

# Signing Up for Multiple Truths (Re)telling Who we are as Racialized Canadians and Indigenous Peoples in Relation to Each Other

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Volume 14, numéro 2, 2023

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1099896ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v14i2.186690>

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Éditeur(s)

Institute for Critical Education Studies / UBC

ISSN

1920-4175 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Khan, M. & Pushor, D. (2023). Signing Up for Multiple Truths: (Re)telling Who we are as Racialized Canadians and Indigenous Peoples in Relation to Each Other. *Critical Education*, 14(2), 65–85. <https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v14i2.186690>

Résumé de l'article

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# Critical Education

Volume 14 Number 2

May 1, 2023

ISSN 1920-4175

## *Signing Up for Multiple Truths*

### *(Re)Telling who we are as Racialized Canadians and Indigenous Peoples in relation to each other*

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Citation: Khan, M., & Pushor, D. (2023). Signing up for multiple truths: (Re)Telling who we are as Racialized Canadians and Indigenous Peoples in relation to each other . *Critical Education*, 14(2), 65-85. <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/criticaled/article/view/186406>

#### **Abstract**

*By using autobiographical narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and poetry (Leggo, 1998), we share the story of a Muslim Canadian female graduate student, as experienced by the student and her graduate supervisor. We unpack an email expressing concern, written by an Indigenous male student about the work of the Muslim female student to her supervisor, during their Master's coursework. We work through layers of mis/understandings and a shared desire to stand together in a relationship connecting our unique beings. Our intent is to emphasize the importance of magnifying our human existence and universal dignity beyond binaries by making more space for one another, by listening harder and longer, by learning with open and vulnerable hearts, and by considering what work each of us can do, individually and collectively, to decrease the foreignness, first among ourselves and then among racialized, Indigenous, and white settler Canadians.*



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*We are transformed, individually, collectively,  
as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our  
subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our  
sense of the world. (hooks, 2015, p.153)*

I honour the Earth upon which I dwell, I honour the Land on which I stand, I honour those who stood before me, and I honour those who will stand after me. I honour the Indigenous Peoples to whom this Land belongs, and I honour all Canadians who belong to this Land. As a racialized woman, Brown settler, and Canadian citizen<sup>1</sup>, I take responsibility for being a settler of colour on stolen Lands. I acknowledge that I am exercising a Treaty right simply by living where I do, and I appreciate that my ongoing privileges are directly connected to Treaties. I affirm that I not only stand in relation to White people in Canada, but also in relation to Indigenous peoples and their Lands (Cannon, 2012; Epp, 2008; Haig Brown, 2009; St. Denis, 2011; Tupper, 2012).

I am engaged in learning to deconstruct my ignorance from my positioning as a Muslim Canadian woman in relation to non-White settlers' realities and my implication in the historical and ongoing colonizing process (Lee, 2016). By marking my own subjectivity, and framing my positionality relative to the uninterrupted project of settler colonialism, I am rethinking and decentering my naivety about the Indigeneity of the place, people, and Land upon whose sufferings, silence, excruciating pain, and pathos of agonized separation, the official and political story of Canadian immigration was born and is breathing and living (Cannon, 2012; St. Denis, 2011). I am directly and indirectly benefitting from the occupation, erasure, and assimilation of Indigenous people and their Land.

I am engaged in unlearning that decolonization is a distinct project from other civil and human rights-based social justice approaches and projects. I am deconstructing my understanding of the term decolonization, realizing that it is not an exchangeable term because when swapped with social justice and other human rights approaches, it becomes a form of settler appropriation. I am reconstructing my understanding that decolonization is not a metaphor because when metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters Whiteness, it decenters Land, it resettles theory, it diminishes praxis, it extends innocence to the settler, it creates victims and then pits victims against each other. In all of this, it entertains a settler future.

I am engaged in relearning that decolonization is the unsettling work of accepting myself as dispossessed, a colonial subject, a political identity, a market-based commodity, an immigrant, and a Brown settler brought through colonial project by White people onto seized Indigenous Land (Tuck and Yang, 2012). I am sitting with Brown settler guilt seized by pain and shock while carrying the burden of being an enabler of unconscious injustices as I live through my own oppression. The guilt is deep, and the pain is enough to teach me to explore the relationship between guilt, responsibility, and action.

To situate my knowing and guide my activism, I draw on the non-competitive worldview of co-reliance and cooperation which ground all Indigenous relations—that all beings are intertwined and interdependent as a collective existence; that the spiritual and material world

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<sup>1</sup> To distinguish our voices as authors, given our significantly different positioning as Canadian citizens, we have used two font styles. Momina's voice is represented in Times New Roman font. Debbie's voice appears in Arial Nova font.

coexist, and all beings have a moral obligation and shared responsibility and accountability to present, past, and future generations (Amadahy & Lawrence, 2009).

*plural I  
 an immigrant  
 come from a colonized land  
 Pakistan  
 now live on a stolen Land  
 Canada  
 a colonial diasporic  
 Muslim, Pakistani, Canadian  
 body being positioning belonging  
 woman, racialized, brown, hovering in-between  
 a settler Ally*

In this paper, we work through layers of mis/understandings and a shared desire to stand together in a relationship connecting our unique beings. Our intent is to emphasize the importance of magnifying our human existence and universal dignity beyond binaries of insider/outsider/us/them/foreign/ alien/ stranger/belonging/ by making more space for one another through unsettling yet sincere attempts to transcend our differences.

### **The Truth Hurts but Victimization Haunts**

Universities do not stand outside of the structures and ideologies innocent of the dynamics of oppression but instead are institutions or “apparatuses” that transmit “ruling ideologies” (Althusser, 1971), maintain “hegemony” (Gramsci, 1971), and reproduce the existing social order (Kumashiro, 2000). Canadian universities are founded on imperialism and the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples and Lands, as well as on the exploitation of racialized identities through the process of legitimizing and maintaining social structures and competing ideologies (Abawi, 2018; Kumashiro; 2000; Smith 2002). Although academe affirms diversity and claims fairness, equity, equality, and justice, the voices of racialized female students still remain in the shadows — silenced, censored and erased, “into the dominant paradigmatic plotlines” (Clandinin, Caine, Estefan, Huber, Murphy, & Steeves, 2015, p. 25).

Since many White settlers fail to critically accept and address that their country was founded through frauds, deception, abuses, and violence perpetuated against the Indigenous peoples and their Lands, and do not easily consider and transform their own investment in and relationship with historical and ongoing colonialism, the diasporic peoples are left hanging in a service position as commodified labour meeting the needs of only Whites. Diasporic Canadian women are systematically, strategically, and structurally buried under racial and religious stereotypes, Euro-centric cultural hegemony, White supremacy, sexism, and gender discrimination. Therefore, with their exhausted eyes, colonized bodies, and worn-out spirits, they see colonialism from a racial/religious injustice lens and exclusively as an Indigenous struggle (Cannon, 2012; hooks, 1988). The active agency of women and their capacity to stimulate social change has been severely neglected in academic studies, theory, research and praxis. Instead, it has been replaced with a narrative of victimization and suppression.

Amid a troubled history, ongoing segregation and dislocations, and unresolved issues of colonialism and its repercussions, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and non-White communities remains highly susceptible to unpleasant competition for power, privilege, and resources. In the context of decolonization, the necessary spaces of contact between Indigenous and non-White settlers, who are implicated in each other's lives and histories, have been, and continue to be, marginalized. It can be seen that denying spaces of connection and critical conversations between marginalized and Indigenous groups is a White settler move stemming from fears that any collaboration outside of their direct surveillance and involvement might be a threat to White power and privilege (Lee, 2016).

Using autobiographical narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and poetry (Leggo, 1998), I attempt to “stay attentive to experience with no clear outcome beyond a deeper understanding of experience” (Clandinin, et al, 2015, p. 24) in order to “see hope for personal, social, cultural, and institutional change” (p. 25). With narrative inquiry, I aim to “sign up many truths/narratives” (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001, p. 112), rather than determining one generalizable truth. I share my own story, the truth of my knowing, to construct pathways and possibilities for re-imagining and deconstructing the binary opposition of us and them, of belonging and not belonging, of oppressed voice, and repressed positioning. Through shaping together, the radical and graced spaces of connection, conversations, and critical dialogue will emerge powerful voices, words, wisdom, and stories from which we can build possible democratic and non-colonized futures and platforms for mobilization, reconciliation, and compassion (Lee, 2016).

*my being and becoming*  
*always in flux*  
*the quality of equality*  
*controversial and provocative*  
*recreating radically*  
*graced spaces*  
*new beginning in*  
*ethical practices*  
*moral performances*  
*deep breathing in outer space*  
*seeking to live well*  
*with myself(ves) & others*

My voice from silence to un-silence, from censored to situated, from hypothetical to academic, from critical to creative and, finally, from a voice in the limelight to a voice in the shadows offers insight on how to respectfully dismantle the various barriers to settler-of-colour and Indigenous relationships by having brave decolonial conversations. As a Pakistani Muslim Canadian woman, Brown settler, and first-generation immigrant, I seek to disrupt the monolithic perceptions about Muslim women through sharing my personal narrative. In this paper, I share my story of an email that was written about me to my master's/doctoral supervisor by a male Indigenous colleague in one of my master's courses in the Faculty of Education.

### My Telling of Who I Am in Relation to Graduate Students

As a professor and graduate supervisor, I have the privilege of forming close and unique relationships with each of the graduate students whom I accompany. With each student, a particular rhythm and connection is formed over the long period of time in which we travel a shared journey. Given the intensity of the working relationship and the personal nature of this one-to-one mentorship, we develop a strong bond. We come to know, and know about, each other's families; we meet and work at each other's homes as well as on campus; we share food, tea, coffee; we text, we email, we call; we exchange cards and gifts; we laugh, we cry, we hug, we share our stories and dreams. Ultimately, we become friends, colleagues, sisters, relatives in some form ... family in the way in which we care about one another. Each student holds a very particular and precious place in my life – and in my heart.

Just as I form a deep and significant relationship with each of the students I mentor, I also hope to promote a relationship between and among the students as well. I try to nurture a web of relationships, a connection that goes beyond me, that even becomes independent of me, that forms for each of them a wider circle of support. To this end, when Momina created a video arising out of her doctoral research on critical issues of racialized identity and entered her video in the University's *Images of Research* competition, I shared that news by email with other students with whom I also was working closely. I invited them to log in and view Momina's video and to lend their support to her through their response.

The emails I received from others were warm, celebratory, and encouraging of the powerful, creative, and courageous work Momina was undertaking. Momina a Canadian Pakistani Muslim woman, doing doctoral work in English, her third language, was admired and esteemed in our graduate community for her intelligent and articulate thinking, for the stories she told which invited us to become "world travellers" (Lugones, 1987) in our thoughts and perspectives, and for posing questions that we sometimes did not even realize needed asking, until she asked them. Honestly, though, one email surprised me. It caught me off guard. It was written by a male Indigenous student, whom I will refer to as Terrance. As you read Terrance's email, below, it is important for you to know that the title of Momina's doctoral dissertation is, *O Canada, Whose Home and Native Land?*<sup>2</sup>, a play on the lyrics of Canada's national anthem.

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<sup>2</sup>Khan's dissertation (2018), "*O Canada, Whose Home and Native Land? An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry into the Critical Role of Curriculum in Identity Affirmation*" received "2019 AERA Narrative Research Special Interest Group Outstanding Dissertation Award" (American Educational Research Association) and "2019 University of Saskatchewan Graduate Thesis Award" (Doctoral), College of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies.

*Terrance's<sup>3</sup> Email*

*Dear Debbie,*

*I took a moment to view Momina's video and was reminded of her words in your class some three years ago. It was about that long ago; I cannot recall the exact date.*

*I did not want to address Momina's concern in your class but could tell from her video that her concern has not abated. I really wanted to respond to her in class but knew that it would have likely caused a pretty high degree of discomfort for the rest of our class. I did not want to do that in your class, Debbie, as my esteem for you is high and I consider myself very fortunate to have you as my instructor.*

*A number of years ago I had a friend from Indonesia who told me that if he returned home that his Father could order one of his brothers to kill him as he had forsaken the Islamic faith. I thought he was joking or just angry but, after he returned home and ceased writing to me, I suspected he had been killed. I cannot confirm that, but it was one of my first experiences with a Muslim who decided to exercise his conscience in opposition to his family's religion.*

*When Momina spoke in class some three years ago, I simply wanted to say one thing. In Canada, we have freedom of speech and conscience and in Islamic countries, there are no such laws. For those two simple reasons, you will continue to feel discomfort within Canada. What I find so ironic is that when I asked Momina why she came to Canada, she, like every other Muslim I have spoken to, declared that she likes the freedom. What I find so ironic is why Muslims seek to bring Shariah when they enjoy Western freedoms so much. When Momina used the word "Native" in connection to what she perceives to be a violation of her laws, conscience, or values when she has moved here, I got pretty upset. I do not appreciate her use of a term held by my people to challenge a long held custom of our First Nations (council) and also our federal government's House of Commons (open and free speech and debate). For this reason, I did not and will not vote to support her work.*

*Debbie, if you believe that I am in any way misunderstanding Momina, I will gladly hear it from you. I am, however, concerned that one of the biggest challenges to our way of life is a religion which has a long historical patterns of oppression. We (FN) have been through it once already and I fear that most in Canada feel that it won't happen again. I don't think I need to speak to you about my family's treatment by the governments of this land. Amongst my Father's way there is a saying which goes like this, "It is hard to see, but can you see the end of the root, or the seed". It basically calls the learner to strongly consider the origins of something. If you can actually see that then you can really know what that thing is like.*

*Sincerely,  
Terrance (2017)*

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<sup>3</sup> Terrance is a pseudonym used to maintain anonymity. We are including Terrance's email in this paper with his informed consent.

To me, the content of the email signalled the possibility of an educative moment – for Terrance, for Momina, for me. Did Terrance know Momina’s story, the challenges and sacrifices of immigration, of integration, of raising “hyphenated-Canadian” children at the intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion amid ongoing institutional and systemic discrimination, power, privilege, and various forms of subtle and blatant oppression”? (Khan & Cottrell, 2017, p. 16)? Did Momina know the derogatory ways in which the word “Native” has been used in Canadian society and Terrance’s, and Terrance’s family’s, story of oppression? Did I give enough space in my courses for either story to be heard to the depth that it required? Did I inadvertently create a culture in class where disagreement would be seen to be disrespectful? Terrance’s email evoked in me a sense of responsibility, in the way in which Noddings (2009) defines it; a call to be response-able to those in my care. I had many questions that I wanted to ask and explore with Terrance and Momina. I hoped for dialogue, for the three of us to be listeners and learners, teachers and leaders, alongside one another. I hoped for the three of us to come together over tea at a round table to share our personal stories of experience, and to explore our positioning as ‘Canadians’ in relation to one another – an Indigenous male rooted in/to/on the land, a racialized female Canadian citizen, and a white female settler. I sought Terrance’s permission to share his email with Momina.

*Dear Debbie,*

*Thank you for sharing Terrance’s email and your initiative to seek understandings.*

*I have been thinking hard/deep about his comments and assumptions. It looks like he has some serious misconceptions not only about my viewpoint as a Canadian, but also about my faith, and he has been harboring them for quite a while.*

*At this point, specifically in terms of his concern about my video and the use of the word*

*“Native,” instead of him getting upset with my use of the word “Native,” he needs to challenge the government’s policies and our national anthem. I also have a problem with the line, “O Canada our Home and Native land.”*

*Regards,*

*Momina (2017)*

### *Looking Backward to Look Forward: Hear Me Out*

In a respectful voice and with eyes full of curiosity, Terrance’s first question for me was about *Shariah Law*. The headscarf on my head must have spoke to him of my Muslim identity. Terrance and I were together in 2011 in one of our Master’s courses called *Curriculum Perspectives*. In the Faculty of Education where almost all the students, who were administrators, principals, and teachers, were White, only he and I were students of color. He, an Indigenous man, and I, a Muslim woman. After completing my first Master’s degree from Pakistan in 1994, I registered as a Master’s of Education student at the University of Saskatchewan in 2011. Not only was the landscape a brand-new experience for me, but the curriculum terminology, Eurocentric textbooks, all white instructors, and 95% white student classroom population were as well.



Terrance's question about *Shariah Law*, which was related to religion, terrified me as, at that time, religious conversations were not as common in the academy. On top of that, I was learning how to set the silenced voice trapped in my throat free. When he asked his question, it felt as though I was choking painfully, right there and then. Whatever came into my mind, standing in that hallway outside of class, is what I said in response to his question about *Shariah Law*.

The expression on his face made me feel that I did not answer his question well enough. Therefore, I humbly invited Terrance and his family to my home so I could introduce him to my husband, and we could answer his questions in a comfortable and safe environment. He accepted my invitation and we welcomed him to our home, drank tea, and had snacks together. We tried our hardest to address his questions to the best of our knowledge through sharing our culture, religion, lived experiences, and immigration story with him. My husband and I took the time to formulate meticulous humble and honest responses to all his questions about Islam. At the end of our visit, Terrance thanked us for our hospitality and left. Although he had left with gratitude and a gracious smile on his face, perhaps in his heart there were lingering questions we were not successful in addressing, or that the "single story" (Adichie, 2009) of his Indonesian friend remained deeply engraved in his heart as a mark for how he perceived all Muslims. Adichie (2009) stressed "the danger of only knowing one story about a group" and reminded me that, "the single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (12:57). One story could be a true story, but it does not portray the entire truth. I wonder about the extent to which the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the media following the 9/11 tragedy had influenced Terrance's overall perspective about Islam and Muslims. On the other hand, one story could simply be a single story, but that story alone may be the tip of the iceberg that holds the power to subvert dominant narratives and hegemonic knowings.

### *Unpacking Terrance's Email: Making a Difference Video Pitches Competition*

*I took a moment to view Momina's video and was reminded of her words in your class some three years ago. It was about that long ago, I cannot recall the exact date....I did not want to address Momina's concern in your class but could tell from her video that her concern has not abated. (Terrance, 2017)*

Our life experiences and trajectories shape our research work. My doctoral research was an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my 'mother stories' of my children's experiences with school and curriculum. In one of my PhD courses, I told a story of my youngest son's experience with the Social Studies curriculum when he came home and talked to me about a film shown in his class about Residential Schools. The telling and unpacking of this story, and our exploration of my son's positioning, as a Canadian child born to citizens who had immigrated from Pakistan, became part of my doctoral research. Upon sharing my son's story with my doctoral committee members, with instructors and graduate student colleagues in my classes, and at research conferences, the responses I received, along with rejections and hurtful comments by a few peer-reviewed journals, made me feel intimidated and fearful of the ramifications of what I was exploring. My story became unfamiliar to me in light of these new questions. I felt a strong sense of discomfort that perhaps I was sharing the right thing – but at the wrong time.

**Shhh !!!**

*“well, what you are saying is just an isolated case”*

*“but this is your son’s story not yours”*

*“how is it possible to take the experience of one or even two kids and say that this can be a representation of Canadian betweenism”?*

*“we need to be careful talking about such stuff amid Truth and Reconciliation”*

*“your story doesn’t represent the generalized public”*

*“you have not picked the least controversial or sensitive of topics to explore”*

*“such complex, complex issues”*

*“questions you are posing, very complex”*

*“you are causing me to do a lot of thinking”*

*“highly complex dimensions”*

*“I think your questions are important and should not be suppressed”*

*“you have to move forward with them in a way that is gentle and respectful while also being open and curious”*

*“so you are aware of the need to proceed cautiously here”*

*“just alerting you to possible implications so that you make an informed decision about sharing it”*

I know the truth hurts, but please know that victimization deeply haunts

***The Story: Oh Canada, Whose Home and Native Land? An Excerpt<sup>4</sup>***

*On the fourth day of the new school year of Grade 8, I asked my youngest son how everything was going, what he thought of his homeroom teacher, and if he had friends in the same class as him. In a tired voice he replied, “I almost fell asleep in class today.” He was saying this to me in the evening, so I proposed that he go to sleep earlier from now on in order to further himself from his summer sleeping patterns. He said, “No. It’s because of the movie that they show us repeatedly in Social Studies class.” “Which movie?” was my curious response. “A movie about First Nations people.” I asked him what he saw in this movie and he said, “All about residential schools, how their land was taken and what “we” did to them.” In a highly cautious and alert voice I inquired, “Who did what to them?” “We, the Europeans,” he returned. That was a profound moment in my life as a mother in regard to the identity formation of my children as racialized Canadians. In my Research and Images Video Competition held by the University of Saskatchewan, I raised questions about why my Canadian children had to be reminded on and off that “our home and native land” is not theirs. It is the “Native Land” of the First Nations people and the “Home” of the White dominant culture. I posed, what then is left for my Canadian children who are born and raised on this land? Is it only*

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<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth story and discussion, see Khan & Cottrell (2017). The article, “Oh Canada, whose home and native land? Negotiating multicultural, Aboriginal, and Canadian identity narratives,” received the “2018 Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies Outstanding Publication Award.”

*their home built on someone else's land, or is it their homeland? Or neither? How can they construct and shape their identity and a sense of belonging without a land and a home? How can they develop their sense of responsible citizenship in such a scenario where curriculum is inappropriately inculcating their dispositions as Canadians? Does it mean our national anthem insults half of the Canadian population? Does it mean that my son begins every morning at school with hypocrisy by singing, "O Canada, Our Home and Native Land" (excerpt from Khan & Cottrell, 2017, pp.7-8)?*

I assume that after watching my research video, which was available publicly on the University's website, Terrance must have sent an email to Debbie sharing his response. I am glad that Debbie chose to share that email because it created a space of opportunity and "building of settler-Indigenous alliance" (Cannon, 2012, p. 25). When Terrance came to our home, in response to my invitation, we engaged in "productive dialogue" (p. 25) and critical conversations as mature adults, colleagues, educators, Canadians, and human beings instead of holding onto assumptions and biases that jeopardized our shared sense of humanity. Did it help us find where our common ground lies as Indigenous peoples and settlers in the larger systems of oppression?

It was an opportunity for Terrance and me to find out where our common ground lay as Indigenous peoples and settler ally in the larger systems of oppression. I wished to ask him about the nature of our allyship since "allyship discourses are dangerous to non-white settlers if not unpacked because these discourses implicate them in white settler genocide by offering no other subject position outside of the white ally" (Lee, 2016, p.20). With his help, I believe I would have thrived in my inquiry and effort to figure out "where [I] 'fit in' to Aboriginal history, not just where Aboriginal history fits into the history of Canada (Simon, 2012, para. 13). Collectively, we could have shaped a radical space of critical awareness of oppressive structures, systems, institutions, and ideologies to capture the complexity of subject positions and lived experiences of peoples who hold different historic and contemporary relationships to Indigenous peoples and different historic and contemporary relations with minoritized populations (Amahady & Lawrence, 2009; Kumashiro, 2000). Sadly, at that time, our conversation did not extend this far.

*When Momina uses the word "Native" in connection to what she perceives to be a violation of her laws, conscience, or values when she has moved here, I got pretty upset. I do not appreciate her use of a term held by my people to challenge a long held custom of our First Nations (council) and also our federal government's House of Commons (open and free speech and debate). For this reason, I did not and will not vote to support her work. (Terrance, 2017)*

As stated in his email, perhaps the word "Native" and my use of it was insensitive to Terrance. The explanation for why I used the term *Native* at that point in time is neither a "[Brown] settler move to innocence" nor an "attempt to relieve the [Brown] settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility" (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p.10). Rather, it is the truth of my knowing which was masked by the deep and dark imprints of imperialism, ongoing colonialism, and the resulting hopes and fantasies of immigration, considering Canada a *saviour state* for immigrants from impoverished countries.

It is ironic that my affirmed use of the word "Native" was grounded in a mandatory requirement and confirmation of my status as a Canadian citizen in a citizenship ceremony where (new) citizens are required to take an oath of loyalty by loudly singing Canada's national anthem and uttering the lines, "O' Canada, Our home and NATIVE Land." What I was not aware of then

was that I was taking an oath wrapped in obligatory hypocrisy where I was conforming to the expectations of White people at the expense of the ongoing erasure of Indigenous peoples by undermining their sovereignty, exploiting their Land, pushing out their language and culture, violating Treaties, and quashing their self-determination and self-governance efforts (St. Denis, 2011). I support Barrie's (2018) proposal that "the second line of O Canada should read 'Our home on native land'" or, perhaps, our home on Indigenous Lands.

Also, my lack of awareness was due to the fact that the concept of Truth and Reconciliation sat on the backburner during the time I began my Master's program in 2011. I also felt uneasy that there were no mandatory courses offered in the Department of Curriculum Studies, neither about Indigenous history, culture, spirituality, struggles, agony, and strength (aside from a few lessons and conversations about Residential Schools) nor about the disturbed state of Multiculturalism. I always puzzled over how to address these peoples correctly, *Native people*, *First Nations*, *Indigenous*, *Aboriginal*, or *Indian*.

In fact, another example of my naivety is that, in my very first term paper, I proudly self-identified as *multicultural* by supporting the *mosaic* model of multiculturalism without fully understanding that "Multiculturalism is dependent on colonial structures because it assumes the legitimacy of the current colonial Canadian government [and] [a]s multiculturalism ignores ongoing colonialization, the result is a trivializing and erasing of Aboriginal sovereignty" (St. Denis, 2011, p. 311). My unawareness as an immigrant and Brown settler resulted from White racial supremacy, western civilizational superiority, and structural and historical racial injustices embedded in Canadian government policies, institutional oppression, and discriminatory practices. I was also a victim.

Oppression is both a shared experience and something that is lived personally. The histories, stories, backgrounds, and voices of marginalized and Indigenous groups have been either pushed aside or softened, sanitized, and whitewashed to advance White centrality, ascendancy, power, and privilege. Since the history of colonization is a problem undeniably faced by all Canadians, then it is each and every Canadian's responsibility to not only acknowledge and understand how this is so, but also how we may deal with and combat the ongoing colonialism, both uniquely and collectively, given our subject positionalities (Lee, 2016; Cannon, 2012). Lee (2012) pointed out that although People of color are settlers on the stolen lands and are also historically "complicit in taking and occupying land as property, non-Whites share with [I]ndigenous peoples a violent history of displacement, segregation, dislocation, and internment enacted through racialized and gendered violence" (p. 20).

*In Canada, we have freedom of speech and conscience and in Islamic countries, there are no such laws. For those two simple reasons, you will continue to feel discomfort within Canada. What I find so ironic is that when I asked Momina why she came to Canada, she, like every other Muslim I have spoken to, declared that she likes the freedom. What I find so ironic is why Muslims seek to bring Shariah when they enjoy western freedoms so much. (Terrance, 2017)*

In response to Terrance's comment above, I wonder to which "Islamic countries" he is referring? As far as I know as a Muslim, there are around 57 majority "Muslim countries" in the world today, and I have a hard time assessing which country is truly "Islamic." Also, I ponder upon his strong words that there is "freedom of speech" and "freedom of conscience" in Canada. His comment intensifies my curiosity to hear voices and experiences of his community at large. My

personal lived experiences as a racialized Canadian woman inform me that these freedoms are limited because, when it comes to speaking up about certain events, histories, beliefs and brutalities, we are silenced in the name of “integration,” “citizenhood,” and “patriotism.” To some extent, I agree with Terrance’s statement that in Canada there is a ‘selected’ freedom of speech and I wish to tell him that I myself was practicing that free speech in a polite manner at the College of Education for the first time, after 11 years of living in Canada in silence. We figure ourselves out in different ways, at different times, through different modes. I want to share my truth with Terrance — not to gain sympathy or to “echo the episodic [women and] Muslim discourse of victimology” (Siddiqui, 2008, p. 1), but to invite him to a space of our nuanced ways of knowing, being, and becoming. In order to carve a relational space for our allyship, “We need a wholesale rethinking of our departure points in educational, methodological, [ideological] and activist-based contexts” (Cannon, 2012, p. 22).

I want to begin by risking being raw, vulnerable, and brutally honest because without sharing our humane realities with absolute sincerity, we cannot reclaim our robbed identities, histories, dignity, relations, and knowledge. Knowing that sharing my truth “may stir the opening of Pandora’s box” for some (Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011, p. 29), I endeavour to “break through the crusts of the conventional and the routine,” beyond claim and counter claim, blame and defensiveness and faithful and disloyal “to light the slow fuse of possibility” (Greene, 2007, p. 1). I am indeed a woman from a country where quite often a rainbow appears after sustaining countless absurdities and a shower of tears. I am indeed a woman from a country where freedom of speech is restricted, where the harmful gazes of men instill a trembling fear in women, where women who write poetry or do creative writing are considered to be sinful romantics. I am indeed a woman from a country where raising your voice in the name of justice is synonymous with being brazen and mannerless, where the burning venom of endless trials for equality and justice awfully bites, where catering to male ego, obeying masculine authority, serving dominance, and entertaining supremacy are the textbook definition of “ideal” womanhood. This was one of the main reasons that my husband and I, along with our three children, left Pakistan with hopes to finally evade the structurally and psychically penetrating effects of historical and ongoing colonialism and the resulting colonization of bodies, minds, beliefs, knowledge, and existence. Indeed, we hoped to offer our children and ourselves the experiences of Canadian sovereignty and freedoms.

Page A-14 ♦ The Melfort Journal, Tuesday, May 18, 2004

## A safe place to be: Citzer

By **Melanie Dolton**  
of THE JOURNAL

The freedom to speak and raise their four children in safety are just some of the reasons why Dr. Mohammad Khan and his wife Momina chose to leave Pakistan for a new home in Canada.

They were among 27 people who received Canadian citizenships during a ceremony Wednesday, May 12 in the Maude Burke Elementary School gymnasium.

“The reason was really a better future for our kids,” said Khan, who is the local medical health officer for the Kelsey Trail Health Region.

“Pakistan is a big population but it is a small country and it’s not politically stable. We wanted to give our kids a life where they could feel safe and have a bright future.”

In a one-hour ceremony, the group of new Canadians who came in from as far away as North Battleford and Saskatoon to pledge their oath to Canada heard congratula-

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Upon my arrival to Canada, I learned for the first time what the shades of freedom look, feel, and sound like. Going out alone without receiving unwanted attention and piercing stares and harmful gazes from strangers, sitting in the front yard of my home, shopping for groceries by myself, obtaining my driver's license, walking my children to school or to the park were all so empowering for me. I felt like I could finally breathe, effortlessly.

However, it took me 11 years to accept that counter-arguing, sharing candid thoughts, and voicing my voice as a Muslim Canadian woman were, although risky, completely normal. My persistent attempts to be grateful to Canada for being a saviour in our difficult times and welcoming my family and me into Canada was a far greater responsibility for me than seeing it from the lens of its vested interests behind my immigration. This complex positioning of being a grateful, nice, humble, integrated and law-abiding immigrant/citizen, all the while avoiding pointing out the failures of the system, policies, institutions, and organizations, was in many ways burying me under layers of both self-silence and structured silence each day. Despite repeated experiences and encounters of strange gazes from people regarding my headscarf and accent, institutional hegemony, racial bias and judgement, prejudice and discrimination, I preferred silence over speech to neither sound ungrateful to Canada nor jeopardise my positioning further as a Muslim woman who immigrated to Canada in 2000, where 911 occurred the next year.

However, I tasted my own voice after more than a decade of living in Canada, in the same college and class that Terrance and I shared, where I too was learning how to unearth the stories that I had been drowning in, stories of struggle, pain, puzzles, experiences, mysteries, questions, wonders, and tensions buried deep inside my heart. While I was tearing apart and unveiling the multiple thick curtains of silence, I was also healing and coming back to myself through truth telling. I was tasting agency, challenging the status quo and entitlement, deconstructing the "ideologies of neutrality" (Abawi, 2018, p. 86), dismantling oppression and patriarchy, asking hard questions, "pulling [fierce] passion, potential and possibility from my pain", (Khan, 2021, p. 253) and destroying blind submission. I was using my voice and "narrative as a source of empowerment and a form of resistance to counter the domination and authority of canonical discourses" (Ellis & Bchner, 2000, p. 749). I was deepening and reconstructing my understanding that the actual practices and experiences of women are the point of entry into our knowledge of how our lives are constituted. I was rejuvenating the cycle and circle of relationships and interrelationships, I was truly turning into an unapologetic I.

Change is never permanent therefore once again, as a Muslim woman with a headscarf, I have been forced into 'fear' from 'freedom' in the wake of recent consistent brutal attacks on Hijabi Muslim women in Canada. I wonder how it is different to be a victim of males' harmful gazes and assault for not properly covering in an Islamic home country than it is to be brutally assaulted for properly covering in a secular home country? Scholars tend to magnify this incongruity in women's liberation process as a gender issue, the ways in which the rights of women to participate in freedom have been 'choked off' on the basis of traditional, cultural, and religious values.

*upon every shake and shiver  
of hegemony, supremacy, masculinity, authority  
endless. exhausting. attempts at troubling bias  
in a state of continuous despair  
fighting silenced self  
embossed imposed performed*

*burden of repairing spirit*  
*learning to enlighten*  
*my resistance. my existence.*  
*an ephemeral assuage*  
*hopeful pessimist*  
*active captive*  
*wrapped in colours*  
*a woman a mother*  
*a Muslim a Canadian*  
*a teacher a learner*  
*a citizen*  
*a human*

### *Terrance, Your Email Was an Invitation to Re-Awakening!*

I will not feel discomfort in Canada because Canada is the very place that showed me how to speak up despite being silenced, how to challenge imposed conformism, how to fly without wings, and how to reclaim my wings from people who live to cut off those who do not belong to them. Please rest assured that *Shariah Law*, which is Islamic jurisprudence, can only be adopted and implemented in Islamic states. Finally, there are Muslims with righteous practices and Muslims with ill performances, just as there are with all humans; one story is not the only story (Adichie, 2009). I acknowledge that I may not belong to this Land as this Land is your Land, but Canada is my home and I belong to Canada. I would like to remind you of the wisdom and way of your father, “*It is hard to see, but can you see the end of the root, or the seed?*” May I kindly invite you to see the Muslim People and Muslim Canadians as whole and refrain from judging the entirety and teachings of Islam through Muslims alone? The rapid rise in Islamophobic attacks on Canadian Muslims, particularly Muslim women, calls for centring our educational and institutional systems around equity, justice, and Indigenous, Black, and Muslim history. Muslims have long been portrayed in mass media as terrorists and religious extremists and this has resulted in serious repercussions, such as the recent murder of the innocent Afzaal family in London, Ontario in June 2021. Although our oppression is different, yours and mine, our liberation is tied together; nobody is free until we are all free. Charting out a new set of possibilities begins with vigilant listening and conscious and active understanding of religious pluralism and religious freedom in Canada. “The irony is how core liberal values, like freedom of expression, keep bumping into conflict with commitments to religious pluralism and religious freedom” (Khan, 2019a, p. 28)<sup>5</sup>. To live well with ourselves and others requires “seeing people as whole [which] means recognizing that both our everyday lives and the larger cultures in which we operate shape our senses of who we are and what we can become” (Howard, 2000, p. 387).

Each body is tied to lived experiences and the stories that are written on it, and thus the body is central to our coming to know of identity (Grumet, 2007). Sometimes we as Canadians are

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<sup>5</sup> Khan’s article (2019), *When Does Free Speech Become Offensive Speech? Teaching Controversial Issues in the Classrooms*, (*Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue Journal*) received “2020 Francis P. Hunkins Distinguished Article Award in Teaching” and “2020 CACS Special Mention for Outstanding Publication in Canadian Curriculum Studies.”

guilty of either active sympathy or “passive empathy” (Dion, 2009) situated as “judging, but inactive, subject” (Cannon, 2012, p. 23). To find a common ground in order to dismantle the larger system of oppression, “we must understand the difference between fear societies and free societies, between dictators and democrats” (Sharansky, 2004, p. xxvi). We must have the courage and audacity to engage, look for, and think through the blind impresses, the gaps and the blind spots of thoughts, issues, discourses, difficult knowledges, and practices at the individual, national, and global level (Rorty, 1989). Creating affirming and empowering spaces for all voices to share and unpack their lived experiences and deconstruct their histories requires alliances and “constellations of co-resistance” (Simpson, 2016) between racialized settlers and Indigenous Peoples. Decolonizing the nation will require co-resisting the placement of marginal identities against one another in competition for equality and justice. “The challenge we face as racialized people, Black people, Indigenous Peoples, students, activists, and educators might best be considered as much a problem of history as it is of the present” (Cannon, 2012, p. 33). In a global era of increasing accountability and apology, Canada’s colonial past effectively poses a moral and ethical dilemma. We are forced to ponder the feasibility of *solidarity and sovereignty* within the context of our current neoliberal, capitalist, and neocolonial political system.

As Canadians, educators, instructors, and students in the field of education, it is our responsibility to strive continuously to enlarge our moral and ethical understanding and means and modes of knowing for coordination, co-resistance, and coexistence. Understanding is not simply the result of what is already known and held jointly; rather, it is a co-constructive process of what is to be done jointly through multiple lenses and positioning (Graumann, 1995). It is critical that understanding is accompanied by *concrete actions* at all levels of Canadian society and that, such actions, at their core, must be radically *transformative*. The reform of the Constitution, of the delivery of social and human services, and of the social studies curriculum would be a valuable starting place in this work. Foundational change of this sort requires questioning established paradigms and hierarchies; deconstructing the ways that power relations shape the production, dissemination and application of knowledge; resisting and actively unlearning the dangerous and harmful legacy of colonization; and interrogating and dismantling structures that perpetuate racism, imperialism, and colonialism (Mintz, 2021).

### *Amid Pandemic: Graceful Ending to a New beginning*

Desiring a web of relationships amongst graduate students, I was thrilled to learn that Terrance had accepted Momina’s invitation to visit her home and family, soon after he received her email. It says so much about both of them that they sat together sharing snacks and stories of their identities, their beliefs, working through dissonance and difference in viewpoints in order to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of one another and of their positioning in Canada, individually and in relationship to one another.

Yet, the learning was not complete. Momina and I continued to discuss and explore the lived tensions, expressed and experienced, as racialized, Indigenous, and white settler identities continued to come together and push apart in our College, in our graduate student community, in her coursework, in her research, in her children’s schools, in our larger society. Terrance and I continued to meet for tea when we could, although his master’s thesis was defended and he was now doing doctoral work at another university



in another Canadian province. We talked of the new perspectives that were informing him, living and studying on a new – and more diverse – landscape. And, too, I had persistent wonders of my own. What part had I played in the earlier tension, the struggle for understanding? What part would I play into the future? What vulnerability was I also willing to lay bare? What learning was I also ready to undertake? A desire for tea at a round table persisted, a desire kept alive by our continued relationships, revisited memories, a persistent need for further connection, a sense that we remained “in the midst” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of an important conversation.

And, finally, our desire was realized. The three of us met at a local coffee shop on a beautiful autumn day about three years after this conversation was first initiated by Terrance. As we each got our beverages and settled in at the round table, bathed in warm sunlight, a passage came to mind out of one of my favorite children’s book, *The Table Where Rich People Sit* (Baylor, 1994). In the story, the little girl has called a family meeting and the family is gathered around their homemade kitchen table as the story unfolds. The little girl narrates:

*...my mother thinks  
if all the rulers of the world  
could get together  
at a friendly wooden table  
in somebody’s kitchen,  
they would solve  
their arguments in half the time.*

*And my father says  
it wouldn’t hurt  
to have a lot of cookies  
piled up on a nice blue plate  
that everyone could reach  
without asking.*

*But tonight  
it’s our kitchen  
and our argument  
and our family meeting  
and our very spicy ginger cookies  
piled up on my mother’s  
one good blue-flowered plate  
exactly  
in the centre of the table. (n.p.)*

And, with steaming teas and lattes in hand, it was *our* moment, *our* ‘family’ circle, at *our* friendly wooden table. And while we *were not* rulers of the world with an argument to solve, we *were* individuals who live in different worlds who came to have courageous and honest conversation. As Leggo (1998) challenged us to do, we were there to “confess

our foreignness, our alienation, our separation, our lack of understanding” (p. 180). We were there to tell and re-tell each other:

*who we are  
as humans in relation to the global landscape  
as Canadians in relation to the Canadian landscape  
as partners in relation to the educational landscape  
as citizens in relation to the political landscape  
as community in relation to the social landscape  
(Khan, 2019b, p. 33)*

We were there to make more space for one another, to listen harder and longer, to learn with an open and vulnerable heart, and to consider what work each of us can do, individually and collectively, to decrease the foreignness, first among ourselves and then among racialized, Indigenous, and white settler Canadians.

We talked for a long time, not covering topics but “uncovering” (Hawkins, as cited in Duckworth, 2006) them. We uncovered the concept of a “pedagogy of pain” in which we want to be neither victims nor victimizers, but hope, instead, “to pull out passion, potential, [promise] and possibility for repair and renewal of self(ves) and humanity” (Khan, 2021, p. 252)<sup>6</sup>. We uncovered our dreams for our children, for a space for them where authentic and reciprocal relationships exist. We uncovered the dominant political and social scripts in which we are all forced to take up an identity, perhaps not one of our choosing. We uncovered mistakes, anger, and the processes of learning. And we uncovered a desire to give grace – in conversations where individuals are working to generate familiarity and knowing across different positionings and differing identities on this “native land.”

### *Graced Conversations: A Gentle Audacity*

“Hope springs from contingent, dialogic, destabilizing, relational and enlightening ways of knowing and being” (Sawyer & Norris, 2016, p.11). I will always remember and cherish the power, positivity, and audacious hope I experienced during our conversation session over coffee amid eased COVID 19 restrictions. I felt honoured, humbled and thankful to Terrance and Debbie for providing me the opportunity to be heard by agreeing to meet and have courageous and critical conversations about our relational ways of knowing, being, becoming and belonging.

That day we were part of the same circle, where there was no center and no margin. Rather, it was a place of how to be in the context of positioning where all three of us were revolving and evolving together, unafraid, unbound, and unintimidated to share our truths by shedding our assumptions, judgements, and becoming awakened to our positionings, identities, and humanity. During our conversations that day, when Terrance joyfully showed Debbie and I the photos of his children and who they resemble, something moved me deeply inside. I believe those beautiful photos and faces of his children were a point of entry for me to meet Terrance at an inspirited intersection, “a place where life is exposed,” where consciousness descends to the opening of the

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<sup>6</sup> Khan’s article, “Pedagogy of pain: Pulling passion, potential, and possibility from the pain of silence and truth telling received the “2021 Outstanding Publication Award from Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies.”

heart (Khan, 2020, p. 253) and where we can clearly see the person in front of us transcending from the limits of their being to the truth they hold. It was a place, where instead of Terrance, I saw a caring and loving father, where I saw a reflection of myself in him as a mother, where I saw a reflection of my children in his children, and where together we saw a glimpse of ourselves and our humanity in everyone sitting around us in that coffee shop. We were transcending from beings into becoming by witnessing the new beginnings with a heightened “awareness of what it is to be in the world” (Greene, 1995, p. 35).

Recovery, healing, and “[c]hange takes place when we seek these kinds of self-(and Other) interrogations” and reflections (Cannon, 2012, p. 33) wrapped in critical and honest conversations about “the non-singularity of oppression” (Dion, 2009, p. 188). The relationship, unity, and reciprocity enabled us to retell and relive those moments with raised consciousness and compassion. We graciously embraced the “unfinishedness of our human condition” (Freire, 1998, p. 66) and learned to “speak by listening” (p. 104) and being “open to the word of the other” (p. 107). We learned that we must make passionate attempts and take unapologetic steps to clarify the sense of dissonance between individuals, interpretations, and expectations by magnifying our human existence and universal dignity beyond binaries of Muslim, masculine, feminine, white, settler, and Indigenous.

*a sliver of opportunity  
where all choices intersect  
only action turns into  
radical possibility,*

*the stop.*

*becomes the site  
of unpacking  
of sense making  
of meaning making  
of possible worlds  
of truth telling  
of narrative repair  
of relationality  
of creative alliances  
of mobilizing solidarity  
of co-resistance  
of restoration liberation  
renewal!*

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## Authors

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**Debbie Pushor, PhD**, is a mother of three adult sons, Cohen, Quinn, and Teague, and a former public school teacher, consultant, principal and central services administrator. She currently works as a Professor in the Department of Curriculum Studies at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada. In her program of research, Debbie has engaged in narrative inquiries into parent engagement and leadership, a curriculum of parents, and parent knowledge. She is currently engaged in analyzing and interpreting research from her study of systematic parent engagement in an elementary and a secondary school in SK. In her undergraduate and graduate teaching, Debbie makes central an often absent or underrepresented conversation about the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes.