

Towards a Theory of Decolonizing Citizenship

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Abstract

In this paper, we consider the (im)possibilities of thinking about a decolonizing citizenship. Specifically, we work through a theorization of citizenship and decolonial theory as a means of considering the difficulties of talking about citizenship, a concept tied to nation-statehood and European liberal tradition, amidst a larger conversation about attending to decolonizing educational praxis. In working through this, we argue that, ultimately, the two are largely incommensurate without rethinking what citizenship is taken up to mean, what its purpose is and largely what it entails including, primarily, pluriversality or the multiple conceptions of being and knowing that characterizes life in a shared context.

Key words: decolonization, citizenship, social studies, education

You are becoming part of a great tradition that was built by generations of pioneers before you. Once you have met all the legal requirements, we hope to welcome you as a new citizen with all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012, p. 3)

Belief in a more full democracy comes from the many people who have struggled to gain the right to vote, to eliminate discrimination by race or sex, to oppose the colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands, and to make Canadian laws more fair and just. (Jones & Perry, 2011, p. 43)

Complex Quandries: A Starting Point

As stated above, to become a citizen of Canada is to enter into a "great tradition," a tradition forged by explorers on lands that, to some, were considered empty. In this tradition of national belonging, a citizen enters into the general population after swearing an oath, stating that one will faithfully pledge allegiance to the British sovereign. Juxtaposing the narrowly defined idea of citizenship in the first excerpt, a second example, taken from a counter-guide to the 'official' Canadian discourse, explicitly confronts colonization and its multiple histories of discrimination enacted on these lands. The glaring distance between the two understandings of Canadian citizenship forces us to question how dominant (colonial) interpretations of citizenship, as projects of national belonging and formations of state (Alfred, 2009), are then translated into citizenship education. In our theoretical discussion we grapple with existing tensions in both citizenship and decolonization theories, to discuss what possibilities and limitations exist, to then, 'decolonize citizenship education.' We hope to offer a starting point for thinking through these quandaries, specifically when theorizing a version of citizenship education that is not colonizing at its core.

As racialized white settlers who currently occupy the traditional lands of what is often referred to as Mississauga territory², we recognize that the privileges of living on this land further

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extends into our educations, where our bodies signify belonging, our histories privileged, our success (almost) guaranteed through our very presence in the system that was built for settler colonizers, by settler colonizers. This being said, we understand that in opposing colonization, as Stirling (2015) puts it, we are "caught in political and practical conundrums as [we] attempt to engage in decolonization" (xi), which involves working through our positionalities, and shifting, tenuous subjectivities as we attempt to gain an overall sense of our roles as settlers in decolonizing citizenship. However, on this journey we are mindful of the naïve consumption of decolonizing theories in settler-occupied and controlled spaces such as education (Tuck & Yang, 2012), and do not take lightly our roles and responsibilities as settler teacher educators on this path. Before entering into a conversation about citizenship education, we recognize the need to engage the reader in a theoretical discussion; to first wrestle with divergent underpinnings of this conversation before proceeding into the realm of pedagogy. In this way, we position this paper as a starting point for a complex conversation, one that considers the theoretical and pedagogical, or as Freire (2000) might suggest, a commitment to praxis through a dialectical dance of theory and practice.

In this theoretical exploration we seek new possibilities, and troubleshoot limitations of decolonizing citizenship, not to promote a process of inclusion into Eurocentric mainstream citizenship and social studies curricula (Kanu, 2006, 2011), but to allow for more than one understanding of belonging. To account for varied ontoepistemologies (Barad, 2007) we turn to theoretical conceptions that allow for multiple ways of being and knowing through the "pluriversal" (Mignolo, 2002, 2007), which recognizes that many ontoepistemologies exist and are valuable, but have yet to be imagined in universalist (Eurocentric) education systems, and Battiste's (2013) "trans-systemic education", the opening up of current education from a narrowly defined, linear system, to one that is elastic and epistemologically responsive to its students. Through these understandings, we challenge how existing tensions surrounding diverse conceptions of nationhood and belonging collide with Eurocentric education systems. Secondly, we question how theoretical conversations surrounding citizenship and decolonization can work toward unsettling settler-education paradigms, simultaneously creating possibilities through their disruptions.

Theorizing Citizenship

To provide a conceptual basis for understanding citizenship, it is critical to detail, however briefly, the articulation of citizenship with nation(alism) and its frequent cognate, the state. We do so for two reasons. First, the terms are often mutually referential. Speaking to this, Pinson (2007) argues that the, "link between nation and state is what creates the presumed overlap between citizenship and nationality" (p. 354), an overlap that gestures towards the ways in which the two notions are reflexively related. Secondly, these terms gain particular meanings in political discourse such that they (appear to) conflate with each other, serving as referents for political and cultural belonging. Brodie (2009) speaks to this, noting that the, "nationalist social imaginary [of the type Benedict Anderson theorizes] has been so powerful that citizen identity has been routinely treated as tantamount to national identity" (p. 690). Indeed, we can see this in the ways that we talk about national belonging – to belong to a nation is to be a citizen, not a national.³ For our purposes, as teacher educators in Ontario, this conceptual linkage takes on a specific pedagogical importance for citizenship, as defined in the Ontario Social Studies curriculum for elementary grades, which is situated within a frame emphasizing knowledge of democracy, rules and law, national identity and political institutions, all of which owe their dominant meanings to a nationalizing discourse (Ministry

² Haig-Brown (2009) notes that various groups have occupied the space now known as Toronto.

³ While the term national can be and is used, it certainly is not used to the same extent that citizen is.

of Education, 2013). Consequently, we feel as though it is necessary to define each state and nation for conceptual reasons.

For our purposes, we conceptualize ‘states,’ borrowing from Althusser (1971), as the institutions, both repressive and ideological, that regulate action and belief in support of dominant interests. Together, the repressive and ideological apparatus serves as a system ensuring the interests of dominant groups are secured by organizing rules, social function and political and cultural discourse. States, according to Gellner (2006), are the necessary but not sufficient precursor to the nation, which he himself defines as necessarily following from nationalism, the production and teaching of a shared culture. These nations are themselves imagined, limited by finite bounds, sovereign and communal in their “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 2006, p. 7). Consequently, states are the powerful apparatuses through which a seemingly necessary shared culture is produced, giving rise to feelings of nation-ness. Within these contexts, the concept of citizenship gains political and social currency as the means of identifying one’s relationship with particular conceptions of nation-statehood and a shared culture. Nation-states, with their discursive control over the imaginings of the national bounds, create categories of citizenry – one occupies positions within, beyond, or at the liminal spaces of nationalism through their positioning as particular types of citizens.

On the face of it, such conceptualization of social/political organization does not seem necessarily colonizing. Historically though, these concepts are problematic for two reasons. First, these concepts inescapably (but do not always) owe their articulation and enactment to the modernist epistemologies and histories of “Western tradition.” Nations (Gellner, 2006; Hirschi, 2012), states (Knuttila & Kubik, 2000) and citizen(ship) (Bellamy, 2008; Pocock, 1995) have histories indelibly connected to imperial and philosophical traditions rooted in modernist Europe. In this sense, the ways in which these concepts are often used owe their epistemological backing to a legacy of European thinking.

Second, and following from this, conceptions of nation, state and citizenship were historically and continue to be laid over the lands, philosophies and bodies of those who exist(ed) in opposition to it. European hegemony in what is now Canada act(s/ed) to shape and frame notions of belonging and being according to foreign notions of cultural, political and social configuration. As an example of this, we turn to a foundational aspect of life: the relationship one has to the natural context. Citizenship, as it gets taken up in relation to Western epistemologies, is, as Tuhiwai Smith (2012) reminds us, in large part predicated on the human/nature dualism, “seen to be in opposition to each other” (p. 48). Dualism is a crucial aspect of citizenship – the citizen, often positioned as an individual actor, has obligations, responsibilities and rights in relation to the natural context upon which she lives and acts. The Ontario Social Studies curriculum emphasizes this clearly as citizenship is taken up as an exploration of personal rights and responsibilities different from societal ones (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 10). Indeed, the concept of national identity presented is conflated with “personal identity.” This dichotomization of human and nature can be juxtaposed with Indigenous philosophies more broadly which, in Canada, stem from more ecologically grounded epistemologies that invoke intrinsic connectedness between nature and the human body (Donald, 2012; Turner, Ignace & Ignace, 2000). In talking about the importance of developing ethical relationality, “an ecological understanding of human relationality”, Donald (2012) notes that, “humans are seen as intimately enmeshed in webs of relationships with each other and with the other entities that inhabit the world” (p. 103). This exists in stark contrast and signals an epistemological and ontological incongruity; Indigenous philosophies of being emphasizing connectedness, Western epistemologies privileging the rationality of human/nature separation and the supremacy of individuality. The consequences of epistemological and ontological differences such as these is the positioning of (particular) individuals as the citizen, not citizenship as a collective

obligation to each other and the natural context upon which we live. Even moments of possible recognition of the “enmeshed webs” in the form of stewardship gets represented as individualistic; in defining stewardship as “the concept that people’s decisions, choices, and actions can have a positive impact, supporting a healthy environment that is essential for all life” (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 211), the Ontario Social Studies curriculum positions stewardship as a personally defined obligation.

What is difficult here is overcoming the “individual as national actor” conception of citizenship, something that has persisted for centuries. As Nicolet (1988) argues for example, citizenship, “was an elegant way of bringing them [people in the outlying regions of the empire, far from central control] closer to the seat of power” (p. 20) in an ever-expanding Roman Empire and indeed, this still operates today in “imagining” (Anderson, 2006) a collective conception of citizenship across huge spatial bounds in nation-states such as Canada. In this regard, citizenship is about making disconnectedness manageable and even today, citizenship is about ensuring that individuals stay and work together. What we need, we argue, is a conception of citizenship that better attends to the ways that we are “intimately enmeshed” and have a genuine and not exclusively imagined connectedness with others and the world, or, a theorization of citizenship that bridges the divide between people and the ecology upon which we live and learn. What thus needs to be overcome is the practicing of, “an unethical form of relationality with Aboriginal peoples directed towards benevolent incorporation within Canadian nationality and citizenship” (Donald, 2012, pp. 106-107, original emphasis).

It is important to note that citizenship, taken up in more recent literature, diverges from political conceptions of the term to more active or engaged articulations that speak more to the necessary engagements that we each have as citizens (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Ponder & Lewis-Ferrell, 2009). This form of citizenship would appear to be more congruent with forms of ethical engagement and attentiveness to the environmental and relational context in which we all live. In other words, this shift would appear to be more welcoming of Indigenous approaches to conceiving of relations between subjects. Indeed, as Reich (2005) argues, there are multiple ways for people to be engaged and we would be remiss to exclude differing ways of doing so, including those that are often ignored or precluded in a settler colonial political context. In part, this requires conceptualizing engaged and active citizenship as a process that can, and ought to be, inclusive of differing politics, including those intrinsic to decolonizing educational work that are otherwise absent from settler politics. Given that settler colonialism, “is inevitably premised on the possibility of controlling and dominating indigenous peoples” (Veracini, 2013, p. 314), an engaged and ethical response is necessary as a means of attending to exclusions. What is crucial here is the ethical dimension, one which requires, “a commitment to social change through being in relation to one another rather than working towards social change on behalf of the ‘other’” (Tupper, 2012, pp. 152-153).

However much space might be possible within a citizenship that is engaged and ethically active, the question that remains is the positioning of Western epistemologies in this conceptualization, or, how Western thought still acts as the conceptual frame through which citizenship is made possible. As Weenie (2008) argues with reference to curriculum, an argument that holds for theorizations of citizenship, “it is important to address the way we view curriculum and to acknowledge our vantage points, in terms of the biases and assumptions, and the interpretive lens we bring into curriculum” (p. 550). Our biases, vantage points, and assumptions never cease to hold power over our respective imaginaries, so the question becomes what we choose to do with these if we truly want to be actively engaged with each other. This remains a crucial avenue for critical engagement in citizenship theorization.

Theorizing Decolonization

Similar to the difficulty in choosing a definition of 'citizenship' to guide our broader exploration of possibilities to decolonizing citizenship education, finding one understanding of 'decolonization' is also problematic, as there are plural lineages and points of demarcation, in Battiste's (2013) words, "multiple theories, strategies and struggles" (p. 107). To paraphrase Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2011), decolonial theorizing and resistance has existed since the colonization of Africa and the Americas, and has expanded in social sciences and humanities, crossing disciplinary and geographic boundaries in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁴ This literature includes writing from academic disciplines in Western liberal traditions such as philosophy, political science, economics, sociology, and psychology, among others, while traversing geo-political borders and histories. Because of its vast lineages, it is difficult to narrowly defend/define one usage of decolonization to discuss citizenship education, as each iteration has arisen out of a specific historical, political, social, and geographic context, where resistances to modernity, power, and ontoepistemological colonialism have manifested in multiple forms (see also Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2011, 2012; Quijano, 2007). An attempt to define decolonization therefore must encapsulate the dynamic and ever-evolving work being done in multiple forms, including fields of epistemology, ontology, and spirituality/cosmology.

Borrowing from Stirling (2015), then, we choose to define decolonization as having the ability to exist in multiple fields, as "...a state of being, an analytical tool, a body of theory, a process of recovery, a system of praxis, and the expression of activism" (p. 80). In other words, decolonization can span politics, theory, and methodology, but its roots lay in resistances to colonialism and colonization in all its past and present forms. Through myriad theoretical conceptualizations and plural activist/political goals, the work of decolonization varies greatly in its manifestations, which creates a field of knowledge (not unlike many others), which are fraught with tensions, divisions, and possible directions. Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, and Hunt (2015) also contend with this theoretical conundrum, arguing that, "decolonization has multiple meanings, and the desires and investments that animate it are diverse, contested, and at times, at odds with one another. Yet... there is an understandable impulse to suppress these contradictions and conflicts in order to collapse decolonization into coherent, normative formulas" (p. 22).

With this being said, it is not our intention to organize theories into neat categories or hierarchies; instead, our aim as social studies settler-educators is to deeply explore one particular way of imagining decolonization in a possible relationship to an understanding of citizenship as an ecological, enmeshed, "shared fate" (Williams, 2004). This task is fraught with ethical and moral implications, and as Upper Canada and Peace and Friendship treaty peoples,⁵ it is imperative to enter into conversations of collective responsibility by understanding the systemic violence connected to the settler colonial histories. As racialized white, cis-gendered, settler-teacher educators, we are aware that our positions in mainstream Canadian institutions of higher education necessitate a continuous

⁴ For an in-depth genealogy of decolonial theory, see Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2011).

⁵ Smith is a settler from unceded Mississauga territory, and Rogers is a settler from unceded Mi'kmaq territory, currently residing in Ontario. Both authors are cognizant of the imbrication of whiteness and colonialism in Canada (Razack, 2011). Like Razack (2011), in poignantly highlight the overwhelming whiteness of the contributing authors to the book *Rethinking The Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada*, we recognize that, "the relationship between academic knowledge production and white supremacy is an intimate and long-standing one, and an intense vigilance is warranted" (p. 271). In light of this, Razack cautions us, and draws our attention to the necessary, "work to challenge the conditions that have made us once again the knowers" (p. 271). In this piece, we recognize that we are positioned as "knowers" of particular theory but do so in recognition of the fact that our "knowerness" is limited and partial.

dual investigation of our individual subjectivities and privileges within an ontoepistemological Eurocentric paradigm, and a commitment to continuously engage in the decolonial deconstruction of such educational spaces. Although it is not possible to adequately summarize the diversity and depth in decolonial and decolonizing theories fully in this space, it is important to account (however briefly) for multiple, global variations in decolonial theories that are continually circulating, expanding, and evolving. The remaining discussion in this section sheds light on our choice to ground our decolonizing discussion in literature from the places we now call Canada and the United States, which in itself are rife with queries and resistances that are indeed, "at odds with one another," as Andreotti et al. (2015) have noted.

Decolonization in Education: a Dangerous Domestication?

There has been an influx of decolonization theory and theorizing in educational disciplines, with calls to decolonize schools, students' minds, teaching methods, thinking, educational curricula, and structures (Battiste, 1998, 2013; Donald, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012), which is taken up in teacher education programs (Orr, Paul & Paul, 2002; Tompkins, 2002), social studies (Merryfield & Subedi, 2006; Rogers, 2014; Smith, 2014), and science education (Aikenhead, 2006), to name but a few avenues. On the surface, decolonization (in its many forms) being brought into education systems through schools, curricula, and teacher education in Canada gives the impression that progress is not only being made, but the potential to change school environments into places of (un/re)learning is starting to take root. Looking beyond the surface of decolonization's expansion into educational contexts, one could also question in which ways these ideas/theories/practices are being brought into education systems, by whom, and for what means or ends? What is important to consider is the ways in which decolonization is understood and defined in its operationalizations into concrete actions in schooling.

Drawing from Tuck and Yang (2012), these questions are essential when considering the use of decolonization in broader educational theorizing for creating change in schools, which the authors consider to be a task that is incommensurable with their understandings of decolonization. Tuck and Yang strongly critique the recent proliferation of decolonization into education, which they consider to be "dangerous in how it domesticates decolonization...when metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it resettles whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler" (p. 3). As a process that "unsettles everyone" (p. 7), this definition of decolonization includes a literal repatriation of lands, which poses a greater need to rethink its use in educational contexts. Given that residential schooling was used as a mechanism to forcibly assimilate Aboriginal peoples' minds and souls by epistemologically and ontologically becoming the "preferred" (i.e. white, European) Canadian citizen, Tuck and Yang raise significant concerns, including the deep ethical conundrum of using a colonial system as colonialism's remedy. The question remains, in what ways can decolonization exist in education that does not simply alleviate settler complicity in colonization, what Tuck and Yang call "settler moves to innocence" (p. 10), to erase, diminish, or 'domesticate' various perspectives on decolonization work? In light of Tuck and Yang's argument that decolonization implies an "ethic of incommensurability" (p. 28), can such a deep ethical distance be bridged in education, in which ways, and by whom?

A Possible Solution: Decolonization as Commitment to Deconstruction

Battiste's (2013) work on decolonizing education in Canada offers an alternate understanding, one as working with and through ongoing deconstructions:

[A] process of unpacking the keeper in education: its powerful Eurocentric assumptions of education, its narratives of race and difference in curriculum and pedagogy...and the advocacy for Indigenous knowledge as a legitimate education topic. It is the channel for generating a postcolonial education system in Canada. (p. 107)

As a model for current teachers and teacher educators, Battiste's (2013) conceptualization offers possibilities for everyday ethical decision-making practices and pedagogies to (de)center power, citizenship, and race, requiring each person in this struggle to reflect on who they are and what their commitment is to "trans-systemic" education. By trans-systemic education, Battiste (2013) refers to a system where multiple epistemologies are legitimized, and in a possible re-envisioning of schools and classrooms to align with these pedagogical principles, it would entail those who are the 'keepers' in education, including teachers, administrators, curriculum developers, and teacher educators (the vast majority of whom are racialized white, middle-class) to receive ongoing education in areas of decolonization and histories of colonialism in Canada. While we continue to heed Tuck and Yang's words, that decolonization cannot be a move to re-centre whiteness or diminish settler culpability, Battiste's (2013) focus on pluralizing the monolithic educational structures in Canada through "engaging hearts and minds" (p. 168), speaks to us as educators who care deeply about schooling and believe in its potential for transformation.

Returning to our initial task, considering whether decolonizing citizenship is possible in education, we use Battiste's definition and principles to enter into a discussion of citizenship education that takes into consideration our aforementioned ethical dilemmas, nuances/complexities of theory, while offering possibilities for its future uses. In Williams' (2004) paper, "Sharing the River" she conceptualizes citizenship as a 'shared fate', opposed to a normalized 'shared identity.' This understanding of citizenship is rooted in the ecological, and the idea that we collectively belong to, and are responsible for, geographies we inhabit, including the land *and* each other. In the final section, we delve into the possibilities of citizenship as 'shared fate' to consider a potential theorization and way to imagine decolonizing citizenship.

Decolonizing Citizenship: (Im)possible Futures or Shared Fates?

Thus far, we have theorized citizenship and decolonization, hinting at potential linkages while leaving them implicit. The connection, however, needs to be made explicit given the incommensurable existence of these two ways of understanding, being, knowing, and acting. To decolonize is to excise from consciousness conceptions of belonging that are informed by allegiances to European constructs of liberalism and nationhood. Yet, this is difficult - how does one remove themselves from that which is so entrenched in everyday assumptions? In part, this requires attendance, observing our own understandings of the world and recognizing that, even in using the term "citizenship," we reproduce a language of belonging that defers to languages of being that are imposed, not negotiated. In this way, pluri-versal understandings are ignored, while the uni-versal is upheld. This re-centres dominant (Eurocentric) frames of knowing, being, and belonging, simultaneously casting aside and delegitimizing multiple systems of knowledge (Mignolo, 2002). Like Battiste's (2013) trans-systemic education, pluriversalism is the recognition that multiple systems of knowledge and being in the world can co-exist inside one framework. To recognize our shared fate, then, we need to recognize and engage in a critical dialectic with nationalist or state driven theories of national belonging and nationhood that bring about certain understandings of place, progress, and ultimately, modernity-soaked imaginaries of who lives here, who "we" are. The inseparability and seemingly natural suturing of nation/state/citizen(ship) positions "we-ness" as a national "we" (Smith, 2015), consequently creates conditions for an exclusionary citizenship, one that privileges

identities and ontoepistemologies of individual rights-based membership, instead of a collective, shared responsibility to each other.

We intentionally framed this section as a question for a specific reason: decolonizing citizenship and its political, social and legal legacies requires critically engaging a hegemonic discourse, one that is imposed historically, legally and cognitively (Battiste, 1984). Acknowledging pluriversality, in itself, will not undo colonialism but it does open a conversation about a shared history, politic, life, and a shared becoming which embraces multiple ways of thinking, knowing, and being. Cognitive imperialism, the (attempted) imperial domination of Indigenous minds (Battiste, 1984, 2013), and curricula of dominance (Rogers, 2011; Smith, Ng-A-Fook, Berry & Spence, 2011) which shapes normative conceptions of belonging, needs to be thoroughly dismantled and made open to multiple ways of recognizing interconnectedness. It is important to note here that in its many iterations, there is no space for decolonization in systems that seek to preserve entrenched and normative notions of citizenship. Indeed, this is reflected in decolonial resistances that contemplate notions of citizenship in relation to Canadian belonging. As Taiaiake Alfred (2009) argues,

[T]here is no agreement on the meaning of the term citizen among First Nations today; some use it as a marker of their Canadian citizenship as Aboriginal people inside of Canada, others use it to solidify the notion of their own autonomous and sovereign nationhood, and still others use it as the frame of reference for their syncretism and positing of a dual identity that validates both Indigenous nationhood and that of Canada. (p. 12)

Although this certainly complicates our discussion by introducing the idea that some may not wish to be included within a narrowly-defined citizenry, it does point to the ways in which some may feel a desire to assert relationships with others outside of the purview of citizenship. What this also signals are lingering questions about the citizenship/decolonization articulation: what obligations do citizenship educators have in attending to the tensions and varying conceptions that exist? What awareness is required in versions of citizenship that remain hostile or exclusionary given its historical and ongoing influence on conceptions of belonging? Should citizenship even be a part of the vocabulary used in a decolonizing context? How can we practice decolonial deconstructions when citizenship remains a taken for granted way of understanding being and belonging?

Conclusion

What we have presented are our nascent thoughts on theorizing a citizenship in conjunction with possible considerations of decolonization. Sketched here are seeds of potentialities and limits of citizenship that attend to the concerns of decolonization, and the difficulties with doing so. Indeed, if we attempt to decolonize education, we have to decolonize citizenship, not simply because it is part of the educational enterprise, but it is a means of understanding relationships between people as agentive actors with different histories and conceptions of collective belonging. This in turn necessitates a shift in our understandings of civic relationships; if we are to commit to a vision of decolonization, we will need to reconceptualize our collectivity not as sharing a unified, national identity, but as having a shared fate (Williams, 2004), to which we are part of. In part, this will require a reconsideration of the ways in which we think about, and engage with, each other. In this regard, citizenship education must acknowledge the responsibilities we have to each other, and our relationship with the contexts upon which human relationships are made/remade/reformulated. This is not just ecological, as it also requires affective and spiritual engagements. In another sense, it requires active and on-going commitments to people and the places where everyone exists; as Donald (2012) reminds us, “we live in the world together with others and must constantly think and act with reference to these relationships” (p. 536). These commitments must attend to geographies,

histories, and politics not as separate domains but as interrelated spaces of dialogue, resistance, and subjective (re)formation. In other words, how does where we live, when we live, and how we live intersect, and what kinds of obligations does this give rise to as citizens? In this way, our ethical relations with others as an act of citizenship, “requires attentiveness to the responsibilities that come with a declaration of being in relation” (Donald, 2012, p. 103) not only with people, but to complex, historical relationships, including those which we do not or cannot experience.

Whether or not a decolonizing citizenship is possible is difficult to determine. As benefactors of colonialism’s structuring of life, particularly Eurocentric framings of education, we are epistemologically and ontologically limited by the structures and technologies of learning we have been imbued by, since what we know has been thoroughly mechanized through colonialism. Paralleling this, our worlds, and those of many students in Canada, were shaped under the auspices of a putatively apolitical conception of citizenship, one textured by perceptions of European benevolence and pioneering-fortitude that made citizenship a “right,” both as something earned and as something morally and ethically sound. What citizenship needs then is a decolonizing reformation, one that deconstructs the basis of political relationality and serves to disrupt who “we” are not as citizens but as beings in relation to each other.

However much citizenship is implicated in discourses of colonization, it is possible to conceptualize a theory of citizenship that recognizes the ways in which individuals have attended to the shared experiences and histories of others. As Maldonado-Torres (2007) suggests, to truly decolonize, we need to see each other as equal beings, not existing in a hierarchical relation of dominance. In this regard, we invoke the idea of citizenship as shared fate and shared belonging, the notion that we need to be, “bound up in relationships of interdependence with others” and that we are obliged, “to engage one another from time to time in order to address and find acceptable solutions for the challenges facing fellow citizens” (Merry, 2013, p. 86). Even here, however, one cannot escape the seemingly unbreachable articulation of citizenship with nation. Speaking to the idea of citizenship as shared fate, Ben-Porath (2012) notes that national membership is also conceived of as shared fate and consequently, notes that, “shared fate citizenship recognizes that reciprocity is at the heart of citizenship in a democracy” (p. 383). While the intention of such a theorization of citizenship is to recognize the inherent social and complex entanglement amongst those in a citizenry (Williams, 2004), it would appear that it is unable to escape the discursive and linguistic legacy that positions it as a cognate to nation-states and its consequent included/excluded division. While this may be the case, we think that the principle of recognizing that each of us has a shared fate is valuable. As Ben-Porath (2012) argues, what is important here is a, “citizenship education that acknowledges and promotes visions of shared histories, struggles, institutions, languages, and value commitments” (p. 385). Given the shared histories and relationships with institutions (albeit in vastly different capacities), there is the potential to think of citizenship as a shared fate but this is an understanding that cannot be approached lightly.

In this discussion, we explored the tensions that exist when juxtaposing theories of citizenship and decolonization, ways of knowing/being/acting that we argue are largely incommensurate but, with some consideration of pluriversal, trans-systemic education can be bridged. Only when we come to recognize that existence as humans (or citizens) necessitates acknowledgement of non-Eurocentric conceptions of relationality, knowing, and being as legitimized understandings of the world, can we truly think through and live in meaningful relation to each other. Yet, much of what we see and know of citizenship is divorced from pluriversal ways of being, separated from ways of knowing that consider the complex web of relationships that we are intimately enmeshed within. In other words, the shared fate of all groups is largely absent from universalized pedagogical uptakes of citizenship, and deeply embedded in everyday understandings

of Canadian-ness as seen in our opening excerpt - something we explore in depth in a subsequent piece.

As noted in the introduction, this is the first part of a two-part project, one that seeks to (a) theorize the possibilities/limits of a decolonizing citizenship and (b) consider the applicability of these ideas in pedagogical and curricular contexts. While the latter was touched on in this paper, a forthcoming piece explores the pedagogical connections in more depth, engaging the possibilities and limits of thinking about a decolonizing citizenship in a settler colonial pedagogical context.

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