

Shifting, reforming, transforming spaces for a postcolonial, interreligious pedagogy

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The complex history of immigration to the land we now call Canada has made Toronto one of the most multicultural cities in the world. The ongoing migration to Toronto has precipitated a vast reforming of spaces at the educational institution where we serve. From a monoreligious Christian theological College it is becoming a centre for multireligious and interreligious education, community and practices. We are continually challenged by pedagogical and methodological questions that both confound and excite us: colonized spaces of well-honed theological methodologies and practices are called into question; hybrid, hyphenated religious identities disrupt and reform the spaces we inhabit and the expectations we carry. In this paper we examine the shifting realities that contribute to an emerging pedagogy as we are being reformed into a multi/interreligious educational community.

Introduction

Emmanuel College (EC), a graduate theological school rooted in the United Church of Canada, is engaged in an interreligious institutional experiment that responds to the demographic changes in Ontario, Canada and to the creation of a legally recognized regulating body for those who practice “psychotherapy”. Many classes have been transformed into laboratories for intercultural, interreligious community that highlight social cohesion, interaction between groups, and the generation of shared religious expression. It is a step beyond multiculturalism, which emphasizes equal access to education and the integration of cultural and religious minorities (Maudarbux 2016, 461–2).

In this paper, we examine these shifting realities that contribute to Emmanuel’s emerging pedagogy. The paper is composed of three parts. In **Shifting Spiritual-religious Spaces in Canada**, we describe the Canadian and professional context of this experiment, including Canadian-style *deinstitutionalization* and *pluralization*, as well as *indigenization* and *contextualization*. In **Shifting Spaces of Spi-**

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itual Care, we discuss the changing *contexts and credentialling*. In **Shifting to Reforming Educational Spaces: EC** we discuss *EC’s context in Toronto, its dilemma, its potential for contributing to global peace, and student experience*.

Some key questions are emerging as we seek to learn together. Do we reproduce the colonization experienced by our indigenous students with experience of our Christian indigenous students with Muslim, Buddhist, and occasional Jewish, Hindu or Sikh students? Can a Christian school “host” other religions without perpetuating colonialism? Or, in the



search for justice and equity, do we need to develop a fully interreligious ethos as our institutional mission, potentially alienating EC's faithful UCC constituency? While the concern for decolonializing the classroom is not stated in our mission, values or vision statements, it weighs deeply on our minds as pedagogues.

We as colleagues encounter boundaries of difference, including scholarly training, culture, religious background, age, years of experience in theological education and years remaining. We seek honesty, trust, vulnerability, and learning with each other and our students. We are Pamela Couture, chair in Church and Community since 2010, whose paternal ancestors lived in Canada from 1650–1890 and then moved to the upper midwestern United States; Pam McCarroll, associate professor of Practical Theology since 2016, CPE Supervisor-Educator, and born in Canada of Irish, Scottish and Norwegian descent; and Nevin Reda, assistant professor of Muslim studies since 2012 and first-generation immigrant to Canada from Egypt. Our reflections below represent our own experience, not necessarily that of other EC colleagues whose classroom spaces have been “reformed” by this experience.

Shifting Spiritual-religious Spaces in Canada

Canadian-style deinstitutionalization and pluralization.

According to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the introduction to the Constitution of Canada, “Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law” (Brown 2017, 6). National leaders increasingly interpret this principle as affirming that all religions have a place in Canada and reflect Canada's divine ordering. Some voices contest the centrality of ‘divine ordering’ if it includes religions not considered ‘historical’ to Canada; others seek the full secularization of the public sphere—the removal of references to God, public symbols and practices of religion, including prayers and religious garb in public (Bouchard and Taylor 2008; Bill 60 2013.).

The shifting spaces of the Canadian context are similar to the processes of *pluralization* and *deinstitutionalization* as described by Ganzevoort et. al. in the Netherlands (Ganzevoort et.al. 2014 178–197). In Canada, these processes reflect the changing realities

of religion and are influential in theological education. In 1971 Canada adopted an official policy of multiculturalism which encourages and promotes Canada's *pluralization*. This policy has a central influence on the dominant narrative of the nation. While some still resist the multicultural policy of Canada, others insist that it doesn't go far enough. Instead, they say, as a nation we must aim for *interculturalism*. The United Church of Canada, for example, prioritizes interculturalism over multiculturalism. “**Multicultural** refers to a society made up of several cultural/ethnic groups. These groups live alongside each another, but do not necessarily interact with each other. **Intercultural** describes communities in which there is a profound understanding, curiosity and respect for each others' cultures. Intercultural communities focus on the mutual exchange of ideas, etc. and the development of deep relationships.” When a society is intercultural, all are changed and grow through their interactions with ‘cultural’ others. (Intercultural Ministries 2017).

According to Clarke and Macdonald, in Canada *deinstitutionalization* of church is happening on a large scale. The baby boomer generation started leaving church in the late 1960's, a trend that accelerated in the 1970s: call them the “de-churched”. Their children had little or no exposure to institutional Christianity: call them the “un-churched”. The ‘spiritual but not religious’ phenomenon is a key feature in the Canadian context, especially among the “un-churched”. (Clarke forthcoming 2017). This population demonstrates a growing interest in spirituality.

Indigenization and Contextualization

Indigenization has a particular meaning in the Canadian context. In 2008 the Canadian Parliament initiated the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada to face the legacy of residential schools. Residential schools were government-sponsored and church-led institutions that often forcibly removed indigenous children from their families in order to assimilate them into the dominant culture, ultimately seeking to eradicate their cultural identity. The final report of the TRC describes this policy as “cultural genocide” (TRC, 2015). Residential schools existed in Canada for over 100 years; the last one closed in 1996.

The TRC took place over 5 years, with several truth-telling events at central sites across the nation. The Report of the TRC includes 94 Calls to Action for changes in public policy, justice, education,



health, *and* churches and theological education. Many churches and theological institutions are taking up the calls to action, recognizing and valuing indigenous spiritualities, practices, traditions and worldviews. A symbol of this shifting space can be seen in the practice of Territorial Acknowledgement (1) that most theological schools and many churches include at the beginning of community worship and in classes and public gatherings. Indeed, through the practice of territorial acknowledgement our sense of space and place is being reformed.

Contextualization occurs through dialogical engagement between religious/spiritual communities, their belief systems and practices, and Canadian public narratives, conversations, and policy. Notably, the process of contextualization is becoming an increasingly prominent theme among 2nd generation Muslim Canadians who are asking such questions as: What does it mean to be Muslim and Canadian? What do Muslim communities bring to Canada? With the coming together of many different Muslim communities into Canada, groups that had previously been divided by denomination or region are now working together to discern what it means to practice Islam in the Canadian context and to engage the Canadian context and public life as Muslim citizens.

Buddhist thought and practice suggests yet another way to consider this process of contextualization. In Canada we see the familiar phenomenon of Euro-Canadians, formerly associated with Christianity, describing themselves as Buddhist practitioners. They are contextualizing Buddhism in all sorts of varied ways. While meditation practices often claim lineage from Buddhism, recent research suggests that such meditation practices are not necessarily as tied to traditional Buddhism as is often assumed. (Scharf 2015, 470–484). How these practices and the associated philosophies relate to Buddhist traditions are complex and ongoing questions.

Shifting Spaces of Spiritual Care

Spiritual and Religious Care.

In Canada healthcare distinguishes between spiritual care and religious care. ‘Spiritual care’ is publicly funded and practitioners are trained through Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) to serve people of all faiths and no faith, including the ‘nones’, or those who choose “none” on surveys of religion, (Lipka

2016), and the ‘spiritual but not religious’. Religious care practitioners generally serve only members of their given religious community and are funded through specific religious communities.

Spiritual care in healthcare is distinct from its manifestations in the military and prison systems that emphasize faith-based ‘chaplaincy.’ ‘Padres’ in the military and chaplains serving in the prison system serve all faith groups but are recognized and formed through institutional religious bodies. In these cases, CPE training is preferred but not mandatory.

Credentiaing

An Act of the Provincial Ontario government recently organized the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO), a regulating body for the practice of psychotherapy. The scope of practice for psychotherapy is now defined by law as “the assessment and treatment of cognitive, emotional or behavioural disturbances by psychotherapeutic means, delivered through a therapeutic relationship based primarily on verbal or non-verbal communication (Psychotherapy Act, 2007).” Those spiritual care practitioners who consider that their scope of practice reflects that of psychotherapy (as defined above) *must* become members of the CRPO. In Ontario *most* spiritual care practitioners who serve in healthcare have now been registered as psychotherapists (RP) in the CRPO and therefore by law they are accountable to the public for their practice. While some spiritual care practitioners are concerned that the profession of spiritual care is being shifted ‘from without’ by an act of government and thereby losing its essential connection with religious communities, most see this shift as a welcome opportunity, opening up new possibilities and recognition for the profession.

In response to these shifts in the regulation of spiritual care in healthcare and private practice and to requests from multi-religious partners, Emmanuel College has initiated new Master of Pastoral Studies (MPS) degree with foci in Buddhist, Muslim and Christian studies. These programs are training students in the tenets, ethics and practice of their own belief system and in the practice of spiritual care and psycho-spiritual therapy to serve pluralistic contexts.



Shifting to Reforming to Transforming Educational Spaces: Emmanuel College

EC's context: Toronto, Canada.

EC's distinctive character is shaped by the shifting realities described above and by its immediate context and institutional affiliations. The College is located in metropolitan Toronto, home to large constituencies of its immigrant population. In 2011, of its 5,521,235 inhabitants 1,679,845 are Catholic, 227,925 are Anglican, 205,500 are United Church of Canada, 204,690 are Orthodox Christian, 424,935 are Muslim, and 124,215 are Buddhist (Statistics Canada 2011). Like Canada's Christian majority with its many denominations, Muslims have diverse interpretations of Islam. They come from South and South-East Asia, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe. Toronto has more than 60 mosques which are served by Imams who are mostly trained overseas.

Reforming EC: Christian or Interreligious

As noted, in 2011, EC introduced a Muslim Studies program after a grassroots, student-led initiative and discussions within the Muslim community, followed by a Buddhist Studies program in 2015. In the Fall of 2008 most of the 110 students who were registered in the College's basic degree programs (Master of Divinity, Master of Pastoral Studies, Master of Theological Studies, and Master of Sacred Music) were from the United Church of Canada (UCC). Eight years later, in the Fall of 2016, of the 105 registered students 42 were from the UCC, 14 were Muslim and 11 were registered in Buddhist studies.

In an effort to attend to the shifting realities of its immediate context, some classes at EC are in the process of being reformed from having Christian, Muslim or Buddhist assumptions as their foundation to embodying a fully interreligious ethos. Whether EC will remain a school rooted in Christian tradition that hosts other religious traditions or will recenter itself within a fully interreligious mission and ethos remains unclear.

Although EC is responding to changing demographics and shifting laws and needs, emeritus Principal Mark Toulouse locates its transformation in the UCC's distinctive history and theology (Toulouse 2012, 235–254; History of the United Church, 2017). The church's commitment to interfaith dia-

logue was evident in the work of some of its leaders and theologians, including Wilfred Cantwell Smith (d. 2000), C. Douglas Jay, Peter Wyatt and Harold Wells. Smith, a UCC minister and graduate of the University of Toronto, became a renowned historian of religion and an expert in Islamic studies. He devoted his career to the advancement of Christian-Muslim relations at McGill and Harvard Universities. As an educator, he sought to develop methods of teaching religions that would do justice to all traditions and thereby combat insipient religious hatred. He was also a strong advocate of critical self-awareness and was one of the first intellectuals to draw attention to the problem of unreflective fundamentalism (Committee on Interchurch and Interfaith Relations 2004). Like Smith, Jay was a leading theologian of the UCC and an educator, serving as principal of EC (1981–1990) and as the founding director of TST. He was the main author of the 1966 UCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism report, in which he affirmed the values of pluralism, love and peace, and pushed boundaries with “an unqualified willingness to live with persons of other faiths as neighbours rather than as potential converts (Hutchinson 2013, 1–3).” Peter Wyatt, emeritus principal of EC and Harold Wells, emeritus professor, contributed to authorship of and consultation on “That We May Know Each Other: United Church-Muslim Relations Today,” the UCC's 2004 report. William Kervin, current associate professor of Worship and Liturgy, points out that interreligious efforts toward diversity continue a trend established in ecumenism and further developed when women were admitted to EC (Milton 2016).

The UCC's 2004 report critiques the three most common approaches to interfaith relations: the exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralistic approach, and forges new ground with a fourth option: the transformationist approach. The transformationist approach emphasizes its willingness to learn from other faith traditions (Committee 2004, 6). Partnering with Muslims and Buddhists in an educational setting provides opportunities for furthering interreligious understanding and intellectual growth that is reflective of liberal Christian values. This interreligious ethos is becoming increasingly important in light of increasing islamophobia in Canada (Geddes 2013). Emmanuel is expressing solidarity with Muslims and an assertion of social justice and human dignity in the face of rising tensions.



Muslim Interest in EC – Contextualization, Professional Recognition

Muslims have many reasons for wanting to be educated at EC. First, among the most pressing questions Canadian Muslims face is how to reformulate Islamic identity and religious commitment in ways that make sense in the Canadian context, or in other words, how to “contextualize” Islam in Canada (Aziz 2015, see also the description of contextualization above). EC’s academic credentials, specialized programs, and interreligious ethos make it an ideal environment for educating upcoming Muslim leadership who can contribute to this ongoing project. Although the Muslim community has a number of institutions that provide theological education in Toronto, none of them are accredited and are therefore unable to provide their students with recognized degrees at the undergraduate or graduate levels. Some follow the curriculum of Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband in India, relying on books such as *Uṣūl al-Shāshī* in legal theory, often ascribed to Abū ‘Alī al-Shāshī’s (d. 955) but most likely authored by Nizām al-Dīn al-Shāshī (13th century), Burhān al-Dīn al-Marghinānī’s (d. 1197) *Hidāya* in positive law, and Abū Ja‘far al-Taḥāwī’s (d. 933) *Aqīda* in the area of creed. These schools provide their graduates with a thorough grounding in the classical Islamic disciplines with teachers who hold traditional Certificates of Mastery (*ijāza*) but often lack resources that can help them contextualize their learning in the contemporary Canadian context and conduct research to develop these disciplines in ways that meet present-day expectations. To this end, Muslims in Canada are increasingly looking to Imams that have Western academic training, in addition to their knowledge of the tradition (Karim 2009, 6).

Second, as noted, Muslims find Emmanuel attractive for its specialized programs. Its most popular program is the Master of Pastoral Studies (MPS), a professional degree which prepares students to become spiritual care practitioners and psycho-spiritual therapists certified by the CASC and members of the CRPO. These qualifications allow graduates increased job opportunities to serve in private practice, healthcare, mental health and addiction, etc. In addition to the increased job qualifications, education that integrates theory and practice provides Muslim leaders with a skill set in care and counseling that the community needs to heal and thrive. Muslim students are also attracted to Emmanuel’s

research-oriented degree programs which prepare students for engaging in research and contributing to emerging disciplines, in particular Islamic spiritual care and counselling.

Third, EC’s emerging interreligious ethos in some courses also makes it attractive for Muslims. Muslim students have the opportunity to learn about Christianity, Buddhism and social justice-related issues that are relevant in Canada, such as Indigenous Peoples’ rights and the TRC, while at the same time learning to convey something about their own faith tradition in intelligible ways. Yahya Palavacini argues that one of the priorities of the Islamic world today is to rediscover “a language of truth for the times to come” (Qur’an 26:84), especially in conversation with a predominantly secular and diverse society (Pallavicini 2016, 425). He also highlights the necessity of promoting interreligious understanding, enhancing universal values as an integral aspect of Islamic education, and demonstrating how interreligious education can prevent radicalism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other forms of bigotry (Pallavicini 2016, 432–434). Among current educators there is an increasing focus on interreligious education in contradistinction to multicultural education, as can be noted in the work of Mohammed Abu-Nimer (2001, 685–704; 2015, 14–29), Mohammad Maudarbaux (2016, 459–481), and Saif al-Maamari (2016, 439–457). These shifting concerns are reflected in Emmanuel’s emerging pedagogy.

Interreligious Education and Global Peace

Interreligious education is gaining increasing interest at the global level as a means of promoting peace, understanding and social cohesion. For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has published guidelines on intercultural education, in which it recognizes that religions “come into play in an intercultural approach to education, but remain specific as they touch upon what is perceived to be the sacred (UNESCO 2006, 14).” These guidelines specify three principles: respect for cultural identity, active and full participation in society, and respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations. Nevertheless, the challenges of implementation differ from country to country and context to context. At EC, we are recognizing that interreligious education must take into account disciplines that are intrinsic to each tradition’s identity, such as



those that fall into the categories of sacred texts, history, thought and ethics, as well as the pastoral disciplines which support the helping professions for which Emmanuel prepares its students. While some courses remain rooted in one religious tradition and are mostly populated by students who share similar religious commitments and practices, others are interreligious in character and include students from all faith groups. Together they work toward garnering respect for religious identity and prepare students for successful interaction in an increasingly diverse workplace and social context.

Decolonizing the Classroom

Within the nexus of our academic and religious relationships, the EC faculty is aware that we invariably perpetuate colonialism in the classroom. We have heard from our indigenous students that institutional colonialism imposes foreign pedagogies, standards, and educational styles on students who experience the practice of spirituality and learning as an integrated whole. Institutional colonialism also produces false hierarchies of proficiency between those students who have experience navigating the western educational system and those who have not done so. Granted, the experience of colonialism by indigenous students, whose nations were decimated by settlers, and Muslim and Buddhist students who settled in Canada, differs. Still, our Muslim and Buddhist students represent religious minorities seeking to assert their experience in multicultural Canada and experience discrimination.

In order to explore the experience of interreligious classroom at EC more fully we invited students to attend a focus group to reflect on their experience in the classes where the interreligious experiment is strongest (Taped interview, April 21, 2017). What we were surprised to learn, particularly from students who identified with traditions other than Christianity, was relatively little concern about Christian colonization in the classroom. Rather, our students focused on the value of their interactions with one another. They expressed wonder for the rare opportunity to bond deeply with classmates of other religions. An experience of cognitive dissonance that jarred some students became an opportunity for spiritual growth focused on two primary issues: piety and tradition.

Students reported the shock that occurred when they experienced each other's prayers and spiritual practices. A Korean Christian student was taught in

his church to use prayer as a weapon against the "spiritual enemies" in other religions; in the focus group he described being "transformed" when he discovered that classmates of different religions could pray for peace in a particular trouble spot in the world, each in their own language and prayer form. Another Asian Christian student identified she was spiritually transformed when she was asked by a Muslim colleague to pray for her during a difficult time. Another student described hearing the prayers of her colleagues in different languages and forms and experienced "a deep sense of peace: Something is going on here." A self-identified liberal Christian spoke of the power of a Shabat-Jumaa worship gathering, organized by a Jewish and a Muslim student, held in the chapel "with Lenten banners and the picture of Buddha on the wall." A Muslim student described the comfort she found in the Christian experience of lament. A Christian spoke of the way her Muslim colleagues' ever-present sense of God encouraged her to be more aware of the ongoing presence of Jesus in her life.

Other comments tell a painful experience of transformation through the encounter with religious others in the classroom. Several students spoke of the first "crack" emerging in their assumptions within their own traditions. This "crack" began a spiritual transformation that called into question many their previous understandings. They wondered aloud, what exactly was the role of their own tradition. How might they reclaim it anew as a resource and as an object for reflection? How might their experience of deconstruction and reconstruction continue to serve them as scholars and practitioners in their own communities and in their pluralistic context?

While they spoke of pain and "cracks" and transformation, they largely did not report experiencing Christian colonization. Notably, their experience exemplified the UCC's fourth practice of interreligious education as "transformation." (see above) One Korean doctoral student may have offered the best description of the complexity of this spiritual and pedagogical transformation. She named it the spiritual virtue of *jeong* (love, affection, attachment)—which she described as "a sticky relationship."

Closing thoughts

Our desire as a College to engage the lived realities of our context and to respond to each other as neighbours has precipitated a complete reforming of our



institution as a space for theological education. Indeed, the experience of writing this paper together has been one of “reforming space”—the space of sentences on the page as we coauthor a strand of EC’s micronarrative, as we simultaneously blend three voices and allow their distinctiveness to shine. We bring our own hybridity and that of our students to the work. We email each other with questions as we write—when are we “shifting” and when are we “reforming” space? How can we bring to life in this paper the friendships among students that we are witnessing? Friendship is the ‘outcome’ that we most treasure, reflecting our shared interreligious, intercultural, decolonizing space, and it is the outcome most difficult to capture in our competency-based, outcome-driven curriculum. How do we engage the reality of “decolonizing” the classroom as process, that, itself, reforms the content for our courses, while also nurturing an increasingly close relationship with the University of Toronto and the regulations it imposes? Do we imagine ourselves to be embodying a decolonizing pedagogy on the basis of criteria that we employ or by describing the space in a particular way? How do we more precisely use the words such interfaith, interreligious, intercultural, decolonizing, and postcolonial, when all of them point toward aspects of the process in which we are engaged? All these are questions that remain open.

1. Territorial Acknowledgement: “The sacred land on which EC and the University of Toronto stands has been a site of human activity for 15,000 years. This land is the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca and most recently the Mississauga’s of the Credit River. The territory was the subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the great Lakes. Today the meeting place of Toronto is still the home of many indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work and worship on this territory. In recognition of wrongs done, we seek to make right with all our relations.”

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