

Changing the Narrative

Robin. P

How can we unsettle the language and stories we have been taught in order to create a new and different narrative?

In this fact sheet I will introduce concepts and ideas as well as some questions in the hopes that we can begin interrupting and questioning the dominant colonial narratives.

IMPERIALISM: Q: Who has faced the consequences of imperialism in "Canada"?

A complex ideology, with widespread intellectual and technical expression and four different layers: as economic expansion, the subjugation of others, as idea or spirit and as a discursive field of knowledge. Imperialism is the "primitive accumulation" from thefts of peoples, lands and resources as the basis for capitalism. Eurocentric views often frame imperialism as a chronology of discoveries and conquests. However, understanding imperialism from an Indigenous context, as a discursive field of knowledge, is important in adding to the understandings of imperialism. Exploring sites of exploitation, appropriation, and research extraction occurring in Indigenous nations, from Indigenous perspectives, is important as we move beyond a Eurocentric understanding of imperialism.

COLONIALISM: Q: What does colonialism depend on to exist?

Colonialism is an outpost for imperialism and functions as a hierarchal structure, where the colonized (Indigenous peoples) are brought into existence by the settler. Colonialism is ongoing, and both created and maintains white supremacy in Canada. The mutually exclusive identities of the settler and Indigenous peoples are furthered by the labour theft and exploitation of the colonized lands and bodies, driven by the settlers' interpretations of Christianity.

HUMAN: Q: Who defines a "human" in Canada? Who has been excluded from this definition? Who has the power in colonial society to write and create their own history?

The idea of who counts as human varies between settlers and Indigenous peoples in Canada. More specifically, Indigenous peoples have been dehumanized as justification for imperialism and colonialism, and for the benefit of settlers. To

further the definition of who is 'human', German philosopher Hegel defined a fully human subject as a person capable of creating their own history. With that in mind, the history of Canada has been written from a predominantly settler-colonial lens. Settlers have purposefully excluded and oppressed Indigenous peoples, through the use of residential schools and social institutions from being capable of circulating their own narrative and making their own narrative dominant. In Canada, commonly, settlers are even taught not to believe Indigenous narratives. Because of the oppression and marginalization of Indigenous peoples, settlers have dominated the narrative of who gets to write history- thus dominating the narrative of who gets to be considered human.

HUMAN RIGHTS: Q: What are human rights? Who do they protect?

Human rights are a European construct that came out of the Enlightenment period that cannot actually help Indigenous people due to their dehumanized status. The dehumanization of Indigenous people has benefited settlers by allowing them to benefit from the oppression of Indigenous peoples. Therefore, human rights are a European discourse that works to uphold the humanness of Europeans (by virtue of their invention of "human rights") which further works to support the dispossession of Indigenous people because by this logic, Europeans are so humane, they should be trusted.

HISTORY: Q: Who writes history? Who is history written for? What are the circumstances history is written and created in?

We often assume history is about truth and fact, and that if truth comes out it will set things right. But those beliefs are often wrong; history is not about truth but about power. History is constructed in step with imperialism and tells the story of the powerful and how they became powerful. Settler narratives of history are generally focused on Eurocentric views of imperialism and do not center Indigenous peoples' perspectives which upholds Eurocentric power structures. Therefore, truth will not alter the fact that Indigenous people are still marginalized and do not possess the power to transform history into justice.

“THE WEST/WESTERN”:

Q: What is “the west”? How are ideas of “the west” upheld?

The west/western society is a historical, not a geographical, construct that introduces a narrative of “the west and the rest.” The west is an idea central to the Enlightenment period that classifies society through imperial and colonial practices, works as a system that leads to a way of behaving in the world, and is based on an “us and them” construct of “the west” and “the rest.” The west is not homogenous, despite sounding like it, and “the rest” is made up of a long list of many different nations unified solely by the distinction of “the west.” The idea of ‘the west’ did not develop from an already established western society but was essential in its creation.

A POLITICAL AND SOCIAL NEED TO DOMINATE:

Q: How do we explain the social and political process of the creation of 'race'? What are some antiracist and anti-colonial movements occurring in society today? How can we challenge and disrupt the ideas of 'race'?

The concept of 'race' rose out of the colonizers' political need to dominate the 'enslaved' and 'conquered' people. This has been exemplified in North American practices of slavery; it did not develop as a result of racism, rather racism developed as the result of slavery and the colonizers social and political need to dominate. The idea of 'race' should be questioned and its history must be explained in society so that people are aware of its implications. Since 'race' is a concept constructed for imperialist and colonial advantage, it should not be used as a factor that *explains or determines* the functions of society. In these conversations, it is important to focus on the roles of the colonized and their resistance to the colonizers. For example, in the history of the abolition of slavery, it is very important to center and recognize Black scholars and people as the first to refute biological racism and overthrow systems of slavery.

RACISM: Racism is the material consequence of racist ideas. Racism is used as an ideological element of signification to legitimate the selection of a particular population whose labour power will be exploited. Current examples of this can be found in

the Canadian governing system wherein Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promotes equity and diversity as one of Canada's strengths while continuing a policy of extinguishment towards Indigenous peoples. This has been exemplified after Trudeau failed to call RCMP out of Wet'suwet'en territory after the RCMP breached Canada's 'rule of law,' and when Trudeau failed to call on the RCMP to enforce the rule of law and treaty rights during the Mi'kmaq fisheries protests.

DECOLONIZATION: Decolonization involves centering Indigenous peoples' concerns and worldviews, as well as respecting and accepting the rewriting and re-righting of positions in history from Indigenous perspectives. Canadians are currently being taught a colonial version of history, and decolonization requires that we step back and acknowledge the intertwinement of Indigenous and colonial histories and accept Indigenous narratives. It means respecting Indigenous laws and sovereignty, calling for land back and acknowledging Indigenous lands as such.

How can we change our language to change the story?

To create alternate histories and ways of knowing we must interrupt imperial narratives through selecting, prioritizing and legitimizing decolonial ways of theorizing and making sense of reality. Alternate histories and ways of knowing are powerful methods of changing and recovering the narratives that have been excluded because of imperialism, colonialism and racism.

REFRAME AND REIMAGINE:

Q: How can we imagine a world not yet created? What could a decolonized future look like?

Despite all the ongoing issues of accumulations by dispossession, state violence and exclusion politics, which all rely on racism, we must reframe the discussion to educate in ways that interrupt at question the dominant colonial narratives

Works Cited

Hall, S. (2018). *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora* (D. Morley, Ed.). Duke University Press
<https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002710>

Tuhiwai Smith, P. L. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=1426837>