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Theorising decolonisation in the context of lifelong learning and transnational migration: anti-colonial and anti-racist perspectives

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ABSTRACT

In the age of transnational migration, the practices and policies of lifelong learning in many immigrant-receiving countries continue to be impacted by the cultural and discursive politics of colonial legacies. Drawing on a wide range of anti-colonial and anti-racist scholarship, we argue for an approach to lifelong learning that aims to decolonise the ideological underpinnings of colonial relations of rule, especially in terms of its racialised privileging of 'whiteness' and Eurocentrism. In the context of lifelong learning, decolonisation would achieve four important purposes. First, it would illustrate the nexus between knowledge, power, and colonial narratives by interrogating how knowledge-making is a fundamental aspect of 'coloniality'. Second, decolonisation would entail challenging the hegemony of western knowledge, education, and credentials and upholding a 'multiculturalism of knowledge' that is inclusive and responsive to the cultural needs and values of transnational migrants. Third, decolonisation would lead to the need for planning and designing learning curricula as well as institutionalised pedagogy based on non-western knowledge systems and epistemic diversity. The final emphasis is on the urgency to decolonise our minds as lifelong learners, practitioners and policy-makers in order to challenge the passivity, colonisation, and marginalisation of learners both in classrooms and workplaces.

Tracing the shifting meanings of lifelong learning

Lifelong learning as a 'beautifully simple idea' (Field, 2000, p. vii) representing humanistic and emancipatory approaches to education, was perhaps first institutionalised as early as the 1960s or 1970s by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) that envisaged for a new vision of learning throughout the life of individuals and societies (Elfert, 2018). One of the first published reports in this context was by Faure, Learning to Be (1972), that argued for the principles of lifelong learning (initially referred to as lifelong education) to be enshrined as the basic concept in educational policies of both the developed and the developing worlds (Medel-Anonuevo, Ohsako, & Mauch, 2001). The report made a strong case for lifelong education – an education based on democracy, 'conceived of as implying each man's right to realise his own potential and to share in the building of his own future' (Faure et al., 1972, p. v). It thus encouraged learners to 'build up a continually evolving body of knowledge all through life –"learn to be"' (Faure et al., 1972, p. vi).

The humanistic and democratic principles underlying lifelong learning in those early years, however, underwent drastic changes in the 1990s that ushered in new social and economic contexts especially in the global North. With the advent of economic globalisation and neo-liberal restructuring, many western countries such as Canada underwent deregulation and privatisation of public services. Correspondingly, there was a decline in full-time

employment, dismantling of employment protection legislation, cutbacks in minimum wage levels and a shift toward part-time contingent/precarious jobs.

In this neo-liberal world of uncertainty and contingency, workers were expected to be flexible, adaptable and willing to be trained continuously in a wide range of skills to serve the changing labour market needs (Edwards et al., 1998). A notion of employability tied to skill acquisition thus moved to the economic sphere, 'placing emphasis on individual skill development and preparedness for employment, with less concern for the availability of employment and appropriate opportunity structures' (Edwards et al., 1998, p. n.p.). This economic imperative impacted the policies and practices of lifelong learning as well, invoking it as a 'utilitarian discourse. . .represented by the "skills" agenda' (Elfert, 2018, p. 28). As Cruikshank (2002) rightly pointed out, under the banner of lifelong learning, it was training that started to be considered as the essential tool that will enable workers to compete for jobs in the neo-liberal economy.

Two important reports published around this time, UNESCO's Delors report, Learning: The Treasure Within (Delors, 1996), and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Lifelong Learning for All (1996), were instrumental in emphasising the economic rationale for lifelong learning and orienting it toward the 'principles of human capital and employability' (UNESCO, 2016, p. 4). For instance, Lifelong Learning for All presented the ideals of lifelong learning as the primary principle 'that will respond directly to the need to improve the capacity of individuals, families, workplaces and communities to continuously adapt and renew' (OECD, 1996, p. 3). Within a few decades, the discourse of lifelong learning shifted from 'learning to be' to 'learning to be productive and employable' (Biesta, 2006, p. 172).

While there have been some strong policy and practice conversations in the field of adult and lifelong learning about the economic rationale of lifelong learning (Biesta, 2006; Cruikshank, 2002; Edwards 1997; Field, 2000), what is largely left unaddressed is how skills and knowledge offered under the purview of lifelong learning often continue to be underpinned by colonial forms of knowledge formation and racial modalities. Exploration of such modalities is particularly important in the context of transnational migrants living and working in western countries. As has already been extensively explored by scholars, most governments and policymakers in the West are grappling with challenges that are quite similar – increased transnational migration, especially from non-western countries and lack of labour market integration for migrants in host countries (Guo, 2010, 2015a; Maitra, 2013).

According to OECD (2018) report, more than 5 million people settled permanently in the OECD in 2017. As a result of increasing migration, the foreign-born population in the OECD countries has reached 127 million people, representing an average of 13% of the total population compared with 9.5% in 2000. Among the top 10 immigrant-sending countries were China, Romania, Syria, India, and Poland. While the range and scope of transnational practices vary considerably, there is no denying that transnational migration has produced ethnocultural diversity in many western countries.

Although many of these migrant learners and their families are highly educated and bring educational backgrounds, employment-related experiences and professional expertise to the host society, they are frequently urged to return to lifelong learning and keep updating their qualifications and skills to remain gainfully employed. It is generally believed that lifelong learning has an important role to play in helping migrants with their adaptation and transition

to a new society (Guo, 2010). Continuous acquisition of skills, knowledge and communicational abilities are thus deemed useful for transnational migrants in order to expedite their labour market integration in the host country and remain employable under the increasingly fluid demands of job requirements and the allied knowledge economies (Jarvis, 2007). Consequently, those who are unable to engage in lifelong learning are made to believe that they should take responsibility for their own learning and shoulder the blame if they fail to achieve socio-economic and cultural integration in the new country (Crowther, 2004).

Like any other form of learning, lifelong learning is a social and cultural phenomenon in sociocultural world where power is unequally distributed. Thus, the opportunity to learn and progress through learning depends on the individual's position in the social, cultural and economic structures (Jarvis, 2007). The issue is particularly pertinent in the context of settler colonies such as Canada, where politics of race and culture continue to circulate as residues of colonial history. Historically in Canada, for example, the White national subject has always been 'exalted' as a stable and superior being vis-à-vis Aboriginal peoples and other non-white groups living in the country (Thobani, 2007). These colonial and racialised perspectives have, for instance, resulted in Aboriginal peoples being subjected to debilitating forces of assimilation and colonisation through several oppressive federal government policies (Battiste, 1998). Moreover, to maintain an overtly white national character, state agencies have also tried to control and contain the demography of citizens by using race, ethnicity, nationality, and colour to determine who is most eligible to migrate, become a citizen and participate in the national economy. Racialised immigrants, brought into the settler nation, despite being highly educated, face increased barriers to their labour market integration. Such barriers typically include lack of opportunities for learning as well as devaluation and denigration of their prior learning and credentialism leading to their unemployment and underemployment, and downward social mobility (Guo, 2009, 2013; Maitra, 2015a, 2015b). To put into colonial contexts, particular representations of the 'native other' are naturalised, their knowledge delegitimised and thereby considered deficient and inferior (Giroux, 1997; Memmi, 2000).

Given the above contexts, in the following sections, we will delve deeper into the question of whether practices of lifelong learning are responsive to such colonial, racial, and cultural frameworks that mediate knowledge/skill acquisition, recognition and validation in the age of transnational migration? Drawing on a wide range of anti-colonial and anti-racist scholarship, we will make two arguments. First, we will argue that discourses of lifelong learning are discriminatorily employed to create an 'abyssal divide' between the knowledge, learning and credentials brought to western countries by racialised transnational immigrants. Such abyssal divides are based on colonial assumptions of racialised migrants being 'deficient' and 'backward' compared to white, settler norms. Racialised migrants are thus often barred from integrating into the labour market; their previous knowledge and credentials derecognised and invalidated. Second, curricular and pedagogical approaches associated with lifelong learning can also have colonial undertones. In this context, we will draw on scholars who have specifically examined soft skill training curricula that many immigrants in western countries are encouraged to imbibe in order to remain employable in the labour market. We will show how the curricula are often suffused with cultural and racial values geared toward assimilating immigrants of colour to the dominant and normative national culture of the country. We will conclude by arguing for the decolonisation of practices of lifelong learning as a powerful form of redressing the inequities built into the standard, prescriptive models of lifelong learning. While our discussion is primarily based on the Canadian context, much of

our findings are also relevant to many other immigrant-receiving nations in the West, where practices of lifelong learning continue to be underpinned by colonial and racial ideologies.

Transnational migrants' lifelong learning
Creating an 'abyssal divide' between the knowledge, learning and credentials

In the context of transnational migrants living in western countries like Canada, lifelong learning tends to take complex forms of knowledge, skills and training. In order to explicate such complexities, it is important to understand first the challenges of devaluation and denigration that many immigrants, especially immigrants of colour, experience in the host countries. Lifelong learning broadly defined constitutes learning that goes beyond the initial formal education to continue throughout one's life and therefore has to do with the 'acquisition of new skills and knowledge in relation to the world of work' (Biesta, 2006, p. 173). Learning through work, therefore, is an important dimension of lifelong learning (Fenwick, 2003). Indeed, UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action clearly spells out the need to provide flexible lifelong learning opportunities to citizens in order to ensure 'equitable and increased access to quality technical and vocational education and training' as well as the 'recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education' (UNESCO, 2015, p. vi). The notion of credential recognition is also closely linked to the lifelong learning tradition of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition, which involves the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning acquired through various means (Andersson & Guo, 2009).

In many traditionally, immigrant-receiving countries in the global North, notwithstanding official discourses of equity and recognition, skilled migrants, particularly those from racialised backgrounds, face an ironic situation in which those whose skills are most needed encounter special difficulties in gaining access to these professions (Wagner & Childs, 2006). Discrimination buttresses selective recruitment systems that value locally obtained education, and experience over new migrants who come with qualifications and credentials from other, particularly non-western countries (Webb, 2015). Thus, as Wagner and Childs observe, immigrant optometrists become taxi drivers, social workers become hospital cleaners, teachers become clerical assistants, and environmental engineers stack supermarket shelves. In other words, continuing ideologies of racialised undervaluation of immigrant bodies lead to a de-recognition of their skill sets and credentials. The colonial ideologies of race here does not function merely as a cultural artefact of society but has very real material consequences by selectively ascribing immigrant communities into either the lowest rungs of the labour market or shutting them out of the formal labour market altogether (Das Gupta, Man, Mirchandani, & Ng, 2014).

Let us return to Canada – a country that has been quite successful in attracting well-educated migrants since the 1990s. According to the last census, the proportion of the Canadian population born abroad had risen to a near historical high of 21.9% in 2016, for a total of 7,540,830. The top source countries for migration were the Philippines, India, China, Iran, Pakistan, Syria and South Korea. The government plans to boost the immigration programme further, to reflect 13% increase in immigration by 2020. Even though skilled immigrants bring significant human capital resources to Canada, a number of studies demonstrate that highly educated immigrant professionals experience deskilling and devaluation of their prior learning and work experiences after immigrating to Canada (Branker, 2017; Mojab, 1999; Guo, 2009, 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Maitra, 2013, 2015a, 2015b). In a Vancouver based study with immigrants from the People's Republic of China, scholars found that most recent

Chinese immigrants came to Canada with post-secondary education (72.5%). However, they could not find jobs in their original professions because their Chinese qualifications and work experiences were not recognised. Their lack of access to professional occupations resulted in downward social mobility to the extent that some lived in poverty (Guo & Devoretz, 2006). Branker (2017) and Pendakur (2005) noted negative labour market outcomes for Caribbean and Afghan immigrants in Canada. Maitra's previous paper (Maitra, 2015b) reported similar challenges faced by highly skilled South Asian immigrants in Canada. Despite being well qualified, many South Asian immigrants faced what can be described as the 'triple glass effect' (Guo, 2013) while trying to translate their skills into appropriate opportunities in Canada. They were either asked by employers and recruiters to get Canadian work experience or told that their foreign credentials were not enough and that they need Canadian education or certification. To sum, most South Asian immigrants thus encountered a 'glass gate' that denied them an entry into professional communities along with the 'glass door' that blocked their job opportunities by devaluing their credentials and prior work experience. Many were forced to take up and be stuck in low paying jobs for economic survival, a manifestation of the 'glass floor' effect (De la Rica, Dolado, & Llorens, 2005). When probed, most of the respondents in Maitra's study indicated that the Canadian labour market was intensely racialised and excluded those not perceived as 'desirable' in terms of appearance or skin colour. Teelucksingh and Galabuzi (2005) noted from their study that 'racial discrimination in employment. . . deny racialized group members also equality of opportunity in the Canadian labour market and secure an advantage for non racialized groups' (2005, p. 6). We hear echo of similar sentiment in Abdi's work as well when he points out that racism, as an invention of modern colonialism, is 'alive and well in multicultural and multi-ethnic Canada' (Abdi, 2005, p. 58).

Immigrant workers' narratives of racial discrimination and labour market barriers are no mere aberrations but deeply embedded in the complex and multi-layered relationship that links histories of racism, patriarchy and colonialism. The continuing force of the histories of domination is not surprising since from its inception as a settler colonial nation, Canada has been imagined as implicitly white, with Eurocentric hegemony dominating every sphere of the nation and inscribing its social, cultural and economic forms of life (Bannerji, 2000). To maintain and perpetuate this overtly racialised, white character of the national life, Canadian immigration policies have always restricted the flow of immigrants from so-called 'third-world' countries. Categories of race, ethnicity, nationality, and colour have been variously deployed to determine the admission of immigrants to Canada, especially those immigrants who are deemed as undesirable in racial terms (Basran & Zong, 1998). According to Sharma (2006), this distinction between 'preferred' and 'non-preferred' immigrants have served to reinforce a racialised membership in the Canadian nation where '[w]hiteness works as a ruling identity. . . [and] becomes a privilege because it is positioned higher on the value scale of racialisation than is non-whiteness' (p. 56). The historical forms of racial stratification continue to exist even today, affecting, as pointed out earlier, the labour market integration of well educated, professional immigrants of colour. Regardless of all their previous qualifications, they are still considered to be lacking in areas such as Canadian work experience, Canadian education, proficiency in English or good communicational skills. Explaining such discrimination, Galabuzi (2004) writes that those who belong to the dominant groups in Canada 'maintain . . . privilege by constructing racial categories and assigning negative values to immutable attributes such as skin colour and cultural background, using this to evaluate the suitability of minority candidates for employment, compensation and workplace mobility' (p. 187).

Yet, cultural assumptions about the inherent deficiencies of these migrant bodies in the dominant social understanding justifies this material deprivation and dispossession (in terms of actual skills brought to the host country) as a function of the inherent deficiencies of migrant individuals. Thus, colonial ideologies of race and gender structuring the dominant social understanding of immigrants of colour in contemporary Canada not only lead to the material vulnerabilities of immigrant communities but also cultural justification for why immigrants of colour fail as individuals and as communities.

It is indeed crucial to understand here how prior colonial knowledge production about the formerly colonised parts of the world continue to heavily influence the expectations and assumptions about immigrant communities from the global South. As Bannerji (2003) has pointed out, the colonial construction of knowledge formation about the so-called 'traditional societies', that is to say the present geopolitical context of the global South, continues to be the dominant frame through which to understand, interpret and analyse the present global division of labour. Within this deeply racialised and patriarchal framework, immigrant communities, especially women immigrants of colour are valued for their labour inputs but simultaneously devalued as potential citizen-subjects of the Canadian-nation state (Bannerji, 2003). Furthermore, racialisation remains central to the operation of a hierarchical skills regime with skin colour rather than qualifications as its basis for discrimination (Guo, 2015b; Maitra, 2015a, 2015b). It is the 'colour' of the skill associated with immigrants' skin colour rather than the skill itself which causes the deskilling and devaluation (Guo, 2015b).

A further complication that arises out of the settler-colonial nature of the Canadian state is that through the induction of a skilled but undervalued global labour force in the form of migration, the Canadian nation-state is able to construct competing claims to scarce resources like labour market access between immigrants of colour and indigenous groups (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The immigrant labour force is doubly beneficial for the Canadian nation-state in this regard – not only as a possible source of extraction of value but also as a medium of further dispossession of indigenous claims to resources such as land in Canada. The management of immigrant populations through their selective absorption into the nation-state and into the labour market thus create pathways of neo-colonisation for possession of the originary resources of indigenous groups, without unsettling the white settler domination of the Canadian nation-state (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Thus, as Tuck and Yang have forcefully argued, immigration within the present colonial/neocolonial-capitalist framework of value extraction and management of non-white populations through mechanism of immigration containment and de-skilling of coloured communities constitutes a re-affirmation of white settler identity as dominant within the Canadian nation-state.

This denial of the diversity of knowledge, skill acquisition, professional experiences and practices of particularly racialised immigrants produces the 'West' as hegemonic knowledge and other, non-western epistemologies, learning and worldviews as 'inferior', 'backward' and therefore in need of intervention (Abdi, 2005; Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007). Anything different from the western norm is seen as deficient; knowledge is racialised so that it is the education and skills brought by immigrants of colour that is considered 'inferior' and 'incompatible' compared to western qualifications and credentials (Das Gupta et al., 2014; Guo, 2009; Maitra, 2013, 2015a, 2015b).

According to Santos (2014), such discreditation of non-western forms of knowledge reflects an 'abyssal thinking' that has its roots in colonialism. Within the modern cartography of

knowledge, abyssal thinking creates a divide between the knowledge of the metropolitan societies and colonial territories. Such abyssal divide becomes evident in how credentials and qualifications brought by migrants from former colonies are excluded and fitted on the 'other' side of the abyss and constituted as incomprehensible and can be in no way 'considered knowledge, true or false' (p. 122). Similar arguments have been put forward by other anti-colonial scholars who have analysed how our knowledge and learning are articulated within a coloniality of power. For instance, Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodríguez (2002) approached the question of knowledge production and recognition from a modern/colonial world system framework. Arguing that '[u]nderlying the universality and superiority of Western knowledge lies Occidentalism, or the discourse about the superiority of the West' (p. xi) they pointed out how such Occidentalist discourses have been effective in silencing the 'other' since the days of the European colonial expansion. Over the years, development of Eurocentric institutional structures, state apparatuses, as well as universities have further reinforced and reproduced North-South global divide and related differences in epistemologies, knowledge production, and education. Practices of lifelong learning are implicated in the perpetuation of this colonial worldview by positioning certain populations as necessarily 'deficient' and lagging behind the normative standards of Western educational qualifications. In fact, through processes of selective 'deskilling and reskilling, lifelong learning acts as a vehicle to colonising immigrants into the dominant norms and values of the host society' (Guo, 2010).

Colonial undertones in curricular and pedagogical approaches

The hierarchisation and racialisation of knowledge are also evident in some of the curricular and pedagogical approaches associated with lifelong learning. An apt example in this context is soft skill training. In the current Canadian neo-liberal labour market, where work-related learning and training are considered key strategies for developing workers' economic productivity, soft skills (also sometimes referred to as 'life skills' or 'interpersonal skills'), have been identified as increasingly important hiring criteria, especially for immigrants (Maitra, 2015a). There are training programmes provided by government-sponsored settlement agencies to prepare immigrants – especially immigrants of colour – for the Canadian labour market. Much of this training is about teaching immigrants certain soft, relational and interactional skills that are easily transferable, and presumably desired by Canadian employers (Jackson, 2005; Maitra, 2015a). Training curricula are geared toward improving immigrants' communicational skills, adaptability, team-working capacities, behaviour, flexible attitudes, as well as understanding of Canadian culture, values and norms (Maitra, 2015a, 2015b). Immigrants, too, are usually eager to learn these skills, often trying to re-imagine their racial and cultural identity in the process, hoping that this might substantially increase their chances of accessing the labour market. However, often many such soft skill training curricula are suffused with racial and cultural values geared toward training immigrants the dominant and normative national culture of the country. This point is forcefully brought out by Maitra based on interviews with South Asian immigrant women as well as coordinators, employment counsellors, and instructors of various government-funded employment training programmes in Canada (2015a). It is clearly discerned through the interviews how immigrant women of colour were taught to internalise a whole set of dispositions such as communication, behaviour and bodily deportment as induction into Euro- Canadian norms and values (2015a). These women were put under a lot of pressure to re-socialise themselves in order to abandon all 'cultural distinctiveness' of their South Asian identities. This socialisation was most evident when women, cited in Maitra's previous paper, described their experiences in the various training workshops where, in the pretext of

preparing immigrants for Canadian employers, a normative white Canadianness was imposed. According to Malathi, one of the respondents in Maitra's study,

In Canada, I must have attended I don't know how many workshops and various agencies. They have a number of workshops that you have to attend. Each session is about a different module so there can be résumé workshop, interview skill workshop, mock interview session, communication workshop. There's presentations and guest speakers . . . I won't say I didn't learn anything. For example, in one of the workshops we were told to dress up professionally, brush our teeth before an interview, learn to do small talks, not to sit cross-legged. (Maitra, 2015a, p. 70)

What is evident in the above quotation is how the perceived inferiority of non-Canadian life worlds motivated service providers to selectively tutor and train professional, educated immigrants about the basic skills of social processes demanded by a normative Canadian employer. There was hardly any regard for the educational achievements or professional experiences of the immigrants concerned (Maitra, 2015a). As mentioned earlier, Maitra, as part of her previous study, also interviewed employment counsellors and one of the employment counsellors in the study emphasised the need for immigrants to continue to learn the Canadian way so that they can successfully enter the Canadian labour market,

You know most of the immigrants who come from third world countries, they do not know the work culture here in Canada. The way they [immigrants] talk or the way they dress . . . I always tell them it is not going to get them job here. They are no longer in their own country. They need to learn the Canadian way . . . that is why training is so important. (Maitra & Maitra, 2015, p. 323)

This comment marks the category of the 'immigrant' as somehow radically different from the normative ideal of a Canadian citizen. Trainers, with their emphasis on the level of ordinary living such as the style of dressing, ways of interaction, modes of greeting or workplace socialisation, replicate the gendered and racial assumptions of those who 'properly' belong to the normative community of Canadian citizens, in order to eradicate certain traits or cultural affiliations of immigrants of colour that stand in their way of assimilation (Maitra, 2015a, 2015b, 2017). The following quotations from two other employment counsellors illustrate further how they try to socialise immigrants to what they consider as normative Canadian work culture,

I always tell them [immigrants] to practice small talk. That's . . . part of the Canadian workplace. They have to watch Canadian shows and know what is going on around them. If they are unaware or shy they cannot expect to be hired. When you are new in the country you have to learn the Canadian way. (Maitra & Maitra,2015, p. 323)

I always mention in my workshops that workers need to be fresh and pleasant looking when going for their interviews. Sometimes people because of the way they cook sometimes smell of spices. So I always mention that take a shower and wear fresh clothes to the interview. Wear well-fitted clothes. You know some of them tell me in the workshops that clothes are expensive here. I tell them in that case go and buy a second hand one. You can get a cheap one in a second hand store. There's always a way if you are willing. Also shoes are important. Dress shoes with dress pants. (Maitra & Maitra, 2015, p. 323)

This reproduction of Canadian identity through modulation of the immigrant worker subject can operate only by an uncritical naturalisation of the forms of citizenship or the ideal subjectivity which anchors this citizenship where contentious issues of racial or cultural differences are from the beginning abrogated. What are foregrounded instead are a series of corporeal habits – taking a shower, dressing well, appearing confident and so on which taps into what is seen as a uncritical and generalised sense of 'Canadianness' that the immigrant can emulate or hope to emulate through incorporating the technologies of subject formation offered through the training (Maitra, 2015a). This socialisation and compliance to prevailing customs or values that the South Asian women were subjected to were, therefore, more akin to a civilising mission that treated these women, their language and modes of thought as inadequate and in contravention to the dominant norms required for assimilation into the Canadian labour market (Maitra, 2015a, 2017).

When it comes to language and communication training, other scholars have also reported findings similar to the above. While scrutinising English as a second language (ESL) programmes for immigrants in Canada, Guo (2013) has indicated how the curriculum is focused on accent reduction and 'teaching Canadian values, thus ignoring the complexity and ambiguity of the cultural experience of most newcomers' (p. 24). While such training is often justified based on its capacity to help immigrants 'fit in' within the Canadian labour market culture, practices of accent reduction reveals a pathological approach and a colonial mentality that renders native accents superior to non-native accents (Guo, 2013). In this way, all other existing skills and competencies of immigrants are erased or rendered secondary and multilingualism devalued (Haque, 2017).

The above discussion makes it clear how colonial and race relations continue to produce certain ideological understanding of the 'other', its knowledge, learning, values and culture that have become embedded as 'common-sense' or 'truth'. In the modern/colonial world that we live in, knowledge and learning are never neutral yet, when it comes to western knowledge, it is upheld as neutral and universal vis-à-vis what is backward and inferior coming from the former colonies. This devaluation of immigrant knowledge which is not in conformity with the dominant western Canadian knowledge replicates the continuing negation of indigenous knowledge within a settler colonial ethos. Thus, we see that the negation of knowledge practices places the settler colonialism of Canada within a continuum with prevalent practices of neo-colonial extraction of value from immigrant worker groups. It is this unequal exchange of knowledge among cultures that has been described by Santos (2014) as epistemicide or the 'murder of knowledge' (p. 92). Long-standing histories of racism, sexism and white supremacy continue to be reinforced through this selective recognition of knowledge and assimilatory training models. It is then important for advocates of lifelong learning practices to be responsive to the unequal distribution of power that manifests itself through control over knowledge and learning. After Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodríguez (2005) we thus argue that there is a need for a second decolonisation in the context of lifelong learning, a more profound one than the 'juridical-political decolonisation' that will 'address the global class, gender, racial, sexual, and regional asymmetries produced by the hierarchical structures of the modern/colonial capitalist world-system' (p. xxviii). In the following section, we define decolonisation and explicate four important ways decolonisation of lifelong learning can be achieved that would address the gradation of race and colour inherited from colonialism and reinforce lifelong learning's democratic and social justice agenda.

Decolonising lifelong learning practices

In contesting the colonial and racial forms of knowledge and practices that inform lifelong learning in countries like Canada and many other western countries, we advocate for a decolonisation of lifelong learning practices that would entail an 'epistemic shift' in the current colonial matrix of power and knowledge (Mignolo, 2002). After Smith (1999), we theorise decolonisation as a social and political process that would recover and re-establish marginalised cultural knowledge, practices, and identity. Decolonisation framework, while engaging with imperialism and colonialism, will take apart the colonial ideology that underestimates non-western knowledge, skills and experiences (Smith, 1999). In the context of lifelong learning, we propose that decolonisation would achieve four important purposes.

First, it would explicate the nexus between knowledge, power, and colonial narratives by interrogating how knowledge-making is a fundamental aspect of 'coloniality' – 'the process of domination and exploitation by the Capitalist/Patriarchal/Imperial Western Metropolis over the rest of the world' (Hernandez, 2018, p. n.p.). Akena (2012) argues that in order to understand how knowledge is produced, controlled and propagated, it is important to examine the relationship between individual and the society to uncover the deeper meanings embedded and represented by the knowledge produced. When it comes to transnational racialised migrants, there is a need to understand the politics of settler colonialism, its imperial enterprise of domination and exploitation both historically and in the contemporary times.

The hegemonic dominance of Eurocentric knowledge, skills and credentials that racialised immigrants experience in western countries has been primarily produced and perpetuated through colonial and neocolonial structures. In fact, the negative attitudes and behaviours toward immigrants coexist with Canada's commitments to democratic principles such as justice, equality, and fairness. The coexistence of these two conflicting ideologies can be referred to as 'democratic racism' (Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 2006). Democratic racism prevents the government from fully embracing differences or making any changes in the existing social, economic, and political order, and from supporting policies and practices that might ameliorate the low status of immigrants because these policies are perceived to be in conflict with and a threat to liberal democracy (Guo, 2010). Yet, within the discourse of lifelong learning there is hardly any recognition or attempts to dismantle the complicity of colonialism and knowledge as well as related privileges and oppressions.

Moreover, lifelong learning practices also need to be sensitive to the fact that ideological domination and hegemony of western knowledge cannot be of any benefit to the multicultural ethos of many western nations such as Canada (Akena, 2012). The 'relationship of exchange that binds together virtually all groups participating in that kind of society is what really makes social entity, what constitutes it both conceptually and practically' (Akena, 2012, p. 604). Such relationship of exchange should also engage those who are engaged in the process of decolonisation so that they can equally participate in knowledge production 'outside Euro-American hegemonic constructions of the other' (Akena, 2012, p. 605). To sum, lifelong learning must begin from the assumption that 'communities that have been under the heel of colonisation hold within them deeper resources and ways of being, refusing to be defined through the coloniser's terms' (Patel, 2016, p. 8).

Second, decolonisation would entail challenging the hegemony of western knowledge, education, and credentials and upholding a 'multiculturalism of knowledge' that is inclusive and responsive to the cultural needs and values of transnational migrants. Intercultural and

postcolonial approaches have for many years now argued for the diversification of knowledge production and for the recognition of plural systems of knowledge. Yet, such plurality is still missing in the Canadian lifelong learning policies and practices that aim to integrate racialised immigrants to the multicultural ethos of the country. What is then urgently needed is, as Santos (2014) argues, an 'epistemological reconstruction' that would ensure a more 'just relationship among different kinds of knowledge' (p. 42). Such an epistemic reconstruction is not about rejecting North-centric values, culture and knowledge but recognising that North-centric knowledge and tradition are also 'colonialist, imperialist, racist and sexist' (Santos, 2014, p. 42). It is only then that we can start an 'intercultural dialogue and translation among different critical knowledges and practices' which is at the roots of what Santos calls the 'ecology of knowledges' (p. 42).

It is morally and economically urgent for government organisations, professional associations, educational institutions and prior learning assessment agencies to dismantle barriers and adopt an inclusive framework that fully embraces all human knowledge and experiences, no matter which ethnic and cultural backgrounds they emerge from. For example, Eurocentric measuring criteria is being used to assess foreign credentials and education in Canada. Such Eurocentrism searches for Canadian equivalency and an absolute truth regarding knowledge and experience. It adopts a set of value-free criteria that discount the social, political, historical, and cultural context within which such knowledge is produced. The claimed neutral assessment and measuring usually disguises itself under the cloak of professional standard, quality, and excellence without questioning whose standard is put in place and whose interests it represents (Guo, 2009, 2010).

Additionally, in assessing foreign credentials, positivism is juxtaposed with liberal universalism and in turn, exacerbates the complexity of foreign credentials recognition. In applying a one-size-fits-all criterion to measure immigrants' credentials and experience, liberal universalism fails to answer the following questions: Who establishes criteria? Whose interests are represented and served by these standards? What constitutes valid prior learning? What should we do with knowledge that is valid but different? What forms of knowledge become Canadian equivalent? Thus, by refusing to recognise immigrants' qualifications and experience as legitimate knowledge, liberal universalism privileges a regime of truth that perpetuates oppression and disadvantage of immigrants (Guo, 2009, 2013).

Third, decolonisation would lead to the need for planning and designing lifelong learning curricula as well as institutionalised pedagogy based on non-western knowledge systems and epistemic diversity. Abdi (2012) argues that colonial relations historically and in contemporary times have perpetuated European languages and epistemologies so that other worldviews, styles of expression or learning systems have been subjugated. For example, drawing on the African experience, he points out how the knowledge and learning traditions of oral societies have been relegated as backward, ineffective and unacceptable. This is what Santos referred to as the abyssal divide, a point we have discussed earlier. Others have pointed out the impact of such abyssal divide in relation to the Aboriginal peoples and how the imposition of colonial education has detached them from precolonial education, histories, cultures and languages (Abdi, 2012). There is then a need to recognise how this abyssal divide can lead to social exclusions within lifelong learning and situate our 'curriculum and learning on the social experience of the other side of the line – the nonimperial global South, conceived of as metaphor for the systemic and unjust human suffering caused by global capitalism and colonialism' (p. 134). The curriculum must recognise that each kind of knowledge brings with it different ideas and possibilities that should be allowed for

pragmatic discussion rather than simply dismissed because it does not fit the Eurocentric framework.

In terms of pedagogy, we advocate for an 'embodied integrative anti-racist feminist' approach (Ng, 2005; see also Maitra, 2015a). Such an embodied pedagogy, critical to the confrontations between dominant-subordinate bodies within adult learning settings, urges practitioners to acknowledge and act on unequal power relations within social interactions, disrupt commonsense ideas and normalised practices, and reflect on how practitioners, while following institutional rules and conduct, can unwittingly reproduce sexism or racism (Ng, 2005). Congruent to reflective and transformative learning traditions in adult education, embodied pedagogy 'requires that we envision a society free of oppression and that we change ourselves and society to achieve this vision' (Ng, 2005, what is embodied learning, para. 7).

The final emphasis is on the urgency to decolonise our minds as lifelong learners, practitioners and policy-makers in order to challenge the passivity, colonisation, and marginalisation of learners both in classrooms and workplaces. According to Santos (2014), internal colonialism is insidious and difficult to pinpoint as it constitutes a 'very wide social grammar that permeates social relations, public and private spaces, culture, mentalities, and subjectivities' (p. 26). Critical reflection and discussion can be a way to address internalised colonialism. Given that cultural training and soft skills are often left to instructors' own biases and interpretations (Haque, 2017), such retrospection would enable instructors to assess and examine their own assumptions, interventions, and pedagogy (Brookfield, 2000; Schön, 1987). In addition, discussions of gendered and racialised experiences, needs, and learning objectives would ensure equal participation on the part of adult women learners. These approaches would support soft-skill training or for that matter any training, that is holistic, inclusive, and 'integrative of experience' (Mezirow, 1991, p. 14). Thus, decolonisation of lifelong learning cannot be based on short-term interventionist solutions, given that colonial ideologies and Eurocentrism are so deep-seated. It calls for a long-term strategy – a political will to generate change and a need to recognise colonialism as a 'system of oppression' (Santos, 2014, p. 40) that continues to permeate our lives, learning and work long after political colonialism has ceased to exist.

Conclusion

In this paper, we highlighted how lifelong learning practices in many western countries such as Canada continue to be underpinned by colonialism and racism. The issue is particularly pertinent in light of the increased number of transnational migrants who are living and working in many of these countries. Most of the migrants are from racialised backgrounds who are often encouraged to undertake lifelong learning activities to remain productive and employable. This is because most of the time, the knowledge and credentials brought in by racialised immigrants are derecognised and considered inferior when compared to the Canadian standard. Racialised immigrants are also asked to train themselves in language, communication and soft skills to remain attractive to the Canadian employers. This devaluation of transmigrants and their knowledge, learning and experiences explicates the tension the metropolis societies often experience as more and more workers from former colonies continue to enter their space. The immense mobility that transnational migrants demonstrate challenges the neat divide that formerly existed between the colony and the metropolis. The growing pressure and presence of transnational migrants within metropolitan spaces makes the 'abyssal metropolitan sees herself trapped in a shrinking space and reacts

by redrawing the abyssal line' (Santos, 2014, p. 126). Knowledge is racialised; learning and skills considered inferior and backwards and as a remedy racialised migrants are relegated to assimilatory training modules that would correct their behaviour, communication and other bodily comportments.

Given the lack of recognition of this colonial relation within lifelong learning practices, we argued for the decolonisation of lifelong learning. Drawing on a range of anti-colonial and anti-racist scholarship, we argue for an approach to lifelong learning that aims to decolonise the ideological underpinnings of colonial relations of rule, especially in terms of its racialised privileging of 'whiteness' and Eurocentrism as normative processes of knowledge accumulation. After Smith (1999), we theorised decolonisation as a social and political process that recovers and re-establishes marginalised cultural knowledge, practices, and identity. In the context of lifelong learning, we proposed that decolonisation would achieve four important purposes. First, it would illustrate the nexus between knowledge, power, and colonial narratives by interrogating how knowledge-making is a fundamental aspect of 'coloniality' – the process of domination and exploitation by the Capitalist/Patriarchal/ Imperial Western Metropolis over the rest of the world.

Second, decolonisation would entail challenging the hegemony of western knowledge, education, and credentials and upholding a 'multiculturalism of knowledge' that is inclusive and responsive to the cultural needs and values of transnational migrants. Third, decolonisation would lead to the need for planning and designing lifelong learning curricula as well as institutionalised pedagogy based on non-western knowledge systems and epistemic diversity. Here the envisioning of a truly transformative pedagogy for lifelong learning must be able to address the often incommensurable experiences of immigrant groups and indigenous communities who are often lumped together as an undifferentiated body of 'oppressed' communities within a liberal framework. The recognition of incommensurabilities, that is to say the fact that the presence of immigrant groups and their claims on Canadian resources such as land, add to the further dispossession of indigenous life-worlds must be central. Yet, for colonial-capitalist forms of extraction, the continuance of a conflictual relationship between indigenous and immigrant populations would only lead to the perpetuation of the white settler domination. To critically challenge such dominance, ultimately it is imperative to think of contextual collaboration and solidarities based on the mutual recognition of marginalisation and oppression by the same logic of colonial-capitalist extraction (Chatterjee, 2018; Stanley, Arat-Koc, Bertram, & King, 2014). Such solidarities do not have to be absolute, unconditional ones, but based on a responsibility to further forms of dignified life and a nurturing relationship to the cosmological life-worlds of diverse groups within a non-racist and non-patriarchal framework.

The final emphasis is on the urgency to decolonise our minds as lifelong learners, practitioners and policy-makers in order to challenge the passivity, colonisation, and marginalisation of learners both in classrooms and workplaces. By decolonisation, we are not calling for an uncritical acceptance of knowledge systems. Rather, the emphasis should be on being open-minded enough to acknowledge the value of lifelong learning systems based on 'objectively ascertained merits, rather than arbitrarily chosen distinctions of preferred and non-preferred countries, thereby shielding the accreditation systems from bureaucratic or professional interests' (Santos, 2014, p. 37). We believe lifelong learning practices need to embrace cognitive justice that asserts the diversity of knowledges and the equality of knowers (Visvanathan, 2009). After Santos (2014) we also believe that cognitive justice will never be

successful if it is based on the idea of equitable distribution of knowledge. Rather, it should be based on a 'broader context of dialogue with other knowledges' (Santos, 2014, p. 189).

Notes

1. http://www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/2118081/canada-boost-immigrationaccepting-
about-one-million.

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