumbered away
as though we'd caught him doing
something shameful. Robicheaux
never spoke again. And when he waved
it was that dismissive gesture,
a back already half-turned
toward its own business,
the furtive acknowledgment
of one who could wish
your very existence away.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

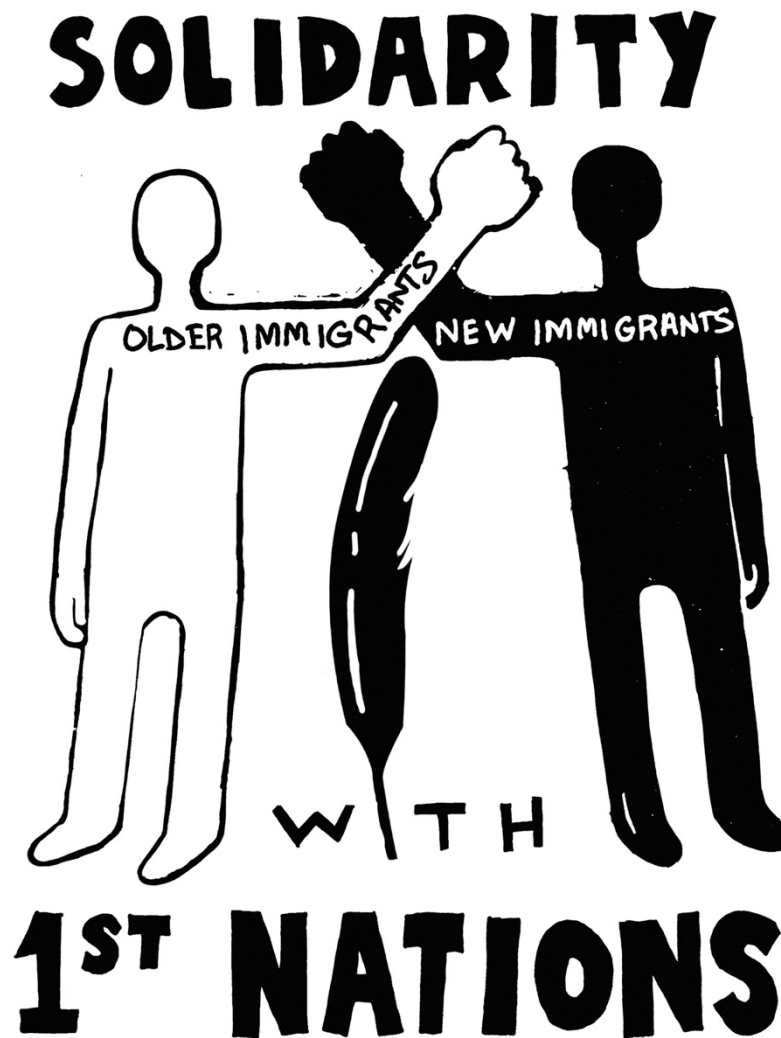
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry

“No Words for Sinners” and “Jeriah”

by Rebecca Bridges



SOLIDARITY WITH 1ST NATIONS, JOSH MACPHEE (2018) VIA JUST SEEDS

No Words for Sinners

I have no words for sinners.
No songs for them to sing.
I walk in trenches with them.
Our boots sink in the muck.
Make a drive to Luska Road,
past one-story houses.
See a rose in a garden grow
where a woman waters flowers.
Silver slippers slide from
side to side before a
sandstone bungalow.
Go past the mill homes,
or Victorian style houses.
Time tells its stories
in the peeling paint.

Drive on Luska Road
past the chicken shack
down the street from
a nineteen fifties house.
It had changed ownership
long before my drive.
A black car cover hides
a bright green Cadillac.
The saints left here long ago,
but I can hear them sing
of the God, in whose protection,
they find solace in their sleep.

I have time for the sinners,
but none for the saints.
No holy water,
whispered words
wrapped in golden foil
for the fried chicken
after service ends.

I have no words for sinners
for nightmares wait beneath
the shattered silence after
the midnight hour meets

my kids on Luska Road
where they cast off
Cinderella dreams.
"Fuck, you think you know me?"
one of them might question.
I discard the question like a
spade in a game.
I love them
anyways.
They call me a "fool"
for jumping
'tween the fights,
the meltdowns,
and the knife.

The saints weren't there
on the day
when Nia's eyes
had sparkled
as she asked me
to "Please rewind
Cinderella
where she enters
on the staircase."
I see fourteen
transform into a dream
beyond the world
of Luska Road.

Jeriah

Has anyone seen Jeriah
or wonder where he's gone?
Some say he wanders
by the tracks or
in daylight down
Luska Road. Did he
fight with his mom
again? No one really
knows. The boys laugh
and call him "fag,"
but they watch out
if they say it
to his face because
he fights like a
lightweight boxer
who has some spurs
attached to his wrists.
He finds no boy-
-friend on Luska Road
between the green cad-
-illac behind the
chicken shack, or
basketball
hoop at the auto
shop, or the barbershop
with its red, white
and blue candy stripe
barbershop
pole, or the funeral
monument
store that looks like
it's made from the same
brick as the coffee shop
where bankers and
independent artists
with daddy's money
go for a latte. He draws
his maps with
precision of a
pharmacist
organizing pills.

On his good days,
he lines the color pencils
up, and when he picks one,
he colors up
and down. June is
here, and Jeriah's
gone somewhere
down Luska Road.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/press/).

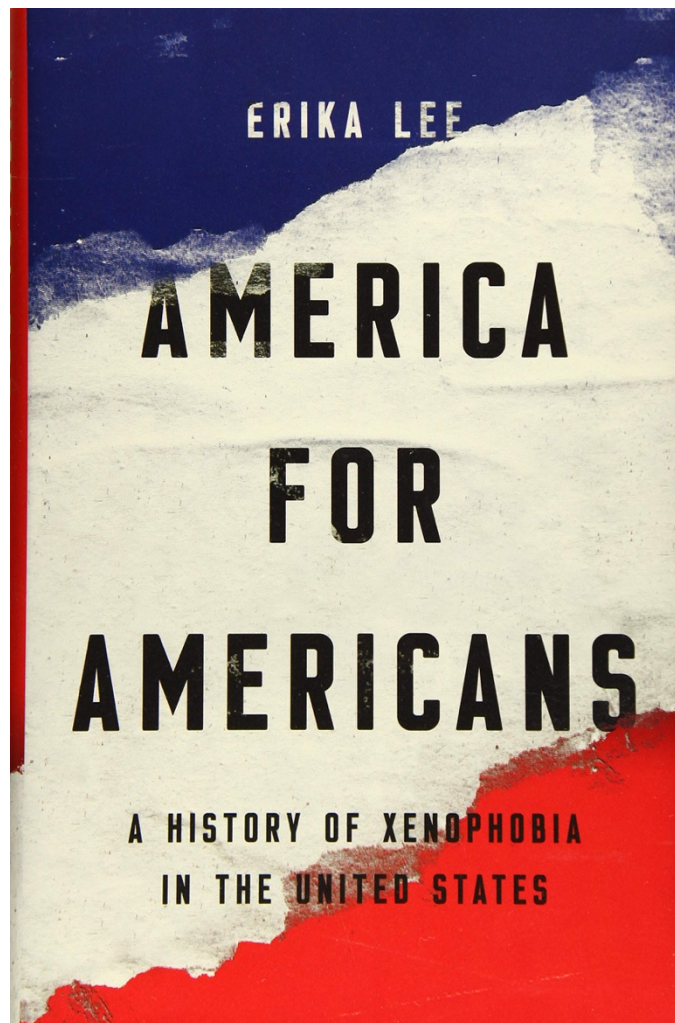
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review

America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the
United States by Erika Lee

by Eva Richter



AMERICA FOR AMERICANS: A HISTORY OF XENOPHOBIA IN THE UNITED STATES. BY ERIKA LEE

Erika Lee. (2019). *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States*. New York: Basic Books,

In a meticulously researched, historically detailed narrative, Erika Lee, author of *America for Americans*, delineates the racism and xenophobia that have met successive waves of foreigners seeking admission to this country and inclusion in its life. The author identifies two conflicting narratives of migration in America: one depicts an open country that welcomes migrants from everywhere, values their contributions and incorporates them into the success story that is American democracy; the other depicts a country in which, since the very beginning of the country's founding, migrants have been met with xenophobia and racism, have been devalued, exploited, denied the full benefits of citizenship and even deported. Writing in the last months of the Trump regime, Lee maintains that the xenophobia that found such clear expression in Trump's anti-immigrant actions, far from being a new impulse, has been an abiding American tradition. Lee does not dispute the truth of the first narrative, but in this work she focuses exclusively on the second narrative and presents a grim picture. (Since the distinction between documented and undocumented, permanent and temporary, migrants and refugees is not particularly relevant to Lee's thesis, I will use the general terms immigrants or migrants throughout this review to refer to the various cohorts she deals with.)

While she agrees that there is no settled definition of xenophobia in international law, academia or human rights, Lee defines it as "an ideology: a set of beliefs and ideas based on the premise that foreigners are threats to the nation and its people," born of a narrow, power-based determination of who is or is not an American, sowing fear of the foreigner, separating him/her from the "natives," and criminalizing both the act of migration and the migrant. She sets the impulse to xenophobia in what she defines as the racist crucible of America's founding with its hostility both to Native Americans, whom it drove out of their lands, and to enslaved Africans, whose rights as human beings the European settlers denied, dehumanizing both groups and declaring them inferior. Lee maintains that race is the single most important factor in determining which foreigners shall be targeted for xenophobic discrimination, explaining that "xenophobia is a form of racism." Race and racism, then, determine the underlying hostility; xenophobia and xenophobic acts are their expression.

But race as Lee invokes it is also a fairly fluid concept, and she traces different forms of racism used to stereotype groups on the basis of perceived behavior and values, both with and without color markers ("color-blind racism"). Distinguishing among "different kinds of whiteness," xenophobes become adept, as she says, at manufacturing racial difference. Thus, the early German settlers and the Irish were stereotyped on the basis of their language, culture, religion and other characteristics, and their right to belong in America was rejected on the basis of the threats they were perceived to embody to the existing American system of values and way of life. The eminent Benjamin Franklin himself deplored the admission to the colonies of all

"blacks and tawneys" and called for the increase of what he called "the lovely white," whom he specifically identified as the English colonist, while he passionately maintained that German immigration presented a clear danger to the integrity of America. Thus, even if they were not specifically "black or tawney," the German were perceived to belong to a different racial category from the "lovely white" English. The Irish were later similarly racialized when they arrived.

In the context of capitalism, with its emphasis on competition, it is economic, political and social power that determines what it means to be an American. The power structure also determines not only where an individual stands in the hierarchy of power, but also where one's group, as defined by certain generalized attributes, shall stand. For much of American history, Lee says, the dominant white Anglo-Saxon Protestants claimed the idea that only they, as the "first settlers," the colonists who established the country's language, culture and form of government, could be considered native and therefore quintessentially American. Lee points out that such a claim amounted to a justification of a wholesale land grab, justification for the westward expansion of America, the dispossession and genocidal destruction of the Native Americans, and ultimately the establishment of what the author calls "a distinct and racist national American identity."

In successive chapters the author details the xenophobia and racism that have met the groups that have come to America, starting with national groups like the Germans in the early 18th century, continuing through the Irish, Chinese, Italians, Mexicans and other Latin-Americans, and the Japanese, and finally comprehending "alien" religious groups like the Jews and most recently the Muslims. She shows how, until they became a colonizing force that stripped Native Americans of their lands, the Germans were considered inferior to the original settlers and unlikely to be able to fit into American life. However, once they became part of the dominant society economically and politically, the Germans could be contrasted with the Native Americans, whom they had exploited and robbed, and they could become acceptable to the dominant white majority as part of their white, successful group. To ensure the existing racial structure, laws were then passed decreeing that only free white persons could become citizens, a racial barrier that persisted until 1952.

Lee traces opposition to the great wave of Irish immigration in the 19th century, culminating in what she defines as both racial and political xenophobia as the Irish were identified by their Catholic faith and their membership in the Celtic race. They were then targeted by the ascendant nativist Know Nothing political party (the name was conferred on them because one of their principles was that when challenged to explain whom they represented they were instructed to claim to know nothing), a party that demonized and stereotyped the Irish as "wild" and untrustworthy, though Lee says they were still perceived as white and thus were apparently victims of a different kind of racism from that which was applied to enslaved Africans and always used a color marker. The Irish were finally accepted when they developed political power, but not before many of them had been deported or had otherwise been denied the promise of American freedom.

Discrimination against the Chinese proceeded on racist lines again, reinforced by the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that invoked the government's regulatory and national security powers and issues of race and class to exclude the Chinese from citizenship. It was not revoked until 1943, when China was an ally in the war against the Japanese.

According to Lee, every successive immigrant group was received with similar racist xenophobia that contrasted the incoming group with the dominant power group in racial terms, attributing to them negative characteristics perceived as threatening to the purity, the persistence and the power of the dominant group. Lee discusses at some length the barriers that were raised against each group, such as the promotion of literacy tests, the use by Madison Grant and his followers of the "science" of eugenics to keep out "inferior stock," the racist theories of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and the complicity of leading lights in public life and sacred academic enclaves like Harvard and Yale. She traces the racialization and exiling of the Mexicans, who had once been natives of the land now claimed by the United States, and she discusses the use of quotas in successive immigration bills designed to keep out people of color. The incarceration of the Japanese during World War II is a particularly sorry chapter in this country's exclusionary policies, as people of Japanese origin, many of them born in this country, were forced into detention centers, their property confiscated by the US government, their civil rights abrogated, even while young, able-bodied men of Japanese descent served most admirably in the armed forces during World War II. The stated reason for this incarceration was distrust of Japanese loyalties, but tellingly, not a single case of espionage or disloyalty was ever charged against any Japanese in or out of the camps. Their loyalty was simply unquestionable, and their imprisonment can only be understood as an extreme form of xenophobia and racism.

The Immigration Bill of 1965 receives quite thorough discussion in terms of racism and xenophobia. Though Lee agrees that it was groundbreaking, forged as it was during the height of the civil rights movement, in its call for thorough social reform, she concludes that it was imperfect in both design and execution. According to Lee, it actually led to a new kind of "color-blind xenophobia," which substituted charges of criminality for racism and led directly to the calls for a wall to keep all migrants out. Lee discusses several factors contributing to the rise of the xenophobic and racist tropes, which led directly to the exclusionary policies of Donald Trump and the demonization of all things Muslim. Among them are California's highly xenophobic Proposition 187, anti-immigrant measures passed as part of the tough-on-crime measures of the Clinton Administration, the role of the North American Free Trade Agreement in destabilizing labor patterns, the rise of the Tea Party, various terrorist attacks in Yemen, Kenya, Tanzania, and on 9/11. Throughout, Lee cites the binary impulses in American society that pit "good" and "bad" immigrants against each

other, elevating now one, now another group in constant competition for legitimacy, acceptance and power.

The book is well illustrated with historical cartoons, photographs, advertisements and declarations. It is meticulously researched and documented and presents a thorough indictment of American immigration policies, illustrating throughout how racism and xenophobia, in a constant and developing dance with one another, have brought us to this defining moment in our immigration history.

Migration has increased all over the world, fueled by climate change and environmental disaster, wars, political and social instability, economic and social inequalities and violence of all kinds--personal, group induced and institutional. This book could be a valuable resource for a course on the nature of diversity and inclusivity in a democratic society. It could help students to examine questions of individual responsibility to the stated values of the society--questions of inclusivity, equality, equity and justice in the light of an increasingly diverse citizenry--and an attempt to understand the limitations of those values as they are daily practiced. It could help students begin to define and understand their obligations as individuals in a pluralistic society with democratic values, at the same time as they may demand adherence to national laws and safeguards both from themselves and from those who have grown up with different sets of values.

Change is the most constant characteristic in our society, and it is hastened by the addition to the body politic of new immigrants with different cultures, languages and customs. How and whether we as a nation adapt to such change; when and how and what we change; how we decide what must be preserved and why; what our core values are; and what our responsibilities and obligations are remain constant questions, part of an ongoing conversation. Migrants and new citizens must be drawn into the conversation and become part of whatever solution our society comes up with. Keeping them out, disenfranchised and powerless, can lead only to further resentment and alienation. Ultimately, it dooms us to the finally destabilizing eternal power play that Erika Lee describes. Defining xenophobia as a threat to American democracy, she finally calls on readers to recognize the destructive nature of our racist and xenophobic policies and calls for immediate reform. It is noteworthy that one of President Biden's first acts as President was to call for immigration reform, a pathway to citizenship for all undocumented migrants, the expansion of legal immigration, and safeguards for the provisions of DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or Dreamers Act of the Obama period that protects from deportation those who were illegally brought to this country as children. To date, however, neither he nor the Democratic Party has followed up on this call. It will be fascinating to see how this drama plays out against a badly divided society in a perilous, anti-democratic time.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review
Refugee by Alan Gratz

by Soraya Hajizadeh-Leiber



REFUGEE BY ALAN GRATZ (2017)

"Some novels are engaging and some novels are important. *Refugee* is both." That is what the author Ruta Sepetys said about the bestseller *Refugee*, which was published in 2017. I agree. *Refugee* is about important issues like war, being forced to leave your country and home, and what it's like to be in danger through no fault of your own. I discovered this book more than a year ago and I couldn't put it down because it's not predictable and there are many cliffhangers. I even got yelled at for reading it instead of going to sleep.

Throughout the book, which moves along very quickly, the reader learns about three kids and their families from different places who become refugees. Josef is a Jewish 12-year-old boy who is living in 1930s Nazi Germany. Isabel is an 11-year-old girl who is leaving Cuba in 1994 during the dictatorship because her father was going to be put in prison for speaking about his opinions. And Mahmoud is a 13-year-old boy who is escaping the war in Syria, his home. The reader learns about the long difficult journeys that they're forced to take with their families in order to survive.

Like many other books by author Alan Gratz, *Refugee* is historical fiction. But this one is my favorite. I enjoy the suspense and learning about what it's like for the characters to be refugees. The characters themselves are also likable and relatable. They have to face death and experience losing loved ones. I really liked this book because it did not treat me like a kid; it told the truth without making it seem happier or easier. It made me feel sad sometimes.

In other words, this book is not for everyone because some parts are about awful things. *Refugee* talks a lot about real problems that happened and are still happening today. Mahmoud's story, for example, is still happening now to people in Syria and other countries. Millions are being forced to flee their homes because of war and other problems. I also learned what it was like to be a Jewish kid in Nazi Germany. And I learned that in Cuba people were being put in jail for disagreeing with the government and expressing their opinions. Even though these stories are about different families living in different times, Alan Gratz does a really good job connecting them.

I would recommend *Refugee* to students who are interested in what's happening around the world—in terms of both history and current events. I would teach it to fifth graders and up. As students read the book, I would also give them nonfiction articles about the dictatorship in Cuba, the war in Syria, and Nazi control in Germany. I would ask them to develop their own questions. Their assignment could be to answer them in short responses using the book, articles, and their own research.

I hope you and your students enjoy this book as much as I do!



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

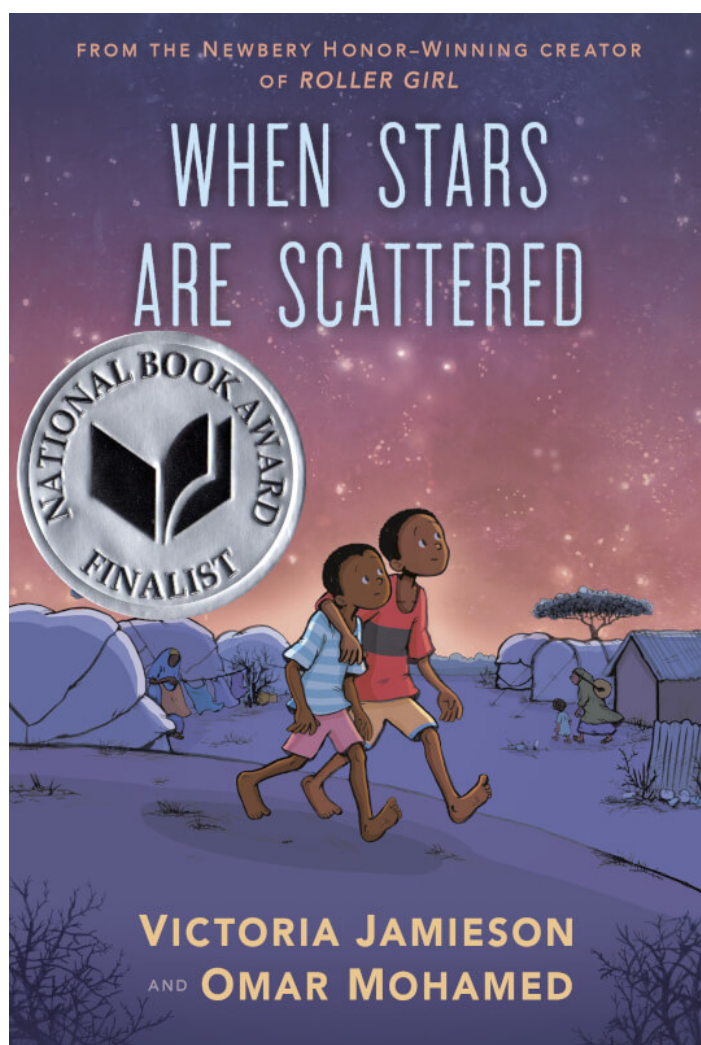
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review

When Stars Are Scattered by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed

by Anna Sedlock-Reiner



WHEN STARS ARE SCATTERED BY OMAR MOHAMED AND VICTORIA JAMIESON

Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed (2020). *When Stars Are Scattered*. (Color by Iman Geddy). New York: Penguin Random House.

When *Stars Are Scattered* is a graphic novel illustrated by Victoria Jamieson, who also wrote the Newbery award-winning *Roller Girl* in 2015. The book is told from the perspective of Omar Mohamed who, as a child, fled from his home in Somalia to a refugee camp in Kenya called Dadaab, currently the largest in the world.

Omar flees from Somalia because his life is in danger; some people shot his father when Omar was very little and his brother was just a baby. This may have been one of the saddest parts in the book because Omar was playing with his favorite toys when he turned and saw people shoot his father. Omar immediately ran to his mother and, since he was so little, he couldn't really tell her exactly what had happened, but she understood. Omar's mother then told him to go to his neighbor's house and that she would come and get him when she could.

Omar and Hassan ran until they came to their neighbor's house and, by then, the people with guns were everywhere. They had no choice but to leave Somalia, so they walked for miles. They had nothing to eat except maybe some little bits of food that they found along the way, and nothing to drink either. Omar began to grow very skinny and tired.

Their group began to grow as more people escaping from their homes joined them. But then it also began to shrink: The people with guns would find and corner them, steal their clothes and food, and so people in the group began to die.

Finally, Omar and a very small group of other refugees arrived at Dadaab. He and his brother Hassan had a lot of illnesses--malaria, malnutrition, dehydration, and more. They were placed in the refugee camp's hospital and cared for until they were mostly better. But Hassan never fully recovered and was only able to say one word: "Hooyo." (Toward the end of the book, it is very moving to find out what "hooyo" actually means in Somali.)

After reading the book, I did some research on the walking distance between Somalia and Kenya, and well... it's really, really long: about 271 hours (approximately twelve days) and 1,347.5 kilometers. And it would have taken even longer than that because Omar's group had to stop to rest.

Most of the book shows Omar and Hassan living in Dadaab. It also showed me what it was like to live in a refugee camp and the terrible conditions the brothers found there. Sometimes Omar and his brother had food, but most of the time they didn't. They lived in little tents and played soccer with crumpled-up plastic bags. They each had one pair of clothes. I tried to think about what that would be like, and it's really hard to imagine. For girls and women, the situation was even harder. There were fewer girls in the

classes at school than boys, and that meant that not many of them made it to middle or high school. A lot of girls weren't even allowed to go to school at all. In the book, the characters Maryam and Nemo help bring this to the reader's attention.

I could not put *When Stars Are Scattered* down! The story moved along quickly even though their life in Dadaab lasted for more than 15 years. I also liked that, even though it showed you many terrible things that happened, it was also from the perspective of a kid—so, despite the circumstances, the book showed the regular things kids do in their lives no matter where they are. I also liked that the relationship between Omar and Hassan was a big part of the book: Other kids tease Hassan because he can only say one word, and they think that means he's dumb. But Omar is able to see that Hassan actually does understand things, he just can't express them with words. Omar feels protective of Hassan, and, with the help of his best friend, is able to realize that Hassan can also be his own person and doesn't always need Omar's help.

I really recommend this book! Enjoy!



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Contributors' Notes Teaching Migration/Immigration



"THEY TRIED TO BURY US, THEY DIDN'T KNOW WE WERE SEEDS", JUSTSEEDS COLLABORATION, RAOUL DEAL, PAUL KJELLAND, NICOLAS LAMPERT

Miguel Abrantes Antunes is an ESL & Humanities educator with 15 years of experience supporting recently arrived immigrant students and their families in multiple capacities. He earned his initial Master's Degree in Sociology from the New School University focused on cultural expressions and subcultures and subsequent Master's Degree in Education from Brooklyn College focused on Social Studies.

Juan Battle – academic, author, activist, and feminist – is a Presidential Professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY); where he holds appointments in Sociology, Urban Education, Social Welfare, the School of Public Health & Health Policy, as well as the School for Labor and Urban Studies. Additionally, he is currently the Executive Officer [Chair] of the PhD Program in Nursing as well as the former and inaugural Coordinator of the Africana Studies Certificate Program.

Andy Beutel is a veteran middle school social studies teacher based in New Jersey. He has written and presented about the challenges and possibilities of critical teaching and learning in a suburban public school setting. Andy also currently serves as president of the education association representing his school district.

Rebecca Bridges is the teacher name of Rebecca T. Dickinson, who is the author of thirteen creative works ranging from poetry to fiction to nonfiction in different literary magazines, online media, and collections.

Tuli Chatterji is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at LaGuardia Community College of City University of New York.

Amrita Dhar is Assistant Professor of English at The Ohio State University, where she teaches courses in English early modern studies, literary disability studies, and transnational migration studies. She is currently on a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship to complete her first monograph, *Milton's Blind Language*, which examines the workings of blindness towards the making of John Milton's last long poetry.

Husseina Dinani is an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto Scarborough. She teaches a range of courses in African Studies, History, Women's and Gender Studies and International Development Studies. Her current research examines the decolonization period in Africa from the perspectives of rural women in southern Tanzania.

Lynn Glixon Ditchfield, Ph.D. candidate, C.A.G.S., Ed.M., M.A. is passionate about arts in education for social justice. She has been an educator of pre-school to university, founded and directed Adult and Community Education of Martha's Vineyard (ACE MV), and is the creator, writer, and editor of the book *Borders to Bridges: Creativity-Based Immigration Curriculum Guidebook*.

Now Professor Emerita, **Linda Dittmar** taught literature and film studies at the University of Massachusetts--Boston for forty years, including two Fulbright grants to India and

teaching at Tel Aviv and Paris universities. Linda is a long-time member of *Radical Teacher's* Editorial Board.

Abby C. Emerson is a Doctoral Fellow studying antiracist teacher education at Teachers College, Columbia University. She was a 5th grade teacher in NYC public schools for 10 years, but spends more time these days with her two children.

Angela Cecilia Espinosa (Ph.D. UC-Irvine) studies intersectionality in avant-garde movements of Abya Yala (Latin America). Her articles have appeared in *Mexican Studies* and *Semiosis*. She currently teaches at San Jose State University.

Susan Gubernat's second full poetry collection, *The Zoo at Night*, won the Prairie Schooner book award and was published in September 2017 by the University of Nebraska Press. Her first book of poems, *Flesh*, won the Marianne Moore Prize and was published by Helicon Nine Editions. She is Professor Emerita of English at California State University, East Bay.

Soraya Hajizadeh-Leiber is a sixth grader in Brooklyn, N.Y. She often reads into the night and sometimes falls asleep with a book on her face.

Alisha Mernick (she/her) is an artist, educator, and organizer based in Los Angeles, CA. She holds her MA in Art Education from NYU, and has been implementing liberatory, critical arts pedagogy in the k-12 classroom for over a decade. Alisha currently serves as an EDI commissioner and area representative for the California Art Education Association, and recently served on the EDI task force for the National Art Education Association.

Molly Nolan is a Professor of History emerita at NYU. She writes on human rights, right radical populism, and economic sanctions. She is active in Brooklyn For Peace and Historians for Peace and Democracy.

Susan Gushee O'Malley is one of the founders of *Radical Teacher* and taught composition, Shakespeare, Women's Studies and Liberal Studies at the City University of New York (Kingsborough, Graduate Center) for 37 years. For the last 10 years she has worked with the NGO Committee on the Status of Women at the UN.

Eva Richter is an NGO representative to the United Nations for the Poverty Elimination and Community Education (PEACE) Foundation. Ms. Richter entered the NGO arena after her retirement from a long career as a professor of English at various colleges and universities in the US and abroad, including the University of Nebraska, Rutgers University, the City University of New York and Hebei Teacher's University (China).

Stephanie Rugoff, coordinator of *We Are Not Your Soldiers*, came to this project nine years ago with a life of activism and a career as a literacy specialist in the NYC public schools.

Anna Sedlock-Reiner is an eleven-year-old who lives in Brooklyn and loves to make lemonade, swing in her backyard, and write stories.

Hadas Yanay is a recent graduate of International Migration Studies at The Graduate Center, City University of New York. In her work with INGOs and UN agencies within the area of Forced Migration, she is committed to promoting localized and resilient pathways on behalf of and in cooperation with refugee and migrant communities.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/press/).