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Examining the curricular and pedagogical challenges and possibilities of post-colonial young adult literature: a narrative inquiry of book clubs with pre-service teachers

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EXAMINING THE CURRICULAR AND PEDAGOGICAL
CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES OF
POST-COLONIAL YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF BOOK CLUBS WITH PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Educational Theory, Policy, and Practice

by
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Abstract

This dissertation draws on narrative, post-colonial, and curriculum theories to describe two book clubs in which twelve pre-service English teachers examined post-colonial young adult literature and explored the possibilities and challenges of using these texts in English Language Arts classrooms. The texts selected for the study focus on young protagonists of color living outside the cultural context of the U.S. because these narratives tend to be underrepresented in the international young adult literature market (Cart, 2010; Koss & Teale, 2009). The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the possibilities and challenges of using post-colonial young adult literature in education settings through examining such texts with pre-service teachers so that they might grapple with these ideas before they begin teaching and be in a better position to teach or recommend post-colonial young adult literature to their own students.

The data collected for this dissertation included pre- and post-study questionnaires, participants' written responses to each novel, audio recordings and transcriptions of each book club discussion, and field notes of each book club meeting. Using narrative analysis methods, I first coded this data thematically to generate categories across all data sources. However, as group discussions involved multiple narratives and speakers, I also used a dialogic approach (Riessman, 2008) to examine conversations in which participants discussed a topic in depth in response to an event described in the novel.

The findings revealed that participants used a variety of strategies to establish meaningful connections for themselves across cultures. Participants used the novels to articulate and sometimes revise their understandings of post-colonial concerns such as race, ethnicity, nationality, and prejudice. They used the space of the book clubs to pool together their knowledge to form a collective learning environment. As pre-service teachers who were less than

a year away from starting their careers, participants were concerned with how they might make post-colonial young adult novels relevant to their students' lives while also expanding students' global awareness. Taken together, these findings support the idea that reading and discussing post-colonial young adult literature in a book club setting can offer some critical and potentially transformative insights for pre-service teachers and, perhaps by extension, for their future students.

Chapter One: Introduction

Stories are powerful. They shape how we view ourselves and how we view the world. Literature, specifically, “deals with particularities, seduces persons to see and to feel, to imagine, to lend their lives to another’s perspective” (Greene, 1995, p. 69). Literature resonates because “the words mean more than they denote, evoking in those willing to pay heed other images, memories, things desired, things lost, things never entirely grasped or understood” (Greene, 1995, p. 44). In that sense, literature offers stories that alternately affirm, expand, or contradict our worldview. These moments are all educational.

In this chapter, I introduce the curricular and pedagogical possibilities and challenges of using post-colonial literature written for and about young adults in teacher education. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002), the term “post-colonial” has various semantic and theoretical definitions, which all refer in some ways to the experiences of nations colonized by Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands. Like the authors, I use the term post-colonial “to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft et al, 2002, p. 2) and to refer to those academic and literary works that “focus on the material effects of the historical condition of colonialism, as well as on its discursive power” (Ashcroft et al, 2000, p. 187). I consider post-colonial arts—including literature, painting, sculpture, music, and dance—as media that uniquely feature the experiences of people during and after the colonial period (Ashcroft et al, 2002; Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001). Although these art forms have emerged from various nations with differentiated experiences of colonization, they hold in common a certain tension with the imperial power and an assertion of difference from its worldview (Ashcroft et al, 2002, p. 2). As such, post-colonial stories function as counter-narratives that render for the reader plausible and

personal accounts of individuals located at the interstices of the inequitable systems of the past and present, and their particular social, historical, and political contexts.

Of the post-colonial arts, I focus on post-colonial literature written for and about young adults, which explores these issues and contexts from the perspective of young people growing up during and “in the aftermath of colonialism” (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews, & Woods, 2004, p. 3). I pay particular attention to the stories of young protagonists of color living outside of the cultural context of the U.S. because these narratives are underrepresented in the international young adult literature market (Cart, 2010; Koss & Teale, 2009). The study for this dissertation explored these texts with pre-service teachers in a book club, so that they might grapple with these ideas before they begin teaching and be in a better position to teach or recommend post-colonial young adult literature to their own students. The overall intention of this project is to invite students and teachers to use post-colonial literature as a lens through which they might (re)consider the “imagined worlds” and “ethnoscapes” in which they and others inhabit—what Appadurai (1990) refers to as “the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe... and the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” (p. 296-297). My hope is that these narratives provide alternate means of making sense of the contemporary world by helping readers nurture a historicized consideration of modern cultural conflicts (Rizvi, 2009). Book clubs have a history of activism, which I discuss in more depth in chapter two, and which supports post-colonial literature’s counter-discursive stance. In this space, located in-between their teacher education courses and their own future classrooms, pre-service teachers can examine post-colonial narratives and explore the possibilities and challenges of using post-colonial young adult texts. I use a narrative inquiry approach to describe how twelve pre-service

English teachers made sense of post-colonial issues as they read and discussed post-colonial young adult literature in a book club.

Narrative inquiry emphasizes that researchers are also storytellers (Holley & Colyar, 2009)—in our research, we tell the stories of our participants, and we also tell our stories. I weave my own through the remainder of this chapter to situate myself “in the midst” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of the many stories that make up this dissertation—the stories of the individuals who participated in the study, of the characters they encountered in their readings, and of the scholars and educators whose works I reference and whose words I borrow. In many ways, these stories will always be “fragmentary and incomplete, with conspicuous gaps, absences, and inconsistencies in the presented text” (Johnston, 2003, p. 4). Through them however, I hope readers can glimpse critical and intersubjective ways to view the world.

My Journey to Post-colonial Literature

My first encounter with post-colonial literature did not occur, as one might expect, during my childhood in the post-colonial nation of Haiti. From grades one through eleven, I attended a French private school that did not include the literatures of other countries as part of its curriculum or address the colonial historical context and implication of a French school on Haitian soil. The young adult novels I read avidly outside of school were imported from the United States and France, and many were French translations of English language books. When I immigrated to the U.S. in the mid 1990s, my exposure to diverse literature both expanded and narrowed: I had better access to the diversity of cultures represented in U.S. books (for instance, African American literature), but the majority of the novels I found were in English and focused on the experiences of white characters. During that time, I probably read several post-colonial novels without being aware of the fact that the authors were from countries that had experienced

colonization and often wrote with the intent of representing the socio-cultural, political, and historical legacies of colonialism. However, my first encounter with post-colonial literature formally named as such happened in a reading group during my first year in a masters' degree program in education. The group was made up of graduate students and led by a professor. With the summer approaching, we considered selecting longer texts, a change from the short articles we usually read during busy semesters. Two South Asian students suggested we read post-colonial novels—Zadie Smith's (2000) *White Teeth* and Arundhati Roy's (1997) *The God of Small Things*. I had been living in the U.S. for over ten years by then, and although I was reading about cultures with which I was unfamiliar, in these stories I also recognized similarities with my own experiences and struggles as an immigrant. Discovering these novels kindled in me a desire to find more like them and marked the beginning of my graduate research. I taught multicultural education courses to pre-service teachers and wondered about the potential role post-colonial literature might play in such classes: pre-service teachers would be able to consider not only the issues and various identity positions multiculturalism already presents, but also worldviews beyond the cultural context of the U.S. I continued to pursue this idea in a graduate children's literature course—my research project focused on locating post-colonial literature for children and young adults. This project raised more questions than answers for me and compelled me to extend my graduate studies to include a doctorate focused on resolving them: Why had post-colonial literature been absent throughout my own schooling, and why were post-colonial perspectives absent from much of the teacher education curriculum? What would have been the benefits of reading such literature as a young girl in Haiti, and how would young immigrant students in the U.S. today benefit from its inclusion in their curriculum? Finally, how might

students and teachers from *all* cultural backgrounds benefit from exploring the cultures, historical issues, and contemporary concerns raised in post-colonial narratives?

Post-colonial Perspectives, Literature, and Teacher Education

Post-colonial perspectives are not typically found in U.S. school curriculum. Rather, multiculturalism is the discourse that emerged in the U.S. in response to large-scale immigration from non-European countries and social movements focused on race and gender equality in the twentieth century (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). A multicultural approach to education has worked towards addressing the ethnic diversity of the student population by integrating the histories and literatures of diverse cultures into the curriculum. However, these efforts have often remained ancillary to the established curriculum (Willinsky, 2006). Moreover, the implementation of multiculturalism in the curriculum has largely remained at the surface without addressing the structural issues that shape students' schooling. A recent review of research reveals that, although pre-service teachers recognize the value of multiculturalism, they struggle to achieve a complex understanding of cultural issues and structures of inequity. Castro (2010) explains:

Preservice teachers expressed very positive views about cultural diversity but still held minimal understandings of what cultural diversity means and requires (Middleton, 2002; Weisman & Garza, 2002). This tendency toward oversimplification can make multicultural ideas less threatening, less political. Preservice teachers may readily advocate and clamor for multicultural education that supports a tolerance approach to diversity (Sleeter & Grant, 2007) without achieving the critical consciousness necessary to dismantle structural inequity and interrogate dominant cultural assumptions embedded in these structural arrangements. (p. 206)

As student teachers prepare to take on the roles of educators, they must acquire more critical understandings of the ways in which inequities are maintained through institutions and cultures.

Post-colonial scholars provide useful ways to think about the cultural dimensions of contemporary systemic inequities in their interrogation of the logic of colonialism and

examination of the cultural, political, and material conditions of its aftermath. As McGillis (2000) explains, “The colonial mentality assumes that the colonizer represents a more advanced state of civilization than the colonized does, and therefore that the colonizer has a right to assume a position of dominance” (p. xxii). Education scholars who draw on post-colonial studies thus focus on the ways in which “knowledges, academic practices and education systems [are saturated] with colonial and neocolonial ideologies” (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews, & Woods, 2004, p. 7). They use post-colonial perspectives to critically (re)examine and intervene in curriculum theories, research methodologies, and pedagogical approaches. Such insights would certainly help pre-service teachers gain a more complex understanding of systemic inequities and how teachers and students are implicated in these systems.

Post-colonial Literature and Post-colonial Pedagogy

One possible way of engaging post-colonial ideas is through post-colonial literature, which echoes the concerns of post-colonial studies through stories. For instance, post-colonial literature refuses to fit the construction of “other” and “confronts directly the forces of cultural domination and racial intolerance” (McGillis, 2000, p. xxiii). Post-colonial authors explore the ramifications of the colonial mentality and reconstruct for the reader its oppressive consequences for post-colonial subjects in stories set during colonialism and afterwards. Post-colonial literature includes post-independence and diasporic texts, which respectively refer to stories set during the time when a nation achieved its independence from colonizers and to the experiences of the diaspora—the movement of “colonized peoples back to the metropolitan centers” (Ashcroft et al, 2000, p. 70). It reclaims and revises previously established stories and histories and retells them

from the perspective of the indigenous, the displaced, and the subaltern¹ (Khorana, 1996; McGillis, 2000). In addition, post-colonial literature considers the complexities of identity in post-colonial cultures—the ways in which race, gender, socio-economic class, national, and sexual identities intersect and how characters experience these categories simultaneously as oppressive and contradictory or as fluid and hybrid.

Post-colonial literature, as well as post-colonial visual and performance art forms, provides numerous pedagogical opportunities. Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) explain that, because post-colonial arts developed in response to colonization during and after independence movements, they offer unique insights and potential directions for issues education has struggled to address, such as multiplicity and difference. Three motifs in post-colonial aesthetics—“*counterhegemonic representation, double or triple coding, and emancipatory or utopic visions*” (their emphasis, p. 19)—provide strategies to conceive of a world beyond binaries, to consider culture as unbounded, and to envision a future that does not merely replicate current inequities, but is a playground for “new political possibilities, new ways of being and acting” (p. 34). Likewise, Tarc (2009) suggests that post-colonial literature offers an “ethico-aesthetic pedagogy” when it reconstructs traumatic colonial histories and depicts characters that transcend them, thus compelling readers “to think and act differently in the world with all sentient beings” (p. 196). Educators who use post-colonial literature have noted both possibilities and limitations in putting these theoretical approaches to work in teacher education and secondary literature classrooms. For instance, students from immigrant and/or marginalized cultures have responded positively to reading literature with characters that mirror their own experiences, struggles, and identities

¹ In South Asian Studies, subaltern refers to “the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way” (Guha as cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000, p. 215).

(Bean, 2004; Lucas, 1990; Willinsky, 2006). However, some students have resisted a curriculum that challenges their worldviews (Johnston, 2003), and pre-service teachers and students from dominant cultures have struggled with engaging literature and pedagogical approaches that contest a traditional and Eurocentric curriculum (Asher, 2005; Goldblatt, 1998; Saldhana, 2000). Finally, teacher educators have pointed to the limits of using literary texts as “authentic” cultural representations when readers are outsiders to the culture depicted (Crocco, 2005; Johnston & Mangat, 2000; Freeman & Lehman, 2001). These limits call for developing a post-colonial pedagogy (Asher, 2002, 2005; Johnston, 2003) and helping students and teachers develop skills and strategies to read all texts critically (Freeman & Lehman, 2001; Johnston & Mangat, 2009).

Research Questions

I have experienced similar opportunities and challenges in my two years teaching World Literature at a private suburban school in the U.S. South. Like the school I attended in Haiti as a child, it favored a classical Western European curriculum. I expanded the primarily Eurocentric worldview of my tenth grade World Literature curriculum to include more literature by writers of color from post-colonial countries. However, using post-colonial literature alongside traditional World Literature texts from European cultures presented some unique challenges. For instance, teaching Chinua Achebe’s (1958) *Things Fall Apart* proved more difficult than I expected: although the writing style is fairly accessible, my students struggled with imagining the Nigerian culture depicted because it was so far removed—geographically and historically—from theirs. Instances of students resisting and making disparaging remarks led to much tension in the classroom because I would not allow these to go unaddressed. I considered that students would benefit from reading introductory post-colonial texts that they might find more accessible. Thus, I revised my curriculum to include post-colonial stories that featured young protagonists, whom I

believe make these narratives more relevant to my students, while also presenting them with alternate worldviews. Students responded more positively to these stories and had productive discussions about culture, issues of race, class, gender, agency, and displacement in a global context.

This experience complicated my original questions about the role post-colonial literature might play in teacher education and a secondary literature classroom. The issue was no longer just about inserting post-colonial texts in the curriculum and having students read and respond to them as a way to cultivate global perspectives. In addition, I wondered about the ways in which my own and my students' identity positions complicated the dynamics of discussing post-colonial narratives. In other words, what roles did my race, nationality, gender, social class, and position of power as a teacher played in my students' encounter with the culture depicted in the stories we read? How did the students' race, gender, class, and culture shape their reading of these narratives? Surely our geographical context—Southern Louisiana and its history of slavery and racial segregation—had an impact on the class dynamic throughout the year. These new questions highlighted for me the necessity of developing a post-colonial pedagogy to approach such texts with students and teachers and the potential of using post-colonial literature written for and about young adults as introductory texts to post-colonial issues.

In response to the above concerns, and as I complete my own preparation to become a teacher educator, I designed a study that engaged the possibilities and challenges of using post-colonial literature in education. Specifically, I used a narrative inquiry approach to describe how twelve pre-service English teachers, divided in two book clubs, read and responded to post-colonial young adult literature. The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the possibilities and challenges of using post-colonial young adult literature in education settings, through

describing how pre-service teachers made sense of post-colonial issues and cultures as they read and discussed such narratives as a group. The following research questions guided this inquiry: What stories, events, or issues emerge for pre-service teachers as they read post-colonial narratives? In what ways do these novels serve as entry points into conversations about their own experiences and issues related to global, cultural, political, or historical events? How do pre-service teachers connect the book club experience, their readings, and responses to their future teaching?

Narratives

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explain that people shape their lives through stories: “Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (p. 375). This phenomenon of making meaning out of experience through story is central to the function of book clubs. Kooy’s (2006) study of novice teachers in a book club reveals that, “The book club allows them to read and use stories as heuristics and explanatory devices for making sense of their worlds in a social, relational, safe context” (p. 662). In a book club, pre-service teachers encounter several stories: the narrative(s) of the character(s) in the novel, their own and their peers’ responses to the stories, their narratives of personal experiences or as teachers in progress, as well as my responses—as the participant observer—to the texts and relevant personal and teaching experiences. As the participants in this study experienced global issues and cultures through reading post-colonial literature, I looked to narrative inquiry—“the study of experience as story” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)—as the method through which I explored, analyzed, and represented the interplay of their narrative responses to the characters, to one

another, and to me, as well as any new narratives they constructed as a result of those conversations and reflections.

Significance of the Study

One of the goals of this study is to support efforts in teacher education and English Language Arts to provide students with texts that promote critical thinking through representing a wide range of cultures and levels of text complexity. For example, the first standard of the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) for English Language Arts (1996) proposes that “Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world” (p. 21). Narratives about young people residing in and emigrating from countries that have experienced colonization can serve as “metaphoric ethnographic cases²” (Bean, 2004, p. 63) that invite teachers and students to imagine the colonial encounter, the experience of colonization as well as its aftermath, from the perspective of a young person. As coming of age stories written both for and about young adults, they are particularly relevant to the lives of young people who can read them in academic settings and for personal fulfillment. In addition, and in keeping with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts, they represent a “range of reading and level of text complexity” (p. 10) because they include novels published both in the adult and young adult markets.

This aspect of the texts selected for the study is also significant for practice because the book club carved a space where pre-service teachers had the opportunity to collect texts they

² Bean (2004) uses this phrase to refer to the fictional representations of “Characters in multicultural novels [who] illustrate how identity is often altered and disrupted within Western diasporic societies and school contexts” and argues that such texts provide insight into the “ongoing struggles and complexity of adolescents and Indigenous peoples in postcolonial times” (p. 63).

might use with their own students and to discuss pedagogical approaches to teaching these texts. In addition, they were also able to engage global issues and cultures through literature themselves and critically reflect on their own social positioning. As many pre-service teachers enter the field with little knowledge about worlds beyond their own (Castro, 2010; Merryfield, 1995; Phillion & He, 2004; Sleeter, 2001), reading and discussing post-colonial novels with a group of peers may help them recognize the limits of their own global awareness, confront their own biases and assumptions about cultures beyond their own, and incite curiosity and further inquiry about global issues and cultures (Dunne & Goode, 2004). The format of the book club itself illustrates a pedagogical method pre-service teachers might adopt once they begin teaching and provide a forum to practice the kinds of conversations they can have with their students.

The study also contributes to scholarly research with regards to teacher education in general and to post-colonial and narrative studies in education in particular. Post-colonial young adult literature is difficult to locate because it is not treated as a distinct body of literature, and novels from post-colonial nations are usually grouped under more generic labels of “global” or “international.” Thus, identifying and analyzing post-colonial young adult literature is significant to help the genre coalesce into a body of work. Moreover, providing these texts to teachers and their students supports efforts to address the gaps and silences that continue to characterize curriculum in U.S. schools today. Describing the narratives that emerge when teachers grapple with the global issues and cultures they encountered in these post-colonial texts contributes to the larger conversation about the possibilities and complexities involved in addressing systemic inequities in teacher education courses. The pedagogical issues raised in the book clubs in relation to the texts similarly inform teacher education programs.

Chapter Outline

In this introductory chapter, I have discussed personal, theoretical, and pedagogical contexts for conducting a study using post-colonial young adult literature with pre-service teachers. In chapter two, I situate the study by reviewing literature associated with post-colonial studies in education, young adult literature, post-colonial pedagogy, and the activist and professional dimensions of book clubs. I offer a definition for post-colonial young adult literature and discuss the reasons for the dearth of such narratives in education and publishing markets. Chapter three describes the methods and design of the narrative research study. Chapter four presents the first of two levels of analysis—I discuss the regional and institutional contexts and realities of the study as well as provide a narrative sketch of each participant and a summary of the novels each book club selected. Chapter five provides the second level of analysis—the findings of the study. In the final chapter, I discuss the implications of the findings for teaching and teacher education as well as possible directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This study is located at the intersections of three areas of scholarship: post-colonial studies in education, young adult literature, and book clubs as pedagogical and activist spaces. In this chapter, I begin with a review of post-colonial studies in education, focusing on the works of educators who draw on post-colonial perspectives to understand and intervene in educational practices. I then examine some of the themes represented in post-colonial literature, and argue that these are also present in post-colonial texts written for and about young adults. I discuss the reasons for the dearth of post-colonial literature for young adults and the difficulties in locating it, and suggest a working definition of post-colonial young adult literature as a genre. Post-colonial stories are counter narratives and using them for educational purposes demands both a post-colonial pedagogy and a counter-discursive or activist space, which a classroom may or may not be. Book clubs have the potential to function as such spaces because they support affective and collective approaches to reading in addition to the analytical and individual ones emphasized in academic knowledge (Farr, 2005; Gere, 1997; Long, 2003; McHenry, 2002). Professional book clubs with teachers combine these approaches with the dual purposes of reading for learning and for intervening in educational practices (Burbank, Kauchak, & Bates, 2010; Flood et al, 1994; Kooy, 2006; Mensah, 2009; Reilly, 2008).

Post-colonial Theory and Literature in Education

Over the past five centuries, the relationship between education and colonialism has been an ambivalent or paradoxical one. Post-colonial scholars Coloma, Means, and Kim (2009) explain that education is “a double-edged sword that wields power for subjugation and oppression as well as for subversive revolution and self-determination” (p. 10). On the one hand, scholars identify education as a primary tool for colonization, which continues to replicate socio-

economic inequities globally. On the other hand, researchers and theorists recognize the transformative potential of education, precisely because it permits exposing taken-for-granted ideologies, disseminating new and previously silenced ways of knowing, and advancing alternative ways of imagining the future. Education scholars draw on post-colonial perspectives to understand and intervene in educational areas as varied as research methodologies (Daza, 2008; Kaomea, 2003, 2009; Villenas, 1996), globalization (Bacchus, 2006; Rizvi, 2009; Tikly, 2001, 2009), the dynamics of teachers, students, and researchers' identities at play in the classroom and in the research field (Bean, 2004; Mirza, 2009), pedagogy and teacher preparation (Asher, 2002, 2005; Johnston, 2003, 2006), and cultural representations (or lack thereof) in curriculum resources (Viruru, 2009; Willinsky, 2006). Given my interest in the potential usages of post-colonial literature for teacher preparation and English Language Arts, I pay particular attention to works focused on post-colonial literature, both in theory (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2000; Tarc, 2009) and in practice (Bean, 2004; Crocco, 2005; Johnston, 2003, 2006; Lucas, 1990).

Why Multiculturalism Alone Is Not Sufficient

Multiculturalism has been the dominant discourse in education to address issues related to inequity and cultural diversity. However, although multiculturalism in education has attempted to include diverse cultures into the curriculum, this inclusion has not extended to structural changes in the established curriculum. Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) argue that, by focusing on culture, the discourse of multiculturalism in education has attempted “to ‘discipline’ difference rather than be transformed by it” (p. 113). They explain further:

Within the managerial language of the university and in schooling, culture has become a useful discourse of containment in which particular groups are granted their nationalist histories, their knowledges, and alas, their experts. Cultural competence then becomes powerfully deployed to blunt the pain of resource scarcity and to inoculate the school's

dominant knowledge paradigms from the daylight of subjugated knowledges and practices. (p. 113)

In other words, diverse cultures may be represented in the school curriculum without examining the reasons for their previous marginalization and without challenging the systems that perpetuate inequities. Asher (2002) explains:

[M]ulticulturalism in education has evolved as a discourse about the marginalized “other” with little examination of the “self” at the center of the dominant culture. Therefore, this discourse and practice remains within—and reactive to—the frame which privileges patriarchal, Western, Eurocentric knowledge and perspectives, and normalizes the split between self and other, margins and center, subject and object. (p. 82)

Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) also point out that, “while an unthreatening form of multiculturalism has been integrated into the curriculum, more critical discourses, such as Marxism, pragmatism, Frankfurt school critical theory, cultural studies, post-structuralism and post-colonialism have been left aside” (p. 2). However, it is precisely these critical discourses that work to challenge the established curriculum and bring to light the effects of its erasures and silences. Specifically, a post-colonial approach to education strives for open and multiple worldviews and challenges systems and processes that privilege or normalize any single worldview.

Intersectionality of Identities

One of the key features of post-colonial theory is the way it troubles the concept of identity as a singular and fixed construct. It considers the ways in which identities such as race, class, gender, sexuality and nationality are not experienced as separate, but as multiple, hybrid, and intersecting. For instance, Trinh (1989) expresses the “triple bind” in representing herself through her writing because she feels “she must choose from among three conflicting identities. Writer of color? Woman writer? Or woman of color? Which comes first?” (p. 6). Instead, Trinh (1989) recognizes that identity categories, “the natures of *I, i, you, s/he, We, we, they,* and

wo/man constantly overlap” (her emphasis, p. 94). She asserts that, “the line dividing *I* and *Not-I*, *us* and *them*, or *him* and *her* is not (cannot) always (be) as clear as we would like it to be” and concludes that, “Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak” (p. 94). In addition to the leaky boundaries of identity categories, identity itself is elusive.

Bhabha (1994) states that, “identity is never an a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality” (p. 51). In other words, identity is a process that unfolds *between* the state of being and the acts of seeing and naming. It presents a dilemma because the act of naming the self or the other is restricted not only by language, but also by the limited view and partial understanding of the self or other. This moment is always incomplete, always in process, because “the very act of naming one’s identity is also a moment of recognizing the limits of the name” (Yon, 2000, p. 59). For example, Yon (2000) witnesses these limits in his qualitative study of Canadian youth and the ways in which they construct identities that are not necessarily fragmented, but fluid, multiple, and overlapping. The Afro-Caribbean students in the study in particular reframed the concept of “race” as intersecting and overlapping with national identity, music and fashion tastes, and culture in general. They continually try to refine their self-definition through qualifications, additions, and subtractions to the insufficient vocabulary of race currently at their disposal. Like Bhabha (1994), Yon (2000) recognizes that “identity categories and labels are often unable to satisfy the desire to be recognized as complex subjects. Identity is therefore always partial, capable of telling us something, unable to tell us all” (p. 71-72). In effect, these youths’ racial identities come up as “unstable and contested and this undermines the static and binary constructions upon which multicultural and antiracist discourses are often premised” (Yon, 2000, p. 103). Acknowledging

that identities are fluid as opposed to fixed pushes educational researchers to continue to find new, more open frameworks to conceptualize identities.

Anzaldúa (1987) offers a way of thinking about identity beyond typical binary constructions with her concept of a “*mestiza* consciousness,” a consciousness that emerges from the collision of Mexican, indigenous, and white American cultures, from being “cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, [and] straddling all three cultures and their value systems” (p. 78). She explains:

The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality ... The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in *healing the split* that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. (emphasis added, Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80).

Healing the splits of identities has profound significance for the work educators do. For instance, Asher (2002) extends Anzaldúa’s (1987) work with her notion of a “hybrid consciousness,” which recognizes that “*All* identities are located at the intersections of race, class, gender/sexuality, culture, history and geography. *All* identities, cultures, representations are hybrid, dynamic, context-specific and negotiated. And encounters with difference, with different others, influence/have implications for the self” (emphasis in original, p. 90). When teachers and students situate themselves “at the interstices” (Asher, 2005) of these identities and social contexts, they are better equipped to engage difference productively. Reading and discussing the literary accounts of individuals who also negotiate their locations at these intersections may offer pre-service teachers the opportunity to reflect on their own social contexts.

Post-colonial Literature

Educators who turn to the post-colonial arts understand them as pedagogical—they argue there is something to learn from the visual, musical, and literary arts of post-colonial nations that expands how we might think about education and the world. For instance, Dimitriadis and

McCarthy (2001) argue that education has failed to address the issues of globalization in general and the increasingly diverse identities of the student body in schools in particular. They posit that the moment and context in which post-colonial literature, music, and visual arts developed—“in the crucible of colonization and its aftermath of independence and postindependence movements and struggles” (p. 3)—have rendered them unique, and uniquely positioned them to offer insights and answers for the trying global times in which we live.

The authors explore a wide range of post-colonial arts: the critical works of public intellectuals James Baldwin and C.L.R. James; the novels of Wilson Harris and Toni Morrison; the paintings of Gordon Bennett, Arnaldo Roche-Rabell, and Jean-Michel Basquiat; and various contemporary youth music genres. They draw on the works of post-colonial theorists such as Arjun Appadurai, Paulo Freire, Stuart Hall, and Edward Said, among many others, to frame their in-depth analyses of post-colonial arts. Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) argue that,

By systematically transgressing genre confinement, by contesting social and epistemological hierarchies, and by operating in a plurality of registers, post-colonial art provides a paradigm of heterogeneous knowledge building, border crossing, and thoughtful dispassion toward cultural origins that best models a pragmatics of pedagogy for our times. (p. 5)

In other words, these art forms serve as exemplars for what education has a difficult time achieving—making sense of the increasingly blurred lines between traditionally compartmentalized lives, subjects, and disciplines. Rather than maintaining an increasingly bounded, outdated, and irrelevant curriculum, these authors call for an education that accounts for the global forces at work in our daily lives by engaging in dialogue that “challenges us to make and remake our own emancipatory educational practice” (p. 9) truly to address difference and multiplicity.

Tarc (2009) focuses on the literary aspects of post-colonial arts and calls for post-colonial education studies that engage difficult historical fictions such as J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, which reveals the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa. Using post-colonial and curriculum theories, Tarc (2009) situates her reading in the current context of globalization and neo-imperialism and argues that educators have a responsibility to "conduct interdisciplinary examinations of the viscerally experienced and materially lived histories of colonization and genocide leading to this globalizing moment" (p. 198) as a means to avoid the historical amnesia that leads to the reproduction of such horrors. She contends that literature may be a nonviolent way of experiencing another's trauma, a means for developing empathy, and a start point for having "complicated conversations" (Pinar, 2004) about the past and the present in the classroom.

In their vision of education, Tarc (2009) and Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) move beyond the current model of education that teaches subjects (such as English or history) in isolation, with the mere function of preparing students for the next level of schooling. Instead, these scholars offer ways to rethink education through a post-colonial pedagogy that shatters the illusions of a self-contained subject matter, culture, or identity, and acknowledges the ways in which colonialism has affected and continues to permeate all aspects of human life, culture, and schooling. These scholars propose that a post-colonial pedagogy is more suitable to our contemporary lives than what current education offers. They theorize that a post-colonial pedagogy is interdisciplinary, engages multiple perspectives, explores trauma in non-violent ways, provides opportunities for dialogue, and has the potential to cultivate empathy. Tarc's (2009) and Dimitriadis and McCarthy's (2001) pedagogical visions are important theoretical and analytical frameworks to implement post-colonial perspectives in education.

Locating Post-colonial Young Adult Literature

Post-colonial narratives “open space for the reader to see and hear peoples from a variety of backgrounds and cultural practices” (McGillis, 2000, p. xxviii). However, locating post-colonial young adult literature can be challenging because post-colonial novels are not typically categorized as such. For instance, booksellers and librarians have directed me to the foreign language, international, or Commonwealth literature sections of their young adult literature collection when I have asked about post-colonial young adult literature. Similarly, scholars tend to use umbrella terms such as “global,” “world,” “international,” “transnational,” “translated” or “multicultural” to describe those texts published outside of the U.S. or stories by authors who are not U.S. citizens. These categories often include literature by post-colonial authors, but scholars do not necessarily address post-colonial issues when they discuss international texts. When scholars identify children’s and young adult literature as post-colonial however, they raise issues related to the economic, political, and historical contexts of the regions, countries, and cultures represented in these texts (see, for instance, Bradford, 2007; Crocco, 2005; McGillis, 2000).

In addition to issues of categorization, Stan (1999) explains that economic, political, historical, and cultural matters have also limited the production of young people’s literature around the world. Historically, post-colonial nations have faced difficulties in publishing, as literature during colonial rule was “imported to serve the children of the ruling government and those attending Western-style schools” (Stan, 1999, p. 172). This trend constrained the development of indigenous authors and artists or of a publishing industry. In addition, as many countries are still in the process of recovering from the effects of colonization (Parenti, 2002) and face obstacles such as poverty and low literacy rates, the books they do produce with youth in mind today are often textbooks or readers intended to promote literacy (Freeman & Lehman,

2001; Stan, 1999; Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 2007). Freeman and Lehman (2001) and Stan (1999) point out that books for young people continue to be produced for the most part by the United States and the United Kingdom and distributed worldwide, which makes it challenging for smaller or developing countries to compete profitably.

Economic and cultural issues also play a role in the availability and marketability of international texts in the U.S. For instance, books that are not originally published in English present a financial risk for publishers because “they tend to be expensive, time-consuming, and unsuccessful in the marketplace” (Roxburgh, 2004, p. 48). According to Stan (1999), U.S. publishers have been inclined to publish international books that feature “universal storylines and generic settings that could be construed as [U.S.] American” (p. 175) and have even edited texts originally published in English to remove markers of cultural differences. Koss and Teale (2009), who reviewed bestsellers, teen lists, and award winning young adult novels from 1999 to 2005, indicate that this trend continues. The authors report that, while the texts they reviewed featured more international settings than they expected, the novels were “culturally generic with the characters’ ethnicity used only for descriptive purposes rather than functioning to depict insights about the culture or cultural practice” (p. 566). In addition, the authors found that “the majority of international countries and characters portrayed were white and European” (p. 569). Similarly, Cart (2010), who examined the winning and honor titles of the Printz award for excellence in young adult literature of the last ten years, also noticed a high number of international novels represented; however, these were primarily from Europe and Australia, and the stories representing characters of color were all set in U.S. multicultural contexts.

Roxburgh (2004) attributes the lack of success of translated or international texts in the U.S. to a general lack of interest in cultures outside of the U.S. He explains that while publishers

have embraced efforts in multicultural education, and “every major publisher has a list of multicultural books, if not an imprint dedicated to them” (p. 49), these books tend to focus on immigrants assimilating into American culture rather than stories about cultures outside of the U.S. context. Roxburgh (2004) concludes that, “At its best, multiculturalism acknowledges and celebrates diversity in our culture. But it falls way short of the mark in acknowledging and celebrating the integrity of other cultures” (p. 49). These findings indicate a need to locate and be able to recommend to young readers more texts that highlight the cultural diversity of youth around the world, particularly stories with protagonists of color who live outside of the U.S.

International publishing issues notwithstanding, it is possible to locate post-colonial young adult literature. For example, *Bookbird* published a special issue on post-colonial children’s literature (Khorana, 1996), and *The English Journal* has published articles about teaching post-colonial literature in secondary English Language Arts classrooms (see for instance, Goldblatt, 1998; Lucas, 1990) as well as an issue focused on teachers’ approaches to the World Literature curriculum after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (see Monseau, 2002). While these particular journals have not focused on young adult literature, they offer some direction for approaching post-colonial texts in the context of education and with young readers. Other publications focus on a particular geographic region—for instance, *Sankofa*, a periodical about African children’s and young adult literature. Some journals on international English literature, for example *Wasafiri* and *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, have published special issues on literature for young people (respectively, see Naidoo & Pandit, 2009; Khorana & McGillis, 1997). Academic scholars have also published books specifically on post-colonial children’s and young adult literature (see for instance, Bradford, 2007; Khorana, 1998; McGillis, 2000). Finally, non-profit organizations such as the International

Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) or literary awards such as the Batchelder Award are also committed to the international exchange of books for young people and are reliable resources for finding quality literature. The above resources mark isolated examples where one might locate post-colonial young adult literature. However, to date, I have yet to locate a comprehensive reference list of post-colonial young adult literature.

Identifying an Emerging Genre

Because post-colonial young adult literature is not always treated as a distinct body of literature, in this section, I explore what it might mean to conceptualize it as a genre, in order to recommend such texts to teachers and students. For the purposes of teacher education and classroom use within the context of the U.S., I envision this literature to be comprised of stories about the experiences of young people coming of age in post-colonial nations as well as stories detailing the experiences of immigrant youth from post-colonial nations. For the purposes of my study, and in order to address the gaps I identify in the previous section, I pay particular attention to stories that feature young protagonists of color outside of the context of the U.S. and that are published in both the adult and young adult markets. This approach would present students in secondary English and social studies courses with texts that a range of literary complexity and a diversity of geographic locations, and varied historical and political contexts. Teachers and students would select novels based on their appropriateness for classroom use and students' maturity, keeping in mind that strong language, sexual content, and graphic violence are often present in both adult and young adult novels. The category would encompass all genres of literature such as historical or contemporary fiction, fantasy, science fiction, and nonfiction (including memoir and autobiography), and all formats such as full-length traditional and graphic novels, short stories, plays, and poetry. It would also consider as texts those films and

documentaries about young post-colonial subjects. Ideally, these texts would be produced by authors who are members of the group depicted, in consideration of the colonial gaze (Fanon, 1967) that has characterized past representations of post-colonial subjects and in support of these authors' attempts to represent their cultures from their own insider perspectives. Lastly, the narratives would feature an unselfconscious use of local languages and/or dialects and explore the ways in which characters navigate the geographical, cultural, social, economic, and political landscapes at play in that particular culture.

Representations of Adolescence in Post-colonial Literature

Young adult literature recognizes adolescence as a unique moment in life with its own distinct challenges—that of growing up, marked by a search for identity and a need to belong (Cart, 2008). Post-colonial young adult literature addresses these challenges in a unique context: growing up during or after colonization. This context brings additional complications for young adults whose identities and the choices they can make are shaped and constrained by the social, cultural, political, and historical contexts of the countries where the stories take place. As “metaphoric ethnographic cases” (Bean, 2004), these narratives inform readers about the experiences of youth around the world in the recent and distant past, and may help U.S. teachers and students cultivate empathy toward, and an ethical relationship with, cultures different from their own. Post-colonial young adult literature may evoke a certain tension between relational and differential experiences of young adulthood for readers who are not insiders to the culture represented. While too great a cultural difference may alienate readers from the character’s experiences, “[one] of the chief values of young adult literature [is] its capacity to offer readers an opportunity to see themselves reflected in its pages” (Cart, 2008, para. 11), and reading about

the experiences of young people coming of age elsewhere may offer some commonalities with which readers can engage difference.

To close this section, I offer a sample of texts—four historical fiction novels—as exemplars of post-colonial young adult literature: *Black Shack Alley* by Joseph Zobel (1950/1997), *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988), *Climbing the Stairs* by Padma Venkatraman (2008), and *What We All Long For* by Dionne Brand (2005). I chose these novels for stories that feature a variety of historical eras, geographical locations, periods of young adulthood, and adolescent issues that readers will find engaging.³ For example, *Black Shack Alley* (Zobel, 1950/1997), a fictionalized autobiography translated from the French (*La Rue Cases-Nègres*), revolves around the dilemma that freed slaves faced in post-colonial Martinique: whether to work in the cane fields as free men and women for wages that would keep them in poverty or whether to participate in the established dominant culture that enslaved them in the first place. The novel, which was subsequently adapted to the award-winning⁴ French language film *Rue Cases Nègres/Sugar Cane Alley* (Palcu, 1983), follows José's recollections of his childhood until his final year of secondary school as he becomes aware of his own implicatedness in colonial society. Reflecting “the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized” (Ashcroft et al, 2000, p. 13), José becomes increasingly ambivalent: he questions whether a hybrid cultural identity is possible or desirable for blacks in Martinique and considers the ways in which colonial education threatens to colonize him further.

³ See Appendix B for a list of the post-colonial young adult novels considered for this study.

⁴ *Rue Cases Nègres* (Palcu, 1983) was awarded at the Venice Film Festival in 1983 and at the César Awards (the French equivalent of the Oscars) in 1984 for best first work.

Likewise, *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga, 1988), winner of the 1989 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for African literature, explores colonial education in 1960s Zimbabwe and the way it distances the main character, Tambu, from her home culture and values. This dislocation reflects the "displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event" (Ashcroft et al, 2000, p. 73). In addition, the narrative examines what it might mean to be located between two cultures, through Tambu's cousin Nyasha, who left for England as a child and returns to Zimbabwe as an adolescent. The novel questions whether hybridity—a new transcultural form synthesized from the two cultures (Ashcroft et al, 2000)—is possible for a girl living in a sexist, patriarchal society. The narrative explores the ways in which Nyasha attempts to assert control over her own body through extreme self-discipline that leads to anorexia.

Climbing the Stairs (Venkatraman, 2008) centers on the post-colonial theme of agency, which refers to "the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power" (Ashcroft et al, 2000, p. 8). Named the 2009 Best Book for Young Adults by the Young Adult Library Association (YALSA), the story is set in India in the 1940s, as the nation fought for its independence from Britain. The main character, Vidya, is a fifteen-year-old girl who parallels the nation's agency in her attempts to overcome gender bias when she has to leave her home in Bombay to live with her very conservative and traditional extended family in Madras. Like *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga, 1988), the narrative reveals the multiple and often-contradictory ways race, caste/class, gender and culture intersect through the characters' subjectivities.

What We All Long For (Brand, 2005), which won the 2006 Toronto Book Award, departs radically from the other novels because it considers the lives of immigrant youth living in

Toronto, Canada in the 1990s. The narrative presents multiple perspectives rather than the point of view of a single character, and the author, a Trinidadian immigrant and resident of Canada, does not represent the world in which she grew up, but offers an observation of diasporic youth living in an urban environment. The novel considers the experiences of second-generation immigrants and the ways in which their lives differ from that of their parents. As immigrants and racial minorities, they are not part of the dominant culture and do not have their parents' memories of growing up in a different place and culture. Unlike the characters in the other novels, these youths must actively construct their identities in fluid or hybrid ways because they feel they do not belong to any culture.

Together, these four stories paint a compelling picture of young people's lives in the post-colonial past and present. They illustrate key post-colonial theoretical concepts that are informed by the colonial particularities of each country—the ways in which colonization was carried out in that location. The themes I have identified in these novels include ambivalence, intersecting and hybrid identities, agency, dislocation, liminality, and the diaspora. While post-colonial authors do not explore all the concerns of post-colonial theory, the stories are rich and intricately weave many of these themes in the experiences of young adults as well as from their perspectives. These narratives represent complex characters with multiple subjectivities and the ways in which these issues and contexts continuously intersect in their lives. As an emerging body of literature, post-colonial young adult literature presents rich opportunities for classroom discussion. The literature explores multiple topics about the challenges of growing up that would invite students and teachers to reflect on their own experiences coming of age as well as examine their own cultures and the roles they can play in society. In addition, post-colonial literature for and about young adults presents multidimensional accounts of identities—the ways in which

identities such as race, class, gender/sexuality, and nationality intersect and are shaped by historical, geographical, economic, and social contexts. These stories can enrich young readers and provide them with examples of how young adults like themselves are implicated in unequal social systems and what they do to negotiate these difficult circumstances. As Bean (2004) explains, “by identifying with a character in a young adult novel who faces issues of racism and socioeconomic struggle, young adults may be better able to cope and adapt to their own problems” (p. 63). These narratives are also valuable for pre-service teachers who can use them to engage global perspectives and cultures, to reflect on their own implicatedness in such systems, as well as to collect texts they can share with their students once they begin teaching.

Post-colonial Pedagogy

The following sections build on my discussions of post-colonial theory, post-colonial approaches to education, and post-colonial young adult literature, and explore the ways in which educators have implemented post-colonial perspectives in secondary and teacher education classrooms through literature. These pedagogical accounts reveal that the politics of identity at play in a classroom complicate the reality of using post-colonial literature in education: I discuss the openings post-colonial literature can create for students of color, the tensions and contradictions that can arise from utilizing post-colonial narratives with white students in secondary and teacher education classrooms, and finally, the necessity of developing post-colonial pedagogical strategies to teach post-colonial literature.

Possibilities in Diverse Classrooms

Using post-colonial literature in an ethnically diverse classroom can provide students of color with positive representations of their cultures as well as examples of the complex ways young people in post-colonial and multicultural nations construct their identities. In his ninth-

grade classroom in Australia, Bean (2004) applies a post-colonial perspective to teach multicultural young adult novels that function as “metaphoric ethnographic cases, revealing the ongoing struggles and increasing complexity of adolescents and Indigenous peoples in postcolonial times” (p. 59). He reports that students from diverse ethnic backgrounds respond positively to reading novels that feature characters who construct their identities in ways that echo the students’ own identities, which are fluid, multiple, and intersecting. However, Bean (2004) argues that while making personal connections to a story is important, a critical literacy approach to class discussions is key to engaging students in the social and systemic issues that these novels challenge. He writes, “Such an approach emphasises looking behind the text to examine whose agenda is served, who is included in a novel or excluded, who has a voice or power in the events that unfold and how cultural practices are presented” (p. 70). In other words, students benefit both from seeing their identities reflected in classroom texts and from learning critical ways to examine all texts.

Teachers must also keep in mind that students, particularly students of color, are often already aware of the post-colonial issues at play in their lives. Post-colonial narratives can serve not only as an introduction to global cultures and issues, but also as springboards for articulating similar issues in students’ lives in ways that are not usually available in a classroom with a Eurocentric curriculum. For example, Lucas (1990) reflects on teaching a twelve-week English course to Navajo students at a small rural school on the Navajo reservation. Realizing that Navajo students would relate to the themes in post-colonial literature since they were “adjusting to a ‘British-influenced’ culture” themselves (p. 54), Lucas (1990) decided to use films and documentaries in conjunction with poetry and novels from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Asian Pacific islands. Lucas (1990) reports that, at the beginning of the course, students had a lot of

stereotypical views of other cultures, which they gleaned from television and movies. However, as the course progressed, students made connections between their own cultural dilemmas and that of other post-colonial nations in films and literature: the threat of cultural extinction due to outside and media influences over generations; feeling trapped or having to choose between two cultures; the urgency of maintaining traditions; experiencing racism and segregation; and the ways in which education signifies both opportunity and distance from their culture. Students expressed gratitude to Lucas (1990) in course evaluations at the end of the year for exposing them to new cultures, for renewing a sense of pride in their own culture, and for helping them realize the importance of maintaining their cultural traditions.

Finally, Willinsky (2006), a college professor and former English teacher, reflects on the surprising directions that emerged in his collaboration with twelfth-grade students in a multicultural Canadian high school English class. His goal was to create a poetry anthology that would address imperialism and better represent the current post-colonial moment and Canada's cultural diversity. He argues that, "If the imperial legacy lives on in the curriculum of today, then the ways in which it lives on—at the core of the educational experience—needs to be part of what students and teachers explore and learn about, rather than ignore and pretend was never there" (p. 97). However, as the students independently researched and selected poems from international authors and in various languages, as they wrote their interpretations and developed discussion questions for the anthology, Willinsky (2006) found that the students exceeded his vision for what a post-colonial curriculum might look like. He continually felt that he had to catch up to "the lessons students in this class were ready to invoke about a world in which the legacy of European imperialism was so readily made present in their lives" (p. 95). As they "ran

with the theory” he offered, they took his project in unanticipated directions by including hip-hop lyrics and poems from Palestine to reflect the post-colonial moment. He writes,

While I had imagined the benefits of bringing greater theoretical sophistication to the schoolroom, I had failed, in the process, to foresee how the students’ ability to run with these ideas would test a teacher’s ability to build, in this case, an open, collaborative, and earnest atmosphere in the class that could balance poetry and history, that could hear out the celebration of martyrdom and underground culture. (Willinsky, 2006, p. 111)

This suggests that, in developing a post-colonial curriculum that addresses students’ lives, teachers may feel “left behind” as students readily take up this new, more relevant approach to schooling. Collectively, the three studies discussed in this section suggest that students with culturally diverse backgrounds already have the cultural capital necessary to engage post-colonial literature productively and benefit from exploring texts that represent their and others’ post-colonial cultures.

Challenges, Tensions, and Contradictions

Although using post-colonial literature can create openings in education settings, Johnston (2006), who uses post-colonial literature with Canadian students and pre-service teachers, acknowledges that “tensions and contradictions may erupt as teachers and students admit historical materialities and historical inequities on the bases of race, class, and gender as valid topics of discussion in the English classroom, alongside the literary analysis of texts” (p. 120). Student resistance was certainly a challenge for me when I introduced a post-colonial novel to my World Literature class.

Likewise, Goldblatt (1998) reports that, initially, many of her “white, middle-class [Canadian] students of originally European heritage loudly asserted that their university education would be harmed by studying these ‘*primitive*’ texts, designating Shakespeare, Dickens, Bronte, or even Wordsworth as more suitable to the largesse of their talents” (p. 72).

However, student resistance to a curriculum that presents diverse cultures should be no surprise when multicultural or post-colonial texts are often “add-ons” to a typically Eurocentric curriculum (Castenell & Pinar, 1993). After all, classrooms and schools have established dominant discourses in which students are fluent. As Johnston (2006) explains, “Literary text selections and school reading practices are mediated by entrenched and self-perpetuating notions of the canon and by static understandings of a collective national identity” (p. 116). Post-colonial narratives offer worldviews that not only are different, but also threaten to disrupt a traditionally Eurocentric way of understanding the world, one that is tied to the dominant “national” culture. Hickling-Hudson et al. (2004) point out that, “Many students are unaware of the bloody conflicts and tenuous resolutions that destroyed colonial empires and gave rise to hundreds of post World War 2 nation-states” (p. 7-8). Therefore, for many students, a world literature course such as the one I taught may be their first encounter with a post-colonial narrative, worldview, and history. As such, using post-colonial narratives in schools involves a process of unlearning and re-education (Tarc, 2009).

This process of re-education is a challenging task even with pre-service teachers. For instance, in the context of Canada, Saldanha (2000) reveals that although the pre-service teachers in her multicultural children’s literature course were invested in “imagining Canada as officially multicultural” (p. 170), the mostly white, female and middle-class students in her class nonetheless read in contradictory ways the racialized representations of children in picture books by Canadian women of color. In her analysis of pre-service teachers’ reading responses, she notices a pattern:

If a text can be made to fit into an ahistorical, Eurocentric framework, it is bestowed with the rather dubious honour of universalism... If, on the other hand, readers of these texts do not, or cannot, read the representations of difference ethnocentrically, within

established multicultural interpretations, the books in question are reprimanded for being polemical..., not believable..., or downright rude. (p. 174)

She warns that while pre-service teachers can be sensitive to socio-cultural issues, “this sensitivity can be useful for understanding, but not engaging with, the difference between cultures” (p. 174). Saldanha’s (2000) experience indicates that, even when they read post-colonial literature, teacher educators may need more strategies to explore and transcend this refusal to engage difference.

Crocco (2005) raises the issue that even when educators are willing to engage difference, they may not have the skills to identify harmful cultural representations in literature. She uses a post-colonial feminist framework to analyze the reasons why teachers in her graduate social studies course had such divergent readings of the young adult novel *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* (Staples, 1989), which revolves around a young Muslim girl living in the Cholistan desert of Pakistan. Although the novel is “recommended on many educational web-sites as an excellent piece of multicultural literature, especially for middle-school students” (Crocco, 2005, p. 562), Pakistani-American students in Crocco’s class insisted that the novel was a negative representation of Muslim women. In contrast, U.S. American students, who were unfamiliar with the culture, were dismayed that the novel was considered a negative portrayal. Further research revealed that its author is an outsider to the culture she describes. Crocco (2005) writes that from a post-colonial feminist perspective, the author’s “desire to show that ‘we all share the sameness of the human condition’ may instead serve as a form of ethnocentric universalism, reduced to the comforting belief that, despite the veils and camels, Pakistani girls are, indeed, ‘just like us’” (p. 570). This insight left Crocco (2005) to question whether this text in particular and fiction novels in general should be used in social studies courses.

The fact that a wide education audience did not see *Shabanu* as problematic echoes Saldanha's (2000) findings that literature that fits the expected ethnocentric but multicultural framework is considered "universal" and confirms rather than challenges cultural stereotypes. In translating a post-colonial pedagogy from theory to practice, teacher educators such as Saldanha (2000) and Crocco (2005) question assigning pedagogical value to the texts themselves. They both conclude that the reader's cultural identity plays a role in the meaning of the narrative to the extent that the story supports or contradicts the reader's worldview.

Pedagogical Considerations for Teaching Post-colonial Literature

Concerns about whether or not to include post-colonial literature in education courses are valid, especially when readers approach such texts uncritically. However, *all* texts are constructed from a particular discourse and are also subject to the reader's interpretation, fiction or not (Holley & Colyar, 2009). In spite of her reservations, Crocco (2005) admits that she still uses *Shabanu* in her courses "because it provides an important avenue into a set of dilemmas that are at the heart of curriculum today" (p. 578). This approach is necessary for students and teachers to develop a critical awareness of the particular contexts—historical and cultural—that shape both the text itself and their own interpretations of it. Crocco (2005) concludes her study with the suggestion that, "Developing educators' and future educators' capacity to read all texts, fiction and non-fiction, as well as visual media, with a sophisticated post-colonial consciousness ought to be an important task of a 21st century teacher education" (p. 578). One approach to achieving this is performing a close rhetorical analysis of the text.

Johnston and Mangat (2000) demonstrate that students can develop a critical awareness of the cultural dimensions of the text through guided rhetorical analysis. In a study with Canadian high school students from white, middle-class backgrounds, they asked students to do

“a blind reading of the first chapter of three African novels ... and to respond in writing to questions of language, voice and cultural translation” (Johnston & Mangat, 2000, p. 4). Johnston and Mangat (2000) found that most students could identify whether an author was an insider or outsider to the culture presented in the text. In addition, students were able to identify when an author was writing *for* an audience outside of the culture presented by examining “the way language is used in the text” (p 6)—for example, whether terms in the local language were italicized or unconsciously incorporated into the text. Johnston and Mangat (2000) conclude that, “students are not necessarily alienated when they read cross-cultural texts in which they may not be the intended audience” (p. 9). In other words, by paying close attention to the writer’s craft, students can find critical ways of engaging a narrative beyond the affective. This study provides a useful way to approach texts with students and teachers and shows that developing a cultural awareness requires critical reading skills that can be taught.

Critical reading skills are certainly not enough in and of themselves to help students and teachers engage difference in productive ways. Informed by post-colonial and feminist theories, Asher (2002) proposes a pedagogical approach that departs from simply engaging cultural others. She argues that while encounters with difference are necessary, teachers and students must also reflect on their own positionalities in the process. She writes, “a multicultural discourse which is focused solely on the other is incomplete, fragmented and garmenting—the self is absent, removed, remote” (Asher, 2002, p. 90). Therefore, in reading about cultures that differ from theirs, students need the space and time to reflect on what the encounter also reveals about themselves. In viewing themselves not as separate from, but “*in relation to* multiple borders at the dynamic intersections of race, culture, gender/sexuality, class, and nationality, in specific historical and geographic contexts,” students and teachers can achieve a “hybrid

consciousness” (emphasis added, Asher, 2002, p. 84-85). For teachers and teacher educators, this means allowing “complex and troubled histories around race and culture the room for expression” and accepting being vulnerable and uncomfortable in the classroom while “working through—rather than avoiding—emotional struggles related to engaging the difficult contradictions experienced within and without” (Asher, 2005, p. 1101). Thus, reading post-colonial literature in the English or social studies classroom requires converging affective and analytical approaches with critical self-reflexivity. Furthermore, as Johnston (2006) writes, in the literature classroom, “Teachers’ sensitivity to considerations of the historical and material contexts surrounding a text means that contemporary problems of political, social, and cultural domination enter the classroom debates alongside discussions of literary allusions, foreshadowing, metaphor, and metonymy” (p. 120). This implies that teachers have to cultivate not only a certain degree of fluency with global political, historical, and current events, but also develop many pedagogical strategies for navigating discussions of these issues in a class with young adults. In spite of the complications inherent in using post-colonial literature, it presents nonetheless an opportunity to begin having these complicated conversations (Pinar, 2004).

In the following section, I consider the setting of book clubs as potential spaces for doing this critical self-reflexive work with teachers. I briefly review the history of book clubs, which reveal their social activist roots for women and African Americans in the nineteenth century. I then examine how the new purposes and innovations for book clubs in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Finally, I investigate the role book clubs play in education as professional development for practicing teachers and as pedagogical methods for pre-service teachers.

Book Clubs as Activist and Pedagogical Spaces

Book clubs are not a new phenomenon—Long (2003) explains that people have come together to talk about books since medieval times in Europe and “especially since the advent of printing and the rise of vernacular literature” (p. 31). Throughout the ages, reading groups⁵ have not only functioned as the leisurely discussion of a text with peers, they have also played a significant role in the public sphere and in supporting social change. As Long (2003) writes, “Certainly, from the time of the sixteenth-century Protestant reading groups, the eighteenth-century salons, or the Chartist correspondence societies of early-nineteenth-century England, such book-oriented associations have played an important role in the cultural politics of class, religion, and gender in Europe” (p. 31-32). In the nineteenth century, book clubs in the U.S. also provided the space for social movements based on reading, discussing, and producing texts (Gere, 1997; Long, 2003; McHenry, 2002). Specifically, minority groups such as women and African Americans turned to book clubs as the means to emerge from their marginal status in society by forging a literate community and advancing political agendas. Book clubs today still tend to refer to small social groups that get together to discuss novels in a leisurely way; however, I am particularly interested in the political dimension of nineteenth century U.S. book clubs—what McHenry (2002) calls “literary activism”—and its possibilities for teacher education.

Nineteenth Century: Book Clubs as Educational and Activist Spaces

Gere (1997) explains that the political dimensions of women’s literary clubs in the 19th century U.S. very much arose out of the country’s historical context: “a time when expanding

⁵ Daniels (2002) explains that there are multiple terms that refer to small groups of people reading and discussing a common text—reading groups, book groups, book clubs, literature circles, and literary societies. I use these terms interchangeably.

national boundaries... were paralleled by major shifts in national definition, economic power, gender politics, cultural standards, and professional identity” (p. 3). As such, book clubs became part of a subculture based on reading printed texts through which people imagined themselves as participating in the national conversation. Excluded from the public world of men, including the workplace and universities, middle class white women turned to book clubs for their own rigorous education, echoing the Enlightenment. However, because reading is seen as benefiting the self—self-improvement—women’s literacy practices were criticized as selfish and undermining women’s work in the home (Gere, 1997, p. 10). These “clubwomen” thus focused their club activities as service to the community. They linked reading to service by arguing that reading helped them understand the underlying causes of the problems they were trying to resolve (Gere, 1997, p.12). These women established “public service institutions [such] as libraries, employment agencies, parole offices, and treatment centers” (Gere, 1997, p. 15). Today, these public services are often taken for granted; however, recent attempts to dismantle such institutions, especially public education (Meier & Wood, 2004), highlight the importance of educating responsible citizens who understand that democracy is an act, rather than a fact, in a democratic nation. That these women used literature for the public good seems particularly relevant to teachers’ work today.

Women of color were categorically excluded from white women’s book clubs, which led African American, Jewish, and Native American women to create their own (Gere, 1997, p. 6). For instance, McHenry (2002) reveals that, in the late nineteenth century, middle and upper class African American men and women—free blacks living in urban cities in the North—formed literary societies not only to educate themselves, but also to construct positive black identities and to reshape public perceptions of African Americans:

Although officially excluded from the workings of the nation, black Americans throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century believed that their future in the United States depended on creating for themselves the educational and cultural opportunities that would prepare them to understand the demands of democracy. (p. 19)

Aware that the presence of a large black literate community undermined the slave system and the rationale that barred them from participating in the public, social, and political spheres, African Americans “turned to reading as an invaluable method of acquiring knowledge, and to writing as a means of asserting identity, recording information, and communicating with a black public that ranged from the literate to the semiliterate to the illiterate” (McHenry, 2002, p. 23). Like the white middle class women mentioned earlier, for African Americans, literary study was intimately linked with activism as the means to achieve social equality. In addition, writing, both producing literature or club papers and publishing newspaper articles, was a key feature of this literary activism because of “the centrality of written texts of national construction to both the legitimacy of the new nation and to their status in it” (McHenry, 2002, p. 23). Since the early twentieth century, however, the link between book clubs and writing has become virtually nonexistent.

Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries: New Purposes and Innovations

Perhaps the biggest difference between twentieth century reading groups and nineteenth century literary societies is that they are no longer “geared toward collective social action or politics” (Long, 2003, p. 59). Long (2003) attributes this difference to changes in political contexts and increased access for women to post-secondary education and the workforce. As white middle class women gained access to universities, book clubs ceased to function as the sole space for education and activism. In addition, as Long (2003) explains:

After a century of broadening options for middle-class women, those older organizations have been overtaken by a host of more specialized and ideologically divided associations that serve the immense variety of women’s contemporary concerns and speak with the

many different voices women now claim. (p. 70)

These associations—which are professional groups, issue-oriented groups, ideological groups, political groups, and special interest groups—address issues such as “equity, advancement, and issues relating work to family, sexual orientation, and other aspects of domestic or private life” (Long, 2003, p. 70), making activism no longer central to reading groups today.

Since most women who participate in contemporary book clubs already have bachelors and masters degrees, they no longer need to prove their competence through book clubs (Long, 2003). Instead, modern reading groups have become “a cultural form that can help women with many of the lacunae, complexities, and contradictions in their lives” (Long, 2003, p. 72), lives which have become complicated in the past century from women’s entry into professional, university, and political arenas. Long (2003) reveals that much like nineteenth century literary societies,

Reading groups still serve middle-class women as time spent for self-improvement, for personal fulfillment, and for exploration of personal identity, but most particularly as time for the development of a self that is engaged with the literary imagination and dedicated to the discussion of ideas, meaning, and values in the company of equally dedicated companions. (p. 73)

The fact that book clubs continue to function not only as spaces for learning but also as spaces for exploring identity and for self-development through literature offers significant pedagogical considerations for teacher education. Professional book clubs, which I discuss in the next section, are especially relevant for novice and pre-service teachers who are still negotiating their place and identity in the workplace and in life (Burbank, Kauchak, & Bates, 2010; Hall, 2009; Kooy, 2006), because they offer a space to discuss these issues with peers.

Traditionally, book clubs have tended to focus on literature, and members read and discuss the same text; however, Hoffert (2006) reports that many adult book clubs have moved

away from this structure. In her surveys of book clubs in libraries across the U.S., she found that many book clubs have a common theme or topic, but each member reads a different title and contributes his or her insights to the discussion, creating a collective learning environment. Reading different texts converges multiple perspectives on an issue or culture, which occasions flowing discussions due to the wealth of information. Text selection also goes beyond novels to include nonfiction, poetry, plays, and media such as films or seeing a live play. Some groups meet over a meal that represents the culture or a scene in the novel or couple discussions with knitting. Other groups invite the author to join the discussion in person, via phone or videoconference or use podcasts or additional literature about the author to inform their discussion (Hoffert, 2006).

New advances in technology have redefined the structure of book clubs. For instance, through television, Oprah's Book Club—the largest book club ever recorded to date—“modeled how to read and talk about books” for an audience of millions, cutting across race and class (Farr, 2005, p. 10). Oprah's Book Club has received criticism for privileging an affective approach to reading over an analytical or academic one. However, Farr (2005) argues that, in enticing millions of viewers to read, Oprah's Book Club has performed an unmatched literacy achievement, “work professional educators and critics have failed to do on a scale anywhere near this one” (p. 72). In addition, Oprah's Book Club has renewed the book club tradition of reading as a collective rather than a solitary act.

In addition to televised book clubs, the Internet has also provided a new space for reading and discussing books. Many online book clubs are part of social networking sites where members—who have never met face-to-face—post reviews or talk about a novel in a threaded discussion. Participation in online reading groups can be easier because “Space and time, which

constrain face-to-face participation, are nonissues on the Internet” (Long, 2003, p. 214).

However, these groups are difficult to sustain, because members tend to fall into patterns of inactivity and moderators expend a lot of effort to keep them engaged—a major difference from face-to-face groups, some of which have met for decades (Long, 2003, p. 214). Nevertheless, technological innovations in book clubs may offer more relevant approaches to twenty-first century, media-savvy young adults and future teachers, while also retaining the traditional aspects of reading and discussing texts in a relaxed and social atmosphere.

Technology, the Internet in particular, has opened up new possibilities of conceiving of and interacting with the world and its variety of cultures and literature. Still, Long (2003) cautions against romanticizing the reach of the Internet as the international online book clubs she observed functioned mostly between English-speaking countries, which “gives them a cosmopolitan feeling, although in general they are within the cultural borders of the old British Empire” (p. 211). In spite of their limitations, innovations in current book clubs offer many options for using new reading formats and integrating technology in book clubs with pre-service teachers.

Pedagogical Considerations of Teacher Book Clubs

Book clubs present a wide array of pedagogical possibilities and limitations to consider for a study of how pre-service teachers make sense of cultures that differ from their own. While teacher book clubs retain the basic structure and social aspects of contemporary reading groups, they are different in that the main purpose of a teacher book club is professional—participants intend for the readings and discussions to influence or inform teaching in some way. In this sense, professional book clubs echo the tradition of nineteenth century U.S. book clubs of linking reading to service. Teacher book clubs tend to function either as professional development for in-

service teachers and as a pedagogical tool in methods courses for pre-service teachers. The focus of teacher book clubs vary depending on the goals of teachers—some read literature, others read professional texts—however, I am particularly interested in book clubs’ potential to expand teachers’ cultural awareness through young adult literature.

Book clubs with pre-service teachers are primarily used as a pedagogical tool in methods courses to help student teachers reach a deepened understanding of an issue relevant to the course topic by reading and discussing a related text. Researchers who use book clubs to challenge cultural stereotypes find that pre-service teachers can become more critical through the process of reading, reflecting—often in writing—and discussing a text with their peers. Flood et al (1994) explain that, “Through book clubs, participants are able to reflect on the ways they think, interpret, and respond to various texts. During these discussions, teachers often reflect upon issues that are critical to their own development as educators” (p. 4). In other words, by reflecting on a text and discussing it with peers who may have other interpretations, a pre-service teacher’s first impression or understanding of a text might be challenged or expanded.

While there are many benefits to including book clubs as part of a class, there are also some limitations to this approach. Because book clubs are assignments within a course, participation is not optional—a notable distinction from conventional book clubs. Inherent in using book clubs as part of a course is the assumption that teachers already have a shared interest in issues related to education in general and the course topic in particular. However, there is a difference between a group formed with the purpose of socializing around a common interest and a group formed in a required course—the latter does not necessarily represent a community. Although most researchers report that using book clubs in their courses was successful, a few also observed some tensions such as members challenging others aggressively or feeling

defensive about their views on a topic as well as resentment at having to collaborate with a group of strangers (Mensah, 2009; Reilly, 2008). Book clubs in methods courses for pre-service teachers also limit the amount of choice available through conventional book clubs because they are not “self-organized structures” (Doll, 1993)—student teachers are not necessarily participating in these book clubs to address an issue they have determined is affecting their lives. Rather, they are exploring a topic in a course in which instructors impose a particular format with the expectation that pre-service teachers will participate as required in order to earn a grade for the course. Consequently, I question, in spite of the deepened understanding that pre-service teachers reach in these book clubs, whether such experiences are so transformative that they will extend to their practice once they begin teaching.

Of particular interest to me were studies that focused on multicultural issues and attempted to create shifts in pre-service teachers’ understandings of the roles race, class, and gender play in educational contexts. All the studies I read concluded that pre-service teachers did experience shifts in their understandings of these issues and the importance of addressing them in education by reading and discussing ethnographies (Mensah, 2009) and multicultural literature (Flood et al, 1994), alongside the critical and theoretical texts that make up the rest of the course (Mosley, 2010). Flood et al (1994) explain:

The selected texts served as springboards for reflecting on and sharing personal experiences. By talking about the feelings, thoughts and actions of literary characters, participants gained insights about cultures of which they had previously had limited knowledge. They felt free to question the cultural experts without fear of being labeled racist because of their limited knowledge. This lack of fear freed participants to discuss cultural stereotypes, prejudices, and differences. With this sense of freedom came a heightened interest in learning more about these cultures. (p. 22)

However, Hall (2009) and Mosley (2010) caution against assuming that these new understandings necessarily translate to teaching. Hall’s (2009) study explored how pre-service

teachers expanded their understanding of culturally responsive literacy practices. The author found that, although these teachers initially agreed that these practices were important, the majority of them admitted they were unlikely to implement them if these were not already part of their future site of employment's practices. As novices, they were more concerned about job security and fitting in the culture of the school.

Likewise, Mosley's (2010) study reveals that even when pre-service teachers take a categorical anti-racist stance, they may not recognize situations that require intervention in their practice or know the appropriate way to intervene. For example, although the white female teacher in Mosley's (2010) case study previously stated that she wanted to teach in anti-racist ways and clearly exhibited signs of constructing an anti-racist identity in/through a book club, when presented with the opportunity to intervene in a conversation in which her students were making racial stereotypes, she missed it. Mosley (2010) explains that during a tutoring session with two students who were reading a multicultural text, "Kelly did not disrupt the racialized statements that they put forward nor was she able to bring the students into a conversation about the social issues in the text" (p. 463). However, a month later in an interview, "she was on the verge of realizing what racial literate practices might look like in that context" (p. 463). Kelly was not able to identify what the issue was or how she might address it until she was prompted to reflect on her experience a month later. Mosley (2010) recognizes that, although her study points to "the difficulty [of] enacting racial literacy in the moment," it also reveals the ways in which, when asked to reflect on the issue, "Kelly drew on racial literacy in her narratives and book club discussions to make sense of her teaching in ways that likely will inform her future interactions with students" (p. 468). Ultimately, Mosley (2010) argues that we must support pre-service teachers' efforts to grow into anti-racist teachers by occasioning opportunities for them to

identify such moments and refer to their own repertoires of readings and discussions to develop anti-racist teaching strategies.

In summary, the advantage of using book clubs in methods courses is that pre-service teachers do gain a deepened understanding of the texts they read and the issues that have an impact on education. In addition, using book clubs as a pedagogical method encourages pre-service teachers to adopt it in their own classrooms (Burbank et al, 2010; Flood, et al, 1994). However, the limitation of book clubs remain that they do not necessarily translate to practice for pre-service teachers (Hall, 2009). This is perhaps because the clubs are not self-organized and remain theoretical—they do not provide a space to apply this knowledge in an educational context. Nevertheless, even though pre-service teachers are concerned with how they might apply their newfound understandings, as Mosley's (2010) study suggests, they benefit from building a repertoire of knowledge about social issues in education that they can access in those moments that require intervention. Book clubs remain one of many effective ways of building these stores of knowledge with pre-service teachers.

Although current iterations of book clubs are not necessarily linked to activism, book clubs' rich history provides a legacy from which educators can draw in order to inform their own professional development and practice. This legacy is important to the work that practicing and pre-service teachers undertake in their careers, as they interact with, nurture, and educate young people. Teachers are agents for their students as they guide and support young people through their formative years. Reading and discussing post-colonial literature in a book club—exploring cultures around the world that have been transformed by and have emerged from a state of colonial oppression—can provide valuable critical insights for future teachers as they reflect on similar local and national issues, as they encounter more internationally diverse students in their

classes, and as they prepare their own students to cultivate a global awareness. Specifically, a study using a professional book club format with pre-service teachers to read, discuss, and write about post-colonial literature in education has the potential to function as literary activism by inviting educators to become culturally well-rounded by cultivating a global awareness, by supporting the creative work of post-colonial authors worldwide, and by giving pre-service teachers the agency to use book clubs and post-colonial literature with their students once they begin teaching. A narrative inquiry of such a study can provide insight as to the narratives pre-service teachers deploy to make sense of the post-colonial cultures they encounter.

In the next chapter, I describe the research design for the study I conducted. I build on the theoretical frameworks of post-colonial theory and pedagogy to examine the possibilities and limitations of using post-colonial young adult literature with pre-service teachers in a book club setting. I discuss narrative inquiry as the methodology that guided the processes of data collection, analysis, and representation.

Chapter Three: Research Design

As a qualitative research method, narrative inquiry seems particularly well suited to a study of a book club—an environment where several narratives are at work simultaneously.

Long (2003) explains:

[P]articipants in book groups create a conversation that begins with the book each woman has read but moves beyond the book to include the personal connections and meanings each has found in the book, and the new connections with the book, with inner experiences, and with the perspectives of the other participants that emerge within the discussion. (p. 144)

A narrative inquiry of a book club would thus focus on the multiple stories at play in that setting, with the understanding that, “Stories function as arguments in which we learn something essentially human by understanding an actual life or community as lived” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 136). As such, Patton’s (2002) foundational questions for narrative inquiry are particularly helpful for guiding this research: “What does this narrative or story reveal about the person and world from which it came? How can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it?” (p. 115). In study of a book club with pre-service teachers who are reading post-colonial young adult literature, these questions apply both to the culture represented in the novel and to the pre-service teachers’ responses to the story. The research questions that guide this particular study focus on how these narratives—the novel and readers’ responses to the novel—interact during a book club discussion as well as any new narratives that emerge:

- What stories, events, or issues emerge for pre-service teachers as they read post-colonial narratives?

- How do these novels serve as entry points into conversations about their own experiences and issues related to global, historical, political issues?
- How do pre-service teachers connect the book club experience, their readings, and responses to their future teaching?

In a narrative study, the participants and the researcher take part in a collaborative relationship, rather than the researcher being somewhat remote from the field, objectively observing the participants. As Bochner (2005) writes, “Instead of spectators, we [researchers] become agents and participants” (p. 66). He goes on to explain, “This conversational, interactive, or communicative model of inquiry redefines how we see ourselves positioned in our research; that is, who we are in relation to the ‘others’ we study and who they are in relation to us” (Bochner, 2005, p. 66). The setting of a book club enables just this sort of relational communication, and a narrative approach supports that the researcher in a book club is also a participant. In this chapter, I describe the methods I used for this study in light of the collaborative aspects of narrative inquiry. I begin with my role as participant observer in the book club, how I selected participants, the process of text selection, and the methods I used to collect and analyze data. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the ethical issues raised in this research and of the limitations of the design of this study.

My Role as Participant Observer

I played multiple roles in this study. As a researcher interested in the potential applications of post-colonial young adult literature, I paid attention to the participants’ responses to, and level of engagement with, the novels selected in the book clubs. As the investigator, however, my role in this inquiry was not only to collect data, but also to facilitate book club discussions, and to recommend post-colonial young adult texts. As a participant observer, I was

also a provisional member of the group and contributed my knowledge about post-colonial literature and high-school teaching to the discussions as well as shared my personal experiences growing up in the post-colonial nation of Haiti and immigrating to the United States. However, I did not belong to the book club in the same way as the pre-service teachers did, mainly because I am not their peer—my role as a researcher always positioned me differently from the participants' own position. Along with my race, gender, and nationality, participants might have also “read” me as an authority figure or viewed me as an expert—in my case, someone with both knowledge about, and experience with, post-colonialism—which can be beneficial to group discussions (Flood et al, 1994; Parker & Bach, 2009). However, as a graduate student, I was also establishing relationships with the participants in the study and could relate as a peer to some of the participants who were graduate students themselves. For instance, one participant, Lindsay, was getting a master's degree and conducting her own research study on pre-service teachers' perceptions of character education, a topic about which she was passionate. She asked if I would give her feedback on the survey questions she had designed. In the following semester, Lindsay also provided me with several articles about young adult literature she had come across in a graduate course, and these proved relevant to my own research. Finally, throughout this project, I was also a student willing to learn from my participants, adjust the study to fit their needs, and face the limits of my own knowledge.

Selecting Participants

Education students with concentrations other than English would probably have benefitted from participating in a book club focused on post-colonial literature; however, given my interests in teacher education and English Language Arts (ELA), the participants in this study were exclusively pre-service English teachers. This purposive sampling strategy supported the

study's objective to explore the possibilities and challenges of using post-colonial narratives for both teacher preparation and in ELA classrooms. In addition, this approach was designed to help the book club function as a professional space where pre-service English teachers could not only expand their own awareness of post-colonial issues and cultures, but also generate ideas for teaching post-colonial young adult literature and begin collecting texts they could use in their future English classrooms. A sampling strategy such as this one certainly holds implications for engaging a broader spectrum of teachers and students in post-colonial issues and cultures, and I discuss these in the "Challenges and Possibilities" section at the end of this chapter (p. 64). In this section, I describe the methods I used to select participants.

In order to recruit participants for my study, I collaborated with English education professors, whom I approached in the summer of 2011. With the faculty's consent, I solicited participants enrolled in pre-service English education courses in the fall of 2011: an undergraduate service-learning course focused on young adult literature, a graduate course for pre-service teachers beginning their student teaching field experience, and an English methods course for undergraduate students in the semester prior to their student teaching. On the first meeting day of each course, I made a five-minute presentation describing my study, with examples of the kinds of texts we would be reading. Pre-service teachers who were interested gave me their contact information to receive more details about the study. I also handed each class flyers with information similar to that of the presentation, including my contact information.

Twenty-five of the pre-service teachers enrolled in the methods and the graduate courses requested more information about the study. Of these, eight responded that they would participate, seven completed consent forms, and five completed all the activities of the study.

Many of the pre-service teachers who were enrolled in the service-learning course were interested in participating in the study as the professor decided that being in the book club would count as a service-learning project. The professor for the course selected five of these students based on their major and preference for joining the book club instead of other service-learning options. Of these five, five completed consent forms, and three completed all the activities of the study.

In order to maintain a small group dynamic and to accommodate a variety of schedules, participants met in two separate book clubs (see Table 1). Book Club A was made up of the five undergraduates enrolled in the service learning young adult literature course. Book Club B was made up of four undergraduate and three graduate pre-service teachers enrolled respectively in the English methods course and in the graduate course. In sum, the participants in this study are twelve self-selected secondary English education undergraduate and graduate students interested in young adult literature and world cultures; they represent a convenience sample of pre-service teachers eligible for this study. I describe the dynamics of each book club and provide a narrative sketch of each participant in Chapter Four (p. 73-87).

Table 1: Book Club Participants

| Book Club A – Service-Learning | | | Book Club B - Methods | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------|----------------|------------------------------|--------|----------------|
| Name | Gender | Classification | Name | Gender | Classification |
| Elnora | F | Undergraduate | Ashley | F | Graduate |
| Joel | M | Undergraduate | Betty | F | Undergraduate |
| Lauren B. | F | Undergraduate | Lauren C. | F | Undergraduate |
| Lexy | F | Undergraduate | Lindsay | F | Graduate |
| Nick | M | Undergraduate | Natalea | F | Graduate |
| | | | Rian | F | Undergraduate |
| | | | Shelby | F | Undergraduate |

Selecting Texts

The setting of book clubs also demands collaboration and book club members need time to build relationships and possibly become a community. In order to nurture this outcome, book group members generated rules of conduct to promote an environment where members can feel safe and supported (Dunne & Goode, 2004). In addition, members collaborated on decisions regarding which books they read as well when, where, and how often they met, and how much of the text to read at each session. In all, each book club read four novels that were provided at no cost to the participants.⁶ Participants in each group met at their convenience once or twice a month in the fall of 2011, with discussions ranging from sixty to ninety minutes. They also had the opportunity to integrate technology in the book club—I created a wiki that connected the readings to additional sources of information such as the author’s biography, geographical and historical information about the country where the story takes place, and so on (see Appendix A, p. 177).

For the purposes of this study, I recommended specific texts that I selected for their geographic diversity and representations of nations with a history of colonization to ensure that post-colonial themes were prevalent in the stories. I also provided a list of novels from which participants could choose and, throughout the study, I continued to search for texts that reflected participants’ interests that I had not anticipated.⁷ Book club members also volunteered several titles (many of which I had not previously read) that they thought would fit the criteria for book selection or that addressed the interests of their particular group. Therefore, although both groups started out reading texts I recommended, as their respective group identities developed, members

⁶ The materials for this study were funded through the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Research Foundation’s Cultivating New Voices of Scholars of Color dissertation fellowship.

⁷ See Appendix B for a complete list of the novels considered for the study.

in each book club moved on to texts that appealed to their particular group; thus each group read different texts, with two titles overlapping across groups (see Table 2). The effectiveness of these stories in creating meaningful discussions about global issues and cultures has provided a basis for recommending them to other educators, as well as provided these pre-service teachers with a small repertoire of novels they can include in their curriculum or share with their own students. I provide a synopsis of each novel at the end of Chapter Four (p. 88-93).

Table 2: Texts Selected (in chronological order)

| Title and Author | Type of Text | Region |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| Book Club A | | |
| <i>Now is the Time for Running</i> by Michael Williams (2011) | Young adult contemporary fiction | Zimbabwe/South Africa |
| <i>Climbing the Stairs</i> by Padma Venkatraman (2008) | Young adult historical fiction | India |
| <i>White Teeth</i> by Zadie Smith (2000) | Adult contemporary fiction | Bangladeshi and Jamaican Immigrants in England |
| <i>The Kite Runner</i> by Khaled Hosseini (2003) | Adult fiction | Afghanistan/U.S. |
| Book Club B | | |
| <i>Climbing the Stairs</i> by Padma Venkatraman (2008) | Young adult historical fiction | India |
| <i>Now is the Time for Running</i> by Michael Williams (2011) | Young adult contemporary fiction | Zimbabwe/South Africa |
| <i>Aya</i> by Marguerite Abouet (2007) | Young adult graphic novel | Côte d'Ivoire |
| <i>Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy</i> by Carlos Eire (2003) | Memoir | Cuba/U.S. |

Data Collection

Narrative inquiry deploys a variety of data collection methods to generate “field texts:” interviews, observations, oral histories, document analysis, auto/ethnography, letters between the researcher and participant(s), and journal writing, among others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Likewise, the format of a book club allows for collecting an assortment of narratives because pre-service teachers make sense of their reading experiences at multiple stages: as they read individually, as they engage in group discussions, and in follow up reflections long after the book club has ended. Four types of field texts were particularly well suited to interpret and retell pre-service teachers’ stories about reading and discussing post-colonial novels: questionnaires, written responses to the novels, group discussions of the novels, and field notes (for samples of research instruments, see Appendix A, p. 176).

The process of collecting data began even before the first book club discussion, with participants completing a questionnaire. The purpose of this survey was to determine the participants’ previous experiences with book clubs and to gather information about pre-service teachers’ awareness of global issues and cultures prior to the start of the study. The questionnaire asked participants to share their reason(s) for joining the book club, to describe their personal and literary experiences with international cultures and issues, and to consider the role young adult literature might play in initiating conversations about these issues with their future students.

Participants also wrote a written response to the novel before each discussion. I asked that participants record in writing their reactions, thoughts, feelings, and questions about the events and characters in the novels, either while they read or after finishing the story, but before we met to discuss the text. Sometimes, participants did not have time to complete their reading responses and did so a few minutes prior to starting the meeting. These responses highlighted the

participants' individual takes on the reading and prepared them to contribute their ideas to the group discussion.

Since I was a participant observer, I also wrote responses to the novels. Because my research questions focus on how pre-service teachers respond to post-colonial stories, I paid special attention to the post-colonial themes, events, and issues present in the novels themselves. I did this both formally and informally, writing my thoughts, feelings, reactions, and interpretations in the margins of the books, flagging relevant passages, and writing short reflexive reading responses to the post-colonial issues I identified. These responses to, and analyses of, the novels helped me identify topics and generate potential discussion questions that I asked during book club conversations. As a set of data, they also document my own subjectivities and motivations.

The audio recordings and transcriptions of group discussions made up another set of field texts. This data documented the ways in which the solitary act of reading became a collective activity (Farr, 2005). Each participant shared his or her individual thoughts about the novel and the conversation expanded as participants responded to one another's ideas. Participants also articulated their knowledge and relevant experiences with regards to the culture and issues represented in the novels or how they negotiated their lack of knowledge about and experience with a particular culture or issue. In addition to serving as a record showing how participants made sense of post-colonial narratives, issues, and cultures for themselves, this set of field texts also documented the ways in which pre-service teachers envisioned using such texts in their future classrooms.

At the end of the study, I e-mailed participants a follow-up questionnaire that asked them to reflect on their individual and group experiences of reading and discussing post-colonial

young adult literature. The survey also asked pre-service teachers to share what they learned through the novels, and the challenges and possibilities they see for implementing book clubs and post-colonial young adult literature in their own teaching.

These sources of data—questionnaires, participants’ written responses to the novels, and audio recordings and transcriptions of the discussions—provided multiple opportunities to examine and retell the narrative experiences of book club participants. However, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind us that “all field texts are selective reconstructions of field experience” (p. 94). The authors emphasize that the researcher’s relationship to the participants and their stories “shape the nature of field texts and establish the epistemological status of them” (p. 94). As such, they recommend that researchers pay attention not only to reconstructing events in their field texts, but also to the contexts that shape them. Field notes played an important role in my consideration of these contexts. I took two sets of field notes. Notes from the discussions focused on the participants’ comments, and I kept track of who said what—a strategy that proved useful while transcribing utterances that often overlapped. I also took notes after each meeting to reflect on the group discussion, including the mood and tone of the conversation as well as my own thoughts and feelings about the meeting and particular participants. In this sense, combining my field notes with transcriptions, participants’ reading responses, and questionnaires helped construct a more complete record of field events.

Data Analysis

Before starting my analysis, I prepared the field texts. For instance, I typed up and transcribed the audio recordings of our discussions, which were sixty to ninety minutes long and whose transcriptions ranged from thirty to forty pages. This phase of preparing data for analysis made clear to me the emphasis narrative inquiry places on the researcher’s understanding that

field texts are not neutral or objective sources from which the researcher extracts the “truth” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Indeed, even transcriptions are a process of selection (Riessman, 2008) from which the context of the recorded interview or conversation is conspicuously absent (Scheurich, 1997). My approach to transcribing was to try to preserve the messiness of book club discussions (Riessman, 2008) by attempting to write everything I heard, including pauses, laughter, noises in the room, and overlapping comments. However, I became aware that my grammatical choices for the participants’ comments were arbitrary and some conversational utterances (“you know” or “like”) were not necessarily pertinent to my analysis. Therefore, the conversations I transcribed are my interpretation of what happened. The quotes from participants featured in the findings chapter (Chapter Five, p. 94) are excerpts from the transcripts and retain participants’ patterns of speech and expressions. In addition to transcriptions, I also typed up participants’ handwritten responses to the novels and generated a list of codes to label each set of field texts.

There are several narrative approaches to analyze field texts. To begin, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, “A narrative inquirer spends many hours reading and rereading field texts in order to construct a chronicled or summarized account of what is contained within different sets of field texts” (p. 131). Their approach is to use literary terms such as “character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator, context, and tone” (p. 131) to code and analyze the field texts as narratives and then reconstruct them into a research text—the final research report. This method draws from the humanities in order to keep the inquiry grounded in the narrative understanding that participants use stories to communicate their experiences and that qualitative researchers are storytellers whose “findings” and “discussion of the findings” tell stories from the field (Holley & Colyar, 2009).

I referred to Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) constant comparison method and Riessman's (2008) thematic analysis approach, "where primary attention is on 'what' is said, rather than 'how,' 'to whom,' or 'for what purposes'" (Riessman, 2008, p. 53-54) in order to begin deriving themes and categories from the data. These approaches were useful for managing the variety of data collected; however, I found it difficult to break group conversations into small units of meaning. It became obvious that a participant's response was uttered in the context of an earlier comment, and I began to analyze larger chunks of discussions focused on a particular topic. In such cases, I referred to Riessman's (2008) dialogic/performance approach to data analysis, which acknowledges that:

Stories told in group settings...typically emerge in fragments, with each speaker adding a thread that expands (or corrects) what another member contributed. Group stories typically lack the neat boundaries—beginnings, middles, and ends—more likely to occur in research interviews. (p. 123)

This approach was valuable for analyzing the ways in which various narratives interacted within each book club, which required close readings not only of what was said but also of the physical and social contexts in which comments were made.

Field notes were particularly useful for examining the ways in which my own subjectivities—my race, gender, and nationality, my experiences, and my role as a researcher—manifested throughout the process of data collection, data analysis, and the final written research text. As Peshkin (1988) warns, "These qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement" (p. 17). I explored these multiple "subjective I's" (Peshkin, 1988) not only to acknowledge the unique perspectives they lend to the research project, but also, and especially, to recognize their limits in order to seek out what might lie beyond the scope of my viewpoint. My field notes were thus an important part of the data collection, not

only to write “rich, thick descriptions” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191) of the book club, but also to monitor my feelings, thoughts, and impressions of the group discussions after each meeting.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical matters permeate a narrative inquiry from start to finish (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and mine is no exception. I discuss these issues at various stages of the study: at the outset (when designing the study, obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and when participants’ signed consent forms), during the data collection (when determining my role as participant observer, the collaborative relationship between participants and myself, our democratic approach to selecting texts, and the fragmented nature of field texts), and when examining data analysis as a selective process. In addition to these, in this section, I discuss issues that came up during these stages as well as the final step of writing the research text.

The ethical aspect of anonymity emerged immediately when I met participants. As we reviewed consent forms and IRB materials, I gave them the choice to use a pseudonym or their real name, recognizing that some participants may prefer to protect their identity in my representations of what they said, while others may want to be credited for the ideas they generated during our discussions. However, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out in their own research, ethical concerns persist throughout the inquiry process. For instance, in the midst of collecting data, I also presented preliminary findings at academic conferences. During one presentation, I quoted a participant to illustrate a finding and referred to her by her real name according to her preference in her consent form. As I said her name, it occurred to me that one of the professors with whom she was currently taking a course was in the audience. What could have been the repercussions of using this participant’s name and words for her and the professor? How might my presentation have affected the professor’s relationship with this student? This

instance highlighted for me the importance of maintaining an ethic of care (Noddings, 2005) throughout the research process: while my goal is to present my findings in a truthful manner, I must also take care, when I represent participants out of context, to do so in a fair manner. In this case, I made sure to tell all the participants about the conference and what I shared with the audience. Participants expressed either discomfort or enthusiasm at being represented in this manner; therefore, I again asked and they reiterated their preferences either to be anonymous or to be identified.

Another ethical issue that emerged during the data collection process revolved around which stories to keep and which to leave out. Beyond the selective process of data analysis where I focused on some stories rather than others in keeping with my research questions, there were also stories I wished to tell but to which I did not necessarily have access for my study. Participants often approached me after our book club discussions when the tape recorder was off, but they continued talking about the novel and themselves. Was this still part of the study? In such cases, which are reflected in my field notes, I had to take care to ask participants whether or not I might include as part of the study the stories they shared with me, but not with the group. In addition, not all participants attended every meeting or completed all the activities the study required. Were their stories still part of the study? In the end, I decided to include the stories of the participants who missed meetings and who did not submit all their reading responses and questionnaires because these absences were indeed part of the life of the book club—the composition of book clubs change over time, and book club members vary in their levels of participation.

The final step in the narrative inquiry process—writing the research text—seeks to address these issues in finding a balance between the needs of the participants, the needs of the

reading audience, and the need for transparency in crafting a research narrative that is an accurate, engaging, and meaningful representation of the field experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recognize that there are at least two audiences to keep in mind while composing a research text: the participants whose stories researchers retell and the research community. They explain that, “Contrary to the sense that research data are audience free, in narrative inquiry, audience is always a presence and interpretively shapes the field texts constructed” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 102). The collaborative relationship between researcher and participants continues during the writing process, as “The two narratives of participant and researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 128). For the purposes of my study, participants reviewed the findings in various stages of completion—for instance, transcriptions of group discussions and drafts of the findings—as well as the final report, to determine whether they were accurate representations of their experiences in the book club.

Although the research community is not as directly involved in the writing process, its presence requires “positioning the work relative to other streams of thought, research programs, and ideologies ... [and the] scholarly conversations we want to engage in” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 136). Narrative inquiry also requires a certain amount of transparency in writing. In my case, this means that I needed to situate myself as researcher and engage my subjectivity through critical, self-reflexive writing, in order to detail the potential ways my interpretation of the data was shaped by my nationality, race, gender, and socioeconomic background. In addition, I needed to make transparent the fact that many stories were left out during the process of writing the final research text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Coulter & Smith, 2009; Scheurich, 1997). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that, “To acknowledge

narrative smoothing is to open another door for the reader. It is a question of being as alert to stories not told as to those that are” (p. 182). The outcome, Coulter and Smith (2009) write, are “Narratives [that] have the effect of evoking dissonance in the reader, enabling the reader to look at educational phenomena with renewed interest and a more questioning stance” (p. 577-578). One way I accomplished this was by deliberately using literary devices to draw the reader in and tell participants’ stories in an engaging way (Holley & Colyar, 2009). Finally, the most important purpose of the final analysis was for it to “connect to larger questions of social significance” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 121). In other words, my analysis of pre-service teachers’ narrative responses to post-colonial young adult literature needed to inform the education research community in meaningful ways.

Challenges and Possibilities

While a narrative approach to these book clubs with pre-service teachers offered many possibilities, the study’s format and the methodological approach also had limitations. My ultimate goal was to examine the narratives of pre-service teachers that emerge from reading post-colonial young adult literature in a book club. However, because this is an exploratory study of a book club, I wanted to leave some space open for participants to become active book club members and perhaps become a self-directed learning collaborative. One way to do this was to have participants decide which books to read. I provided a list of books that met the criteria of the novels under study; however, when participants recommended a particular book or expressed interest in reading about a particular region of the world, I deferred to the group’s interest. This approach posed a risk, as I was not “in control” of all aspects of the study, as a science researcher in a laboratory. Rather, I was interested in the possibilities this collaborative endeavor offered. What resulted was that two of the books we read fell outside of the criteria I devised for post-

colonial young adult literature. However, the discussions of these marginal selections proved fruitful as far as considering them as texts to recommend to young adults, as texts to teach, and perhaps more importantly, as a springboard for discussing international politics and revising cultural stereotypes propagated through news media. These extensions beyond the original the focus of the study, which I discuss in more depth in the next chapter, would not have been possible had I selected each and every novel in advance. Instead, this approach honored the collaborative and self-educating processes of book clubs.

Another limitation of the study is that, although using a book club format is replicable, the findings from such a small number of participants may not be generalized to the teaching population. In addition, the participants volunteered to join the study because they were interested in learning more about post-colonial young adult literature. They were also English majors, which implies, as one participant expressed in her questionnaire, that they might enjoy reading more than the average adult. These realities have implications for researchers interested in using post-colonial literature as part of a course with a broader group of pre-service teachers, who may not have the same dispositions toward literature or interest in post-colonial cultures. Moreover, as a qualitative research method, narrative inquiry facilitates an understanding of the participants and their stories as complex and unique to the particular contexts of the study. A narrative approach thus acknowledges that the participants' stories were uniquely shaped by the particularities of each book club: its format and size; the literature selected; the participants' and the researcher's personal experiences as well as their race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and teacher identities; the length of the study; and the relationships that developed during that process. As such, the findings that emerge out of this study cannot be generalized. However, they might inform new approaches to teacher education from global perspectives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the methods and research design for this dissertation study. In the following chapter, I present the various contexts that inform the study—the regional and institutional contexts where the study took place, a narrative sketch of each of the participants, and a synopsis of each of the novels selected in the book clubs. This first level of data analysis provides the background information needed to understand the findings.

Chapter Four: Contexts of the Study

In this chapter, I present the first of two levels of data analysis: I describe the background information necessary to understand the various contexts that inform the study. I begin with the racial and ethnic demographics of the region and institution where the study took place, the English education programs in which participants were enrolled, and the settings where we held book club meetings. I then provide a brief profile of each of the participants, which I constructed from their pre- and post-questionnaires, book club discussions, and my field notes, and which illustrate participants' lived and literary experiences with cultures outside their own. Next, I discuss each group's approach to discussing post-colonial young adult literature, and I conclude with synopses of the novels each group selected.

Regional and Institutional Contexts

This narrative inquiry took place at the flagship campus of a major state university located in the U.S. South. In order to protect the anonymity of the research participants, I have changed the names of the city and university where I conducted the study to pseudonyms—Bridgetown and Lake University, respectively. The demographic data reveal a disparity between the racial and ethnic makeup of Lake University's student and faculty population and the city of Bridgetown. The statistics that follow maintain the racial and ethnic categories originally reported.

According to the most recent U.S. Census, in 2010, Bridgetown had a population of over two hundred thousand people, representing 52% female and 48% male individuals. Of these, 55% were black, 38% were white (non-Hispanic), 3% were of Hispanic or Latino origin, 3% were Asian, and the remaining 1% was mixed race and Native American.

According to Lake University's Office of Budget and Planning, the most recent available demographic information for students enrolled at the university was for the fall of 2010. Lake University only mirrored Bridgetown's demographics in terms of gender: of the 28,771 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled, 51% were female and 49% were male. In contrast to the city's population, of the total student population for that semester, 75% were white, 9% were black (non-Hispanic), 6% were non-resident aliens, 4% were Hispanic, and 3% were Asian/Pacific Islander. Of the remaining 4% of students enrolled, 2% either did not identify their race or ethnicity or identified as mixed race and American Indian. There may be several explanations for the disparity between Bridgetown and Lake University's demographics, including but not limited to the location of a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) located in a nearby suburb, the status of Lake University as the flagship campus for the state, and that students enrolled at the university represent numerous cities throughout the state.

The faculty demographics at Lake University mirrored neither the city nor the student population in 2010. Of the 1,236 of instructional full-time and part-time faculty (excluding graduate teaching assistants) working at the university in 2010, only 35% were female as compared to 65% of male faculty. 78% of all instructional faculty were white, 10% were Asian, 5% were non-resident aliens, 3% were black, 2% were Hispanic, and the remaining 2% were American Indian or did not identify their race, ethnicity, or nationality. These statistics show that Lake University's student population was about equal where gender is concerned for 2010, but this was not reflected in the demographics of the instructional faculty. The racial demographics between students and faculty were somewhat similar, with the percentage of black and Asian faculty reversed (more Asian faculty than students, less black faculty than students). There was

no information available at the time of the study for the demographics of graduate teaching assistants or support staff.

The racial and ethnic demographics of the city and the university where participants were enrolled at the time of the study illustrate a limited international diversity. By extension, these demographics imply that students had restricted opportunities within Lake University and Bridgetown to engage international cultures firsthand. These were the contexts of the study, which had implications for how participants might engage the global perspectives they would encounter in the post-colonial young adult novels selected for the book clubs.

Curricular Contexts

Although the research participants in this study might not have had opportunities to participate in lived experiences of international cultures at Lake University, the undergraduate English education program in which nine of them were enrolled did provide them with some opportunities to engage in literary experiences of global issues and cultures. In this program, undergraduates major in a content area such as English, History, Mathematics, Biological Sciences, Chemistry, French, or Spanish. Starting their sophomore year, students take a series of five curriculum and instruction courses in the department in which the teacher education program is located. These courses are paired with similar courses in their subject areas. Students are also required to complete 120 hours of field experience observations in local middle and high schools, in addition to a semester of student teaching in their final semester, to earn their teaching certifications. English majors have the option but are not required to take courses such as “Literature and Ethnicity,” which focuses on ethnic literature in the U.S., “Introduction to African-American Literature,” and “Language Development and Diversity.” Although the course titles do not necessarily indicate it, some courses such as “Modern Criticism,” which several of

the participants had taken, sometimes focused on post-colonial theory and literature, depending on the professor who taught the course. English majors are required to take an Adolescent Literature course, which is sometimes offered through the education department.

Three of the participants in this study were enrolled in a 12-month graduate program, in which pre-service teachers can earn a teaching certificate and a Master of Arts in Teaching degree. In this program, students are grouped in cohorts according to content areas such as English, mathematics, social studies, biology, chemistry, and physics. They take teaching methods and foundations courses with education faculty and student teach for two semesters in local middle and high schools. The program also requires that students conduct an action research project where they design a study, collect and analyze data, and write up their findings.

Together, these programs provide the curricular contexts of the study. By offering a forum to read and discuss post-colonial young adult literature, this study provided an additional opportunity for students to engage in literary experiences of global issues and cultures.

Timeline

My first meeting with participants was an hour-long information session prior to start of the book club during which participants reviewed and/or completed Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms and decided on their first book selection. The subsequent five meetings focused on book discussions ranging from sixty to ninety minutes. Each book club selected four or five novels and met once or twice a month in the fall of 2011. Book Club B met once in the spring of 2012 (see Table 3). The first book club discussion served as an introduction in which participants got to know each other and myself as well as generate rules for group discussion. During that session, participants turned in the pre-study questionnaire, which asked them about their current interests in and understandings of global issues and cultures, and which I provided prior to the

meeting. In that first session, I also gave a brief orientation to relevant terms and issues in post-colonial literature and the group discussed the first novel they chose. The subsequent three or four sessions focused on discussing the texts selected. Book club discussions were open-ended, with discussion questions generated by participants and myself, during which participants referred to their written responses to the novels. After the final discussion session, I emailed participants a post-study questionnaire focused on what they had learned from their book club experience and the degree to which each might implement book clubs and/or post-colonial literature in the future.

Table 3: Timeline

| Meetings | Book Club A | Book Club B |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Information Session | 9/16/11 Introductions, consent forms | 10/3/11 Introductions, consent forms |
| First Meeting | 9/26/11 <i>Now is the Time for Running</i> | 10/17/11 <i>Climbing the Stairs</i> |
| Second Meeting | 10/3/11 <i>Climbing the Stairs</i> | 11/7/11 <i>Now is the Time for Running</i> |
| Third Meeting | 10/17/11 <i>White Teeth</i> , parts 1 and 2 | 11/21/11 <i>Aya</i> |
| Fourth Meeting | 10/24/11 <i>White Teeth</i> , parts 3 and 4 | 1/23/12 <i>Waiting for Snow in Havana</i> |
| Fifth Meeting | 11/7/11 <i>The Kite Runner</i> | |

Setting

The very first meeting for Book Club A took place in a multimedia study room in the university’s library. In my field notes, I reflect:

I had picked the venue because I needed a quiet space to record our conversation, and the students did not have a plan other than to meet at the library—I had worried that without my initiative, we would have ended up in a public, high traffic area, making the recording difficult or wasted time wandering through the library in search of a quiet space.

We sat around a conference table, and had access to a computer and a large television screen mounted on the wall. During that first session, we easily integrated technology in our discussion by looking up information on the country about which we read. However, due to the library's "first come, first serve" policy, I could not secure the same room for future meetings. In addition, the room felt too formal, like a classroom, and I wanted participants to feel at home and forget the tape recorder sitting at the center of the table. I wanted for our meetings to be informal, and the space needed to invite participants to relax. I suggested we meet next in one of the lounges in the College of Education building. In my field notes from that night, I described this space as "a large room, with a rug over the tiled floor, and a large desk and bookcase by the entrance door." I even noticed that there was "a very tall, leafy green plant [in the corner], and a hodgepodge of armchairs that lend the room a cozy feel. Filled with chatty pre-service teachers gathered around a coffee table, it almost feels like a living room." The atmosphere definitely felt more social than the library and, overall, there was more overlap in talk, which more resembled conversation. All the remaining book club meetings for each group took place in that room.

In the following sections, I introduce the participants in each book club. I first describe the individual groups followed by profiles of each participant, which I constructed from a variety of field notes. These brief descriptions provide a summary of the information participants shared in various field texts regarding their lived and literary experiences with cultures that are different from theirs prior to starting the book club, their reasons for joining the book club, their level of participations during discussions and, whenever available, their reflections on the book club experience. These group and participant profiles provide a glimpse into participants' attitudes and dispositions toward the texts we read and inform the individual comments and group discussions featured in Chapter Six (p. 157), where I discuss the findings.

Book Club A

In many ways, the participants in Book Club A (see Table 4) were already a community in the making—they were enrolled in a young adult literature course together, and the service-learning component of the course required them to write and reflect together on their group’s experience with young adult literature. Some of the participants also knew each other from previous classes or extracurricular university activities they had in common, which certainly shaped the sense of familiarity within the group.

Table 4: Participants in Book Club A

| Name | Gender | Race | Years at the University |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|--------------------------------|
| Elnora | Female | Black | 1 – Undergraduate |
| Joel | Male | White | 2 – Undergraduate |
| Lauren B. | Female | White | 3 – Undergraduate |
| Lexy | Female | White | 4 – Undergraduate |
| Nick | Male | White | 4 – Undergraduate |

At the start of our first meeting, I reviewed some terms and themes related to post-colonial theory and literature (e.g., defining “colonial” and “post-colonial,” listing the countries involved, defining “post-colonial literature,” and reviewing themes in post-colonial literature such as the relationship between colonizer and colonized, identity, and diaspora). I also suggested we generate some group rules for discussion. Nick humorously offered some teacher-style rules such as “No shouting” and “Don’t interrupt,” and the others agreed that they were comfortable with not having rules until the need arose for establishing one. I added the rules that everybody should contribute and that no one person should dominate the conversation. None of the research participants had been part of a book club prior to this one and seemed unsure as to how to proceed. After one participant read her written response out loud to the group, I encouraged participants simply to have a conversation about the novel. In spite of this tentative beginning, it became quickly clear in this first meeting that most of the participants were

experienced at discussing literature. In my reflections on our first meeting, I noted how “they went for the figurative, the allegory, the metaphor, [and] examined the author’s motivation, but at the same time they also shared personal stories about growing up, school, [and] their own teachers.” Over the course of our meetings, book club discussions included more talk about history, politics, and teaching approaches to the stories we read, as well as more personal stories relating to the stories. In the following sections, I provide profiles of each of the participants of Book Club A, which I constructed from various field texts.

Elnora

Elnora was the only participant of color in this study. She came to most meetings straight from work, still wearing her uniform—a bright blue polo shirt with red lettering and khaki pants. I found her to be the most reserved participant in her group and, in my field notes from our first meeting, I noticed that she “didn’t speak a lot, but when she did, she was making connections and you could tell that she’s really thinking about the material.” Her written responses were always thoughtful, and she often did additional research on the historical contexts of the novels without being prompted. Her reasons for joining the book club were that it would fit her busy schedule and she wanted to learn more about post-colonial literature. In her pre-study questionnaire, she explained that, “Global issues have always interested me and it seems like post-colonial literature is based on that so I went on ahead and decided to make this group my first choice.” Although she was not aware of the post-colonial genre, she did recall a World Literature unit in tenth grade when she read stories about British colonialism in India. Since then, she has independently read several international titles such as *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, *Left to Tell*, and *The Dancing Girls of Lahore*. In her

answer to what she perceived the role literature might play in initiating and informing conversations about international issues and cultures, she wrote:

Literature allows people to see into someone else's head. When you watch the news, it's really easy to become desensitized to all that is going on [in] the world. ...However I think reading a book that deals with an issue really makes you feel as if you are experiencing it yourself.

In her post-study questionnaire, she described her experience in the book club as a positive one, where discussing the novels with the rest of the group helped her to “see the post-colonial aspects of the novels we read” and that now she knows “what post-colonial young adult literature is” and “how easy it is to incorporate these novels into a classroom.”

Joel

In his pre-study questionnaire, Joel explained that he decided to participate in the book club because he thought “it would be interesting to read some postcolonial literature.” Although he had never been part of a book club, in our first meeting he shared that he had once participated in a book discussion with his youth group when they read *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis. He remembered enjoying the experience of the reading group and found it “interesting to see how everyone approaches something differently and to get everyone's viewpoint” on the story. He indicated in the pre-questionnaire that literature is “a great way of shifting a student's paradigm and getting them to see things in a different light.” Joel was well read and fluent in talking about global issues and politics. He was also outspoken and, combined with his extensive knowledge, participated at a high level in our group discussions. While he often took more frequent and longer turns than the other participants, we all benefitted from the information his previous knowledge contributed to the discussion. For instance, Lexy commented in her post-study questionnaire that, “Joel always provided us with a short history lesson and enlightened our understanding of the novel.” Likewise, Lauren B. noted, “I am not

well versed in world history, so having access to Joel’s extensive knowledge was a treat for me.” In our first session, Joel shared that he had taken a World Literature course in high school where he read *Things Fall Apart* and *Cry, the Beloved Country*. At the time of the study, he was also enrolled in an English course with a professor who often talked about post-colonial issues. He often referred to his discussions in that class to shed light on the texts we were discussing and mentioned that class would be reading Salman Rushdie’s children’s book *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Although Joel did not submit a post-study questionnaire, in our last book club session, he expressed interest in continuing the book club beyond the study.

Lauren B.

In our information session, Lauren B. shared that she enjoyed reading young adult literature and that, “Even being twenty-on years old now, ...my first place to go in the bookstore is to the teen section.” Although she had never participated in a book club prior to this one, Lauren B. was skilled at discussing the novels in critical and self-reflexive ways as well as at attentively listening and responding to her peers. In our first book club meeting, Lauren B. determined that her experience with reading authors of color began in a Western Civilization course she took in high school, where she read *An Ordinary Man* by Paul Rusesabagina—the man whose life is the basis for the film *Hotel Rwanda*. She had taken a Modern Criticism course that focused on post-colonial theory and literature, and was able to draw from her experience in that class as well as her high school course to contribute insightful comments about the novels we read. In her post-study questionnaire, she stated that, “the majority of what we covered in that [Modern Criticism] class was theory-based. We primarily read through essays and articles in a textbook.” She added, “Through this book club, I realized I could take that concept and apply it to a secondary education classroom.” For Lauren B., the book club merged what she had learned

in her English and education courses and allowed her to develop ways that she might apply them as a teacher—she shared that she would probably use an inquiry approach to explore these texts with students and that she would also consider using the novels we did not read but that were featured on the list I provided.

Lexy

Lexy always showed up early to book club meetings, which gave us a chance to get to know each other a little. I learned that she was the president of her sorority, and as such, lead a very busy life. Reading was, for her, a way to get “out of the bubble.” In her post-study questionnaire, she indicated that she came to view her time in the book club as “a bi-monthly reprieve from the hustle and bustle of my life.” Her outgoing personality and passionate views kept our discussions lively, and her frank remarks were always refreshing. Lexy was also able to contribute valuable critical insights to our discussions because she had taken the same Modern Criticism course as Lauren B. In her pre-study questionnaire, she explained that she read “scholarly essays written by Edward Said and other authors found in *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*” as well as novels such as *Disgrace* and *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow*. Lexy had also taken a Caribbean Studies course, which included several novels written by Caribbean authors:

Black Shack Alley by Joseph Zobel, *Inconsolable Memories* by Edmundo Desnoes, and *The Harder they Come* by Michael Thelwell. In this class, we discussed the problems and cultures presented in these texts. We talked a lot about the colonial and post-colonial history of these cultures to better understand the messages coming through the texts.

In addition to her awareness of these issues through literature, Lexy listed her field placements throughout her program of study as key experiences with cultures other than her own. She had also traveled extensively with her family throughout Central America and the Caribbean, and was part of a study abroad program in Spain in both middle and high school.

Nick

I did not get to know Nick as well as the other research participants—he attended the first three of five book club meetings but did not complete the study. However, in our time together and from the variety of data collected, I learned that Nick had lived in the Northeast and in the South of the U.S., where he attended several culturally diverse schools. He decided to join the book club because, like Lexy and Lauren B., he was enrolled in both the young adult literature course and the undergraduate English education methods course I visited at the beginning of the term, and the novels we read could apply to his work in these courses. In his pre-study questionnaire, Nick indicated that few of the literature he read throughout his schooling had focused on global issues and cultures. However, he recognized that, “[b]eing able to appreciate and understand others through literature is necessary to being a part of the international community.” During our book club discussions, I found Nick to be both friendly and warm, but sometimes also quiet and thoughtful. In my field notes from the first book club meeting, I observed that, “Nick was a good listener—he knew when to hang back and not always jump in.” He credited his high school history teacher for his ability to productively engage in our group discussions. In our first book club meeting, he explained that his teacher was “the one who prompted us to go search out things on our own and develop our own opinions. . . . We would do reading outside the class and the class would be all discussion.” Nick actively contributed by asking insightful questions of the text that often related his concerns for his future students.

Book Club B

Book Club B started a few weeks later than the first group. We met for an information session in the same office suite as Book Club A, and the research participants decided to hold all book club meetings there on Monday afternoons. Book club B counted three graduate students

and four undergraduates who were in the final year of their program (see Table 5). As such, conversations in Book Club B revolved a lot around students and teaching. In addition to teaching, participants focused on the parts of the stories that were evocative for them, and our conversations were informal and lighthearted.

Table 5: Participants in Book Club B

| Name | Gender | Race | Years at the University |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|------------------------------------|
| Ashley | Female | White | 1 – graduate |
| Betty | Female | White | 5 – undergraduate, non-traditional |
| Lauren C. | Female | White | 3 – undergraduate |
| Lindsay | Female | White | 5 – graduate |
| Natalea | Female | White | 5 – graduate |
| Rian | Female | White | 3 – undergraduate |
| Shelby | Female | White | 5 – undergraduate, returning |

This group was not as structured as Book Club A. Perhaps it was because their attendance was not mandated by a class or a grade, but participants’ attendance fluctuated. At least one person was absent at each of the first three meetings, and only three participants attended the last meeting. Participants had various reasons for not attending, including unexpected opportunities to sit in on a school board meeting or to attend a professional development workshop, health issues, or prior engagements. With seven members, myself not included, these absences were fortuitous in some ways—different participants were absent from week to week, giving those who were present more opportunities to take turns contributing to the discussion. Like the previous group, we also generated group rules during the first session, including taking turns to speak, doing research on the novels prior to the meetings, and that everyone should contribute equally and avoid dominating the conversation. Similar to Book Club A, there were occasional instances where one participant would dominate the discussion. For example, one participant noted in her post-study questionnaire, that one of the challenges in the book club was that “Sometimes I found it challenging to not talk the whole time about my own ideas!” Similarly,

another participant from that same group shared that, “There was a group member who I felt talked maybe a little too much and made it difficult for everyone to participate, but other than that I really enjoyed the book club structure.” Nevertheless, the bulk of our conversations were lively and most participants actively engaged in the discussions.

Ashley

Ashley was one of the pre-service teachers earning a Master of Arts in Teaching degree with a concentration in English. She was student teaching in an eighth grade class at the time of the study. She indicated in her pre-study questionnaire that she joined the book club because she wanted to expand her knowledge of young adult literature, “so I can recommend books [to students] or integrate them into a unit.” During our information session, she shared that the teacher in whose class she was student teaching counted on her to recommend books to students for the school’s Accelerated Reader program, and Ashley thought it would be helpful to expand her reading experience with multicultural books. For Ashley, the post-colonial focus of the book club provided her with an opportunity to read literature that was not represented in her school’s curriculum growing up. In her pre-study questionnaire, she explained:

I think reading books from other cultures throughout the year and not just within a specific unit, benefits students. It exposes them to a variety of cultures and opens up discussions and questions. I know when I was growing up, I wasn’t exposed to a lot of different cultures in our ELA [English Language Arts] classes.

Ashley noted that she had majored in Political Science and took several classes in international relations for her undergraduate degree. However, as far as international literature went, most of her secondary and undergraduate classes were in British Literature. She wrote, “I don’t remember discussing authors of color who aren’t from the U.S. Most authors I’ve read that are of color are from the U.S.” In her post-study questionnaire, Ashley expressed that discussing the novels with peers “added depth to our book experiences...I felt everyone was able to bring

different perspectives. Especially those who traveled/lived abroad.” She added that being part of the book club “opened my eyes to different types of books we could use in the classroom and gave me a larger base of books I could read,” and that she hopes to implement a book club when she starts teaching.

Betty

Betty was a non-traditional student: during our information session, she shared with the group that she has two children who are adults, and that most of her exposure to literature came from reading alongside her daughter throughout her secondary education. Betty described herself as a “late bloomer” in terms of her reading experience and that she was “playing catch up.” Impressively, however, Betty was pursuing a double major in English and History and earning a teaching certification in both subject areas. She stated that she liked the way English and History complemented each other and that her history professors have often used literature instead of history books. Betty drew on her history and literature courses as well as her lived experiences to contribute thoughtful and critical insights to the novels we read. In her pre-study questionnaire, Betty explained that she had also extensive experience with cultures outside her own. Prior to pursuing her degree, Betty worked in the Air Force and lived for a number of years in the U.S. Southwest and in Okinawa, Japan. She has also traveled extensively to Europe. At the start of the study, Betty had already read several international and post-colonial titles for her classes:

I remember reading a little of Jamaica Kincaid’s material in that [Modern Criticism] class. I also read *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart* (one for a history class and the other for a literature class) as well as *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*.

In addition, she had read several international novels for her personal enjoyment, including *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *Life of Pi*. In her post-study questionnaire, Betty stated that she valued the book club because, “Meetings with peers were helpful for coming up

with ideas for teaching, for recommending books to students, and for anticipating controversial topics that might arise in the classroom.” Her biggest challenge in the study was finding the time to read, but she found that, ultimately, it was important “to learn to balance my workload and find time for enjoyable activities such as reading for pleasure.”

Lauren C.

In our first book club meeting, Lauren C. shared that she decided to join the book club because she loves travel and world literature, which is a subject that she would like to teach in the future. Although she had never taken a World Literature course and was not familiar with “post-colonial” as a literary genre prior to starting the book club, she had read Indian novels such as *The Namesake* and *Jasmine*. She was also familiar with literature that explores U.S.

immigrants’ experiences:

My freshman year of college, I took a class called Race in Literature. We discussed some texts written by immigrants to the United States, describing their experiences assimilating to American culture. We looked at the perspectives of Hispanic women, an Indian woman, and a Japanese family.

Lauren C. was majoring in English, with a minor in Spanish and Art History. In her pre-study questionnaire, she mentioned that she had lived in Italy for a summer to fulfill her Art History minor. She stated that the experience “allowed me to become immersed in the culture there and learn a little about what it is like to live in a foreign country.” She has studied Spanish for eight years and, in the process, learned “a lot about Spanish and Hispanic culture.” These experiences were especially relevant when we discussed *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy*, and Lauren C. contributed many thought-provoking insights to the conversation. In her post-study questionnaire, she stated that she benefitted from joining the book club:

I think it was beneficial to get to interact with other pre-service teachers outside of the classroom. It’s always good to get to hear other ideas and methods for implementing literature in the classroom. It also opened me up to a new genre, and schools are

becoming more and more culturally diverse now, so I can see some students really being able to relate to the characters in these books. And I think students from the United States could also really benefit from reading these books, because it helps them to become more culturally aware and culturally sensitive.

Lauren B. expressed interest in using a book club approach with her students because the potential book clubs have to “deepen the learning environment in my future classroom.”

Lindsay

Like Ashley, Lindsay was a pre-service teacher earning a Master of Art in Teaching, with a concentration in English. She was student teaching in both the fall and spring semesters.

Lindsay decided to join the book club so that she could have some updated materials to recommend to students and because she was interested in international relations and studies.

Lindsay also wanted to build a practice of reading for pleasure during the school year. In her pre-study questionnaire, she noted that she wanted to “be more engaged in novels even while I am teaching.” She added, “It is also a nice change to take in information in a leisurely way vs.

graduate courses and teaching.” Lindsay had traveled to Barcelona, Spain in 2008 and to Liberia, West Africa in the spring of 2011. The latter experience provided Lindsay with many insights she shared with the group when we read *Aya*, which is set in a neighboring country. In addition to these experiences, Lindsay cited her student teaching placement as a site of cultural diversity:

“In the high school I currently teach at, the demographics are mainly African American, Mexican/Latin and Asian.” She also had taken an undergraduate English and a Women and

Gender Studies courses that included world literature such as *The Kite Runner*, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga, and *Dreaming in Cuban* by Cristina Garcia. In her pre-study questionnaire, she noted:

In both classes we discussed international issues, oppression, immigration, etc. Honestly, I devote much of my understanding of the Middle Eastern cultures, Chinese culture,

African culture and Latin American culture to the guided readings and discussions of the books I listed above.

When it came to teaching, Lindsay saw many connections between the texts we read in the book club and her passion for character education, especially concerning peace studies. In her post-study questionnaire, she explained how students might benefit from reading post-colonial young adult literature:

The main possibility is that students will gain a wider perspective of the world and a more open eye into the value of human life that, I think, should exist for all people, everywhere. I think there is also the possibility that students will be less quick to judge others who are different than them. My hope is also for a possibility that students will cherish diversity.

Lindsay's lived and literary experiences made her a valuable member of the book club. Her collegiate, but passionate attitude made her contribute as thoughtfully as when she listened and learned from other participants' comments.

Natalea

Like Ashley and Lindsay, Natalea was also earning her Master of Art in Teaching degree with a concentration in English. At the start of the study, she was student teaching in a ninth grade classroom, and wanted to read books that her students might enjoy. In our information session, she acknowledged, "Most of the stuff that I've read is either out of date—they're not going to enjoy it—or, to be honest, I'm a middle class white girl—they're not going to exactly like my taste. I understand this." In her pre-study questionnaire, she stated that in her own schooling, she had "barely studied non-American authors of color in a school setting, if at all," and, as she had only read post-colonial and colonial literature from U.S. American and British perspectives, she wanted to read texts written by authors who were insiders to the culture represented. She explained the importance of being able to recommend such texts to her students:

Much like myself, students can be unaware or misinformed about international issues and cultures. Getting them to read literature by authors from those cultures who understand the issues in a personal way can more efficiently connect the students to them and allow them [students] to see them [those cultures] in the best light: the one of the people from that culture, rather than as an outsider looking in with their preconceived notions and ideas from his or her own culture.

In her post-study questionnaire, she stated that she found the book club to be useful in terms of “finding books and ways to connect to future students I will have.” She recognized that being from a “privileged race, I sometimes forget that I can’t just connect with my students because I want to; I have to make an effort to find that connection.” In that way, reading and discussing post-colonial young adult novels with peers helped Natalea find ways to establish these connections with her future students.

Rian

Rian was in the final year of her program and a semester away from student teaching. At the time of the study, her field placement allowed her to observe grades nine through twelve that semester. During our first meeting, she said that she decided to join the book club, “because I haven’t read young adult literature since I was ten ((laughs)). And I’d rather start getting back into it ... in a genre that’s underrepresented in school.” In her pre-study questionnaire, Rian indicated that she agreed with the NCTE/IRA Standard 2, which states, “Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g. philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience” (p. 22). Rian explained:

Looking at literature this way is important to teaching students how to understand cultures and societies they may not encounter on a daily basis. This is clearly important to my future teaching not only because it is a Standard, but because my goal is to allow my students to be able to navigate a diverse society.

Rian acknowledges, however, that she has had “little experience talking about immigrant or international issues” or “talking about works of authors of color who are not from the U.S.,”

although she does remember taking “a criticism course which focused on postcolonial theory for a few weeks.” Rian did not submit a post-study questionnaire, so it is not clear whether the texts we read in the book club satisfied her expectations for post-colonial young adult literature. However, she noted in two of her written responses that she would recommend *Now is the Time for Running* and *Waiting for Snow in Havana* to students who might find it relevant. In both my observations and in the transcripts of book club discussions, I noted that Rian participated the least in our discussions. It was not apparent whether this was due to the large size of the group or whether she preferred to listen rather than talk. Nevertheless, when Rian did speak, she proved to be skilled at analyzing characters and plot structures, she made important connections, and asked insightful questions.

Shelby

In our first book club meeting, Shelby explained that she decided to join the book club because she did not know what post-colonial literature was before I came to her class to recruit participants, and she wanted to find out more about the genre. In her pre-study questionnaire, she indicated that although she had never taken any courses on world or post-colonial literature, she had learned about international cultures through her Religious Studies courses:

Many of the works that I have read by men and women of other cultures discussing international issues were touched on in my Hinduism class, theory of religion class, and various other courses that brought in international literature without exactly specifying it as such.

She specified in her questionnaire that she envisioned using the novels we read in the book club in her classroom “to help introduce, discuss, and explain immigrant and international issues” to students. She strongly believed that:

Young adult literature acts as a mediator and a facilitator when discussing cultural issues. It is important to give young students the tools with which to look into the outside world

and interpret what is going on. It is also important to expose these students to the reality of life in many different areas of the world, no matter how harsh or different.

Unfortunately, Shelby was only able to attend two of the four book club sessions—she was ill when we discussed *Now is the Time for Running* and had to attend a profession development workshop when we talked about *Waiting for Snow in Havana*. In addition, Shelby was hired as a ninth grade teacher in the spring semester and could not complete the post-study questionnaire. However, when Shelby did attend the meetings, she made thoughtful comments and asked insightful questions. Moreover, Shelby came to these meeting having done additional research about the novels and their historical contexts. Although she did not attend all the meetings, Shelby did read the novels and submitted her written reflections on most of them. As a new teacher, she included these novels in her classroom library and let me know in an email that two of her students had already checked out the graphic novel *Aya*.

Taken together, the profiles of each participant and each book club highlight the situational contexts of the study. The differences in the compositions and rhythms of the two groups did not detract from but, in fact, contributed to the goals of the project. For instance, the groups had different approaches of discussing the novels—Book Club A’s discussions tended to focus more on history and politics, and Book Club B focused on students and teaching. Both groups however were skilled at discussing and analyzing novels, and participants thoughtfully engaged the post-colonial narratives we read. In their post-study questionnaires, participants in both groups expressed that their experiences in the book clubs were positive and that the biggest challenge was finding the time to read the novels thoroughly. Together, these groups uncovered various possibilities and potential challenges for using post-colonial young adult literature in education settings.

Synopses of Text Selections

In this section, I offer synopses of the texts the participants selected for their book club as additional background information necessary for understanding the comments and discussions reported in the findings. I briefly describe the central characters in and the plot of each of the six selections. I begin with the first two texts, which were also novels that both groups had in common: *Now is the Time for Running* (Williams, 2011) and *Climbing the Stairs* (Venkatraman, 2008). In addition, the research participants in Book Club A read the adult fiction novels *White Teeth* (Smith, 2000) and *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2003), and Book Club B opted to read the graphic young adult novel *Aya* (Abouet, 2007) and the memoir *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy* (Eire, 2003). Taken together, these texts offer a variety of perspectives, geographical locations, and historical moments for readers to consider.

Now is the Time for Running

Now is the Time for Running (Williams, 2011) is a young adult novel narrated by Deo, a 15-year-old boy living in the village of Gutu, in contemporary Zimbabwe. In the opening chapters of the novel, Deo witnesses the decimation of his hometown and its people by soldiers who accuse the villagers of opposing the current president's re-election. Deo and his brother Innocent narrowly escape the attack and make their way to the border where they cross illegally into South Africa in search of their father. Deo is resilient because he has to take care of Innocent who has a disability that remains unnamed throughout the story. Through the brothers' journey, readers witness two countries in the "aftermath of colonialism" (Hickling-Hudson, et al., 2004, p. 3): In contemporary post-colonial Zimbabwe, there is a food shortage, a totalitarian government, military oppression, and hyperinflation; in South Africa, Deo and his brother find more opportunities to earn a living, but are met with xenophobia and eventually homelessness because

of their status as refugees and illegal immigrants. The narrative is fast paced and moving as Deo tries to overcome a series of obstacles, sustained only by his love of and talent for soccer.

Climbing the Stairs

Climbing the Stairs (Venkatraman, 2008) is a young adult novel—a coming of age story set in India in the 1940's. The story centers on the main character, Vidya, a 15 year old girl overcoming gender bias in an affluent, but conservative household. The narrative also describes the role India played in World War II, with the largest all-volunteer force participating in the war, at the same time that the country was fighting for its own independence from Britain. Feminist concerns run strongly throughout the narrative as much of the novel takes place indoors and focuses on the sheltered lives of women. The narrative begins with Vidya as both an insider and outsider in her own nuclear family because of her gender—her father is fairly liberal and makes allowances that contradict her mother's more traditional and conservative ideas of what girls can and cannot do. However, when Vidya's father is severely injured in a peace protest and can no longer provide for his family, her mother finds herself suddenly helpless and follows the tradition that says she must live with her husband's family. When Vidya moves to her grandfather's house, she goes from having her own room and her own bed to living in the women's quarters in the "downstairs" portion of the house, where she sleeps on a mat on the floor and finds her days arranged around cleaning, cooking, babysitting, and serving the men their meals. However, *Climbing the Stairs* is a narrative of agency, and readers follow Vidya as she negotiates the socio-cultural limits placed on her because of her gender. In addition, in this novel, the author complicates any simple dichotomy of oppressor–oppressed as the story reveals that oppression takes multiple forms, including colonization and racism, but also classism and sexism.

White Teeth

Smith's (2000) best selling debut novel, *White Teeth*, presents a frank approach to a multicultural England that focuses on immigration, identity, dislocation, history, culture, and generational conflict; all of which are weaved throughout the plot and reflected in the existence of multifaceted characters. While the novel marks a departure from the criteria I devised for post-colonial young adult literature—the book is an adult fiction, but features some young characters—Lexy recommended it to the members of Book Club A, and they decided to read it. The novel, in keeping with post-colonial fiction, revolves around the lasting impact that a colonial history has on the present in both the formerly colonized and colonizing countries. This narrative follows three families—the Joneses, the Iqbals, and the Chalfens—whose histories unfold and intertwine across three countries—England, Bangladesh, and Jamaica—and over three generations. Central to the story is the character of Samad Iqbal, a Bangladeshi man who immigrates to England as an adult. In the new country, he finds himself preoccupied to the point of obsession by his native history and culture, which have become static and cemented in his mind and memory. As his twin sons, Magid and Millat, are born and grow up in London, Samad is alarmed at how they acculturate to English traditions and experiences crisis at what he perceives is their lack of concern for tradition and his slowly disappearing culture. The novel also presents the perspective of the second generation and the ways in which they negotiate the multiplicity of cultures that shape them. Millat, for instance, struggles between affirming an individual identity while continually being constructed as “other” in England. Through a blend of humorous and tragic narratives, *White Teeth* provides insight into the multidimensional layers of immigrant identities from various locations and generations in contemporary multicultural England.

The Kite Runner

The Kite Runner (Hosseini, 2003) was the final selection for Book Club A and another novel that fell outside the criteria for post-colonial young adult literature. This adult fiction novel is narrated by Amir, a privileged 12-year-old boy coming of age in Afghanistan before and during the early years of the Russian occupation, on the eve of the reign of the Taliban. The story follows Amir as he immigrates to the U.S. where he remains until he reaches adulthood. While this novel is not a young adult novel, the first half of the story centers on Amir's childhood and his complicated relationships with his father and with his best friend Hassan, who is also a servant for his family. Amir witnesses Hassan being sexually assaulted and runs away rather than confront Hassan's attacker. This decision haunts Amir well into adulthood when he finally has the opportunity to redeem himself. *The Kite Runner* offers readers an insider's perspective on Afghanistan that challenges news media portrayals of this zone of conflict. This narrative provides a glimpse of Afghanistan during a time of peace; however, the story also reveals the cultural tensions at play in the nation, such as the social mores that maintain inequality between Pashtun and Hazara ethnic groups and the rise of the Taliban.

Aya

Aya (Aboutet, 2007) is the first book in a series of three graphic novels about the adventures of teenage girls living in Côte d'Ivoire during the country's prosperous years in the 1970s. The participants in Book Club B selected this novel to engage a genre—the graphic novel—that they imagined their students would appreciate and with which most participants had limited experience. The story is loosely based on the author's own childhood memories of Côte d'Ivoire and follows Aya and her friends Adjoua and Bintou as they go out dancing and flirt with boys. Aya is the studious and responsible one who intends to go to medical school. Adjoua and

Bintou are carefree and more interested in securing a good boyfriend than a career. The adolescent drama heightens when Adjoua gets pregnant and has to marry quickly. As a graphic novel, *Aya* offers a visual component that is often missing in print novels and provides readers with illustrations of cultural objects and regional landscapes that they might not have otherwise imagined for themselves. In addition, in its colorful illustrations and its humorous treatment of young adulthood, the author intended for *Aya* to function as a counter-narrative in its portrayal of a vibrant and flourishing time in the nation's past, in contrast to news media images of various countries in the African continent ravaged by poverty and disease. However, readers will also notice in the book's images and text, the French colonial and U.S. American cultural influences as well as the tension that exists between socio-economic classes.

Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy

The final selection for Book Club B was *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy* (Eire, 2003), a memoir about the author's childhood in Cuba before and during the first year of Castro's takeover, and after his parents send him and his brother to the U.S. as part of operation Pedro Pan. In this narrative, which begins when he is eight years old in the late 1950's, the author recounts his memories of growing up privileged in Cuba. Written in a conversational style that occasionally addresses the reader, each chapter is a detailed vignette focused on the activities and preoccupations of a young boy, and his relationships with friends and family members. However, Eire (2003) also discusses the political and cultural environments in which he grew up—the looming revolution, the failed invasion of the Bay of Pigs, his friends slowly disappearing from school, the brutal change to communism, food rations, his eventual departure, and the adjustment to becoming a U.S. immigrant, among other stories. This memoir

provides readers with an intimate portrayal of Cuba in the late 1950's and early 1960's, at a pivotal time in the nation's history.

This chapter has discussed the various contexts that informed this narrative inquiry—the regional and institutional demographics where the study was conducted, a description of the programs of study in which participants were enrolled, the setting of the study and its timeline. In addition, the chapter provided profiles of the research participants, discussed the dynamics of each book club, as well as synopses of each text selected in the book clubs. The following chapter describes the findings of this narrative inquiry.

Chapter Five: Findings

Connelly and Clandinin (1991) explain that “people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives” and that narrative researchers “ describe those lives, collect stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (p. 121). Similarly, the findings in this chapter attempt to describe twelve pre-service English teachers’ experiences of reading post-colonial young adult literature in a book club. In addition to the participants’ individual narratives, this chapter also attempts to tell the collective story of the book clubs by highlighting group conversations, which tend to shift rapidly from speaker to speaker and are grounded in exploring a particular book. Significantly, the study did not focus directly on the participants’ lived experiences—in this case, the lived experiences of post-colonial issues. This dissertation focused on stories with young protagonists of color growing up outside of the cultural context of the U.S. because such texts are underrepresented in the international market for young adult literature. Given this, none of the research participants (myself included) were insiders to the cultures depicted in the novels. We all read as cultural outsiders and approached the texts as such, deploying a variety of literacy strategies to read across cultures. Thus, this inquiry describes twelve pre-service English teachers’ experience of reading and discussing the issues and cultures represented in post-colonial young adult literature, rather than their lived experiences. I used thematic and dialogic approaches to analyze the field texts that make up this study, guided by the following research questions:

- What stories, events, or issues emerge for pre-service teachers as they read post-colonial narratives?

- How do these novels serve as entry points into conversations about their own experiences and issues related to global, historical, political issues?
- How do pre-service teachers connect the book club experience, their readings, and responses to their future teaching?

Although they could not tell firsthand stories about post-colonial issues, the research participants in this study often told secondhand stories they gathered from news, books, television shows, films, and others. These pre-service teachers entered these stories as readers, as listeners, and as teachers, and discussed the post-colonial issues and cultures represented in the texts from these positions—never as insiders to the culture represented, but as witnesses in the margins. Book club discussions provided a space for articulating and negotiating these various and sometimes competing narratives, beginning with the book and moving to the participants’ prior knowledge of global, historical, and political issues. Although they could not always engage the post-colonial elements of the stories by drawing on their own experiences, narratives that evoked cultural similarities allowed research participants to bring to the surface their own stories that they could narrate as insiders—coming of age aspects such as relationships with parents, siblings, and other family members; feelings of belonging or not belonging to a group; having a sense of place or belonging to a geographic location; and gender issues such as sexism, sexual harassment, and teen pregnancy. As U.S. citizens with differing perspectives, participants were also privy to the local, national, and international conversations about U.S. social, cultural, economic, and political issues—teen sexuality and pregnancy, immigration, an unstable economy, and war—topics that emerged in response to events depicted in the stories. Finally, participants could discuss with some authority how to approach teaching these narratives to their

future students, as most of them were placed in middle or secondary classrooms during the time of the study and were less than a year away from starting their teaching careers.

In this chapter, I illustrate these findings with both short excerpts and “extended stretches” of conversations with multiple speakers—those “instances in which different members explore a topic in some depth over an extended number of turns” (Beach & Yussen, 2011, p. 122). Specifically, I examine conversations in which participants attempt to articulate their understanding of post-colonial issues in response to specific passages in the texts, in response to another participant’s comment, or in response to my own comments. The chapter is organized according to three major findings (see Table 6): 1) research participants had a limited awareness of post-colonial issues, which they expanded through reading and discussing the books; 2) participants approached the texts both as readers/learners and as teachers. As readers, they used a variety of literacy skills to establish connections across difference(s); as teachers, they were concerned with the needs of their future students and explored the possibilities and potential challenges of using these texts in English Language Arts classrooms; and 3) participants used the stories and the space of the book club to make sense of identities—race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender—across cultures, geographies, and histories. In my interpretations of these moments, I continue to pay particular attention to local, societal, and global/post-colonial contexts to shed light on the types of discourses to which pre-service teachers have access and which they use to engage cultures other than their own.

Table 6: Findings, Categories, and Propositions

| Findings | Categories | Propositions |
|---|--|--|
| Expanding Awareness of Post-colonial Issues and Cultures | Knowledge gaps and fragments | Texts uncovered new information and alerted participants to some gaps in their previous education |
| | Learning through reading and inquiry | Participants used the stories to learn or to do more research on the regions |
| | Addressing these gaps as teachers | Participants wanted or had strategies to address gaps in their prior knowledge |
| | Revising assumptions through counter-narratives | Participants experienced shifts in their perceptions of a culture represented in a text |
| Establishing Connections Across Difference | Post-colonial realities | Post-colonial stories are based on real historical and contemporary events |
| | Cultural disconnect | Participants did not identify with the stories based on their lived experiences |
| | Establishing connections | Participants established meaningful connections to the novels through secondary experiences, popular culture, and cultural similarities |
| | Students | Participants expressed concerns about the novels being relevant to their students or appropriate for classroom use |
| | Teaching | Participants developed ideas for teaching post-colonial young adult literature to make the stories relevant to students and expand their global awareness |
| Understanding Post-colonial Issues through Stories | Exploring prejudice | Book Club A discussed prejudice in <i>Now is the Time for Running</i> using the novel and pooling together their knowledge of the issue |
| | Conceptualizing race, ethnicity, and nationality | Participant articulated understanding of identity categories in <i>Waiting for Snow in Havana</i> self-reflexively and on local, national, and global scales |

Expanding a Limited Awareness of Post-colonial Issues and Cultures

Many of the participants in this study indicated in their pre-study questionnaires and during our first meeting that they joined the book club in part because they were already interested in world cultures and wanted to learn more about post-colonial literature and young adult literature as genres. In this section, I illustrate the various purposes reading and discussing post-colonial young adult texts served for participants in that capacity. For example, for those participants who were already familiar with either the culture or historical events about which we read, the stories provided additional insights, and participants were able to deepen their understanding of the issues. In most cases, however, the novels revealed contemporary and historical events about which the participants were unaware and provided a way for them to learn about cultures with which they were unfamiliar. Becoming aware of these gaps in their knowledge prompted some participants to research these events and others to reflect on the reasons for these lacunae. Several participants shared strategies for addressing these gaps as teachers and identified geo-political regions about which they wanted to know more. Some participants also indicated that reading about these regions helped them to revise assumptions they previously held about specific cultures. In the following sub-sections, I explore each of these ideas in more depth.

Identifying Knowledge Gaps and Fragments

Most of the participants in this study had a general awareness of the broader geo-political and historical regions where the stories were set, prior knowledge they had garnered through films, books, news, and schooling. However, participants had a limited knowledge of the specific historical, political, and cultural issues or events depicted in the texts we selected. When we read Carlos Eire's (2003) memoir *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy* about

his childhood in Cuba before and during Fidel Castro's regime, Ashley, one of the masters students who was also student teaching at the time, disclosed in her reading response that, "Before I read this book, I was only slightly familiar with Fidel Castro and all the issues Cuba has faced from his reign." During our discussion, she acknowledged that this limited awareness stemmed from a gap in her schooling: "I know in history and social studies classes, I don't know about you all, but we never seem to get past World War II. I have no idea what's happened since then." In her follow up questionnaire, she reiterates the point that reading and discussing the texts as a group made her "realize how little we are taught in the US of other countries." One historical event about which Ashley gained more information was Eire's account of the failed attempt by U.S. trained Cuban exiles to invade the Bay of Pigs in 1961 under President Kennedy's administration:

I didn't even know what the Bay of Pigs was until I read, I hate, I know that sounds so stupid. {Sybil: No, it's okay!} But I didn't, I've always heard about it. I know it was during Kennedy, but I didn't ever really know exactly what happened. And hearing it from that perspective of, basically we didn't do what we were supposed to do or what we said we were going to do. It's kind of embarrassing from an American perspective.⁸

At first, Ashley seemed self-conscious and apologetic for not being more knowledgeable about the Bay of Pigs invasion, which she acknowledged is also part of U.S. American history. She then revised her initial statement to explain that she was aware of the event—"I've always heard about it. I know it was during Kennedy"—but that she did not know the details of the incident. Thus, reading about this historical event in the memoir helped Ashley identify exactly what she did and did not know about it. Moreover, reading not only deepened Ashley's knowledge of the Bay of Pigs, learning about it from the Cuban point of view also expanded her perspective of the event—it gave her a different side of the story.

⁸ Participant quotes are as transcribed.

Participants had similar reactions when we read Padma Venkatraman's (2008) *Climbing the Stairs*, which takes place in India during the 1940s when Indians made up the largest volunteer army to fight alongside the British during World War II. Reading the novel helped Shelby identify a gap in her prior knowledge of Indian culture and history. In Book Club B's discussion of *Climbing the Stairs*, she exclaimed, "I mean, I took an entire course on Hinduism, and I didn't know anything about India's history in the 1940s." Ashley likewise reflected in her written response to the novel: "We rarely get another perspective on WWI [sic] or really hear of another country's part in WWI [sic]. I wasn't aware India fought in the war. I felt this was important for students to become aware of." In this statement, Ashley acknowledges that her previous social studies education did not include perspectives on this historical event beyond the U.S. point of view. In his written response to the same novel, Nick noted:

Although I have taken several world history classes I realize I still don't know much about India's history and its independence. Some of the traditions and religious practices were very new to me and Hinduism is an ancient and interesting religion.

Nick also identified a gap in his education: in spite of the number of world history courses he had taken and the fact that Indian cultural practices reach back thousands of years in the past, he noted that he was nevertheless unaware of them and India's history. In this sense, the novel revealed a hidden or ignored version of a global historical event and thus functioned as a counter narrative that alerted some research participants to the limits of the curriculum they encountered throughout their social studies education.

Discussing stories that featured historical events often revealed lacunae in some participants' earlier education; however, even the more contemporary issues and events represented in *Now is the Time for Running* (Williams, 2011) brought to the surface a similar lack of awareness. In May 2008 in South Africa, xenophobic riots targeted tens of thousands of

migrants and refugees, many of whom were from Zimbabwe and seeking asylum in South Africa (Williams, 2011). A number of international newspapers covered the story as several of those refugees were killed in these attacks (Underhill & Khumalo, 2010). One particularly graphic image was widely circulated as representing the extent of violence in the riots—a man set on fire. In the postscript of the book, South African author Michael Williams explains that he was moved by these incidents and his own conversations with displaced and homeless Zimbabwean youth and decided to weave them into the novel, which is set in the first decade of the new millennium.

In their reading responses, several participants stated that they did not know much about the current social, political, and economic issues happening in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Ashley, for instance, wrote, “The author also does a great job of explaining some of the political unrest & xenophobia occurring in Africa. I don’t have a lot of knowledge of this.” Similarly, Natalea noted, “I hadn’t realized that there was a refugee problem in S. Africa.” This more recent event could not have been covered in these pre-service teachers’ secondary school curriculum, and although it garnered international news coverage, it likely did not catch the attention of mainstream U.S. news media. Until I read the novel myself and researched it further, I had not been aware of the riots or refugees in South Africa, either. When I asked participants during our discussion whether or not they had known anything about Zimbabwe prior to reading the novel, most of them answered that they had not. Betty offered an explanation as to why that was not the case:

I think more people would be familiar with South Africa information probably {other group members agree} than Zimbabwe because of the whole Apartheid—that’s just something that we’ve heard more about than any details of some place like Zimbabwe. So, although both places were dealing with the aftermath of colonialism they dealt with it quite d- or different things occurred in those two places.

Betty's comment highlighted the fact that the history of Apartheid in South Africa is already an established part of the school curriculum, but the riots were a contemporary event that perhaps only those who keep up with current international events would know. In the other book club, in response to Elnora's comment that "Wow. This is really happening. And no one seems to know about it," Joel mentioned the political dimensions of news media coverage as part of the reason for our unawareness:

It's funny that you say that 'cause when stuff goes down like that in the Middle East, we hear all about it. And that's probably 'cause we have people over there. And so, I wonder, if we had an investment in something like, say South Africa or Angola, and we had troops down there, and this stuff started happening, how much more attention would it get?

Joel's comment and subsequent question imply that media news coverage tends to lean toward issues that are relevant to U.S. citizens' political interests rather than always providing information about world events as they occur. Joel and Betty's comments highlight the types of discourses to which pre-service teachers have access when it comes to historical and current global events.

While participants often lacked the political and historical contexts needed to engage fully the stories we read, in the space of the book club, participants nevertheless brought with them some fragments of information that expanded the group's collective knowledge. For instance, when I asked whether any of them were familiar with Zimbabwe prior to reading the book, Natalea revealed that she was aware of the depreciated monetary value of the Zimbabwe dollar. Because Williams' (2011) story is based on recent actual events, the author includes several accounts of Zimbabwe's unstable economy. In one scene, for example, a character remarked, "Two hundred [South African] rands—today that is twenty billion Zim dollars.

Tomorrow it might be thirty billion” (Williams, 2011, p. 79). Referring to these moments, Natalea shared:

The only thing I knew when they mentioned, when he started talking about the fact of the value of the Zimbabwe dollars? I actually knew about that beforehand ‘cause randomly one time, before I went to England, I was looking at how much one dollar would be in this country and that country. And that’s when I found out about how small the value of Zimbabwe money was. So...at first when they were like “one million Zimbabwe dollars,” ((voice quiets)) oh yeah, that’s nothing. That’s like pennies.

Although she was not aware that many Zimbabweans sought refuge in South Africa from the unstable political and economic climates in their home country, Natalea’s previous experience with researching exchange rates helped her to know right away that the millions of dollars in the story did not equal to millions of U.S. dollars, but in fact, “pennies.”

A discussion in Book Club A provides another example. In the second half of *Now is the Time for Running*, the main character Deo starts sniffing glue when he becomes homeless in South Africa. Joel and Lexy both said they were aware of this. Lexy commented, “I’ve heard about that it’s a problem in African countries because ...it stifles your hunger for, I don’t know, however long you’re high.” Joel expanded on Lexy’s statement: “Yeah. Which is also why there’s a lot of nicotine addicts in those areas, ‘cause the nicotine will curb your appetite too. So there’s a lot of heavy smokers in those regions.” Joel and Lexy both drew on their general awareness of poverty in the African region and drug use to make sense of this part of the novel and, by sharing this information, contributed to the group’s collective knowledge. In sum, as we discussed the historical or current events in the novels, participants became aware of the gaps in their knowledge, were able to draw on the fragments they did have to make connections to the story, and used the facts in the novels along with other members’ information to expand or deepen their own awareness of the issues.

Learning through Reading and Inquiry

While the texts selected in the book clubs uncovered gaps in participants' knowledge, reading them also provided an opportunity for participants to acquire new information about cultures and historical or contemporary events. For instance, in her reading response to *Climbing the Stairs*, which takes place in India, Lindsay wrote, "I learned a lot about Hinduism while reading, which I *loved*." Likewise, Ashley noted in her response, "Another thing I enjoyed was learning more about Indian culture." In reference to the same novel, Shelby explained in her reading response that, although she had previously studied some aspects of Indian culture, reading the novel helped her expand her knowledge of the country's role during World War II:

My experience with *Climbing the Stairs* by Padma Venkatraman was delightful. I found it to be very enjoyable because I have a minor in religious studies in which I chose to focus on Eastern religions – specifically Hinduism. My prior experience with the history and culture of India's history made the content very exciting and comfortable for me. I was not knowledgeable about India's history during WWII, however, so this novel was very enlightening in that aspect.

Although Shelby was not aware of the role India played in World War II, one of the ways she was able to bridge that gap was to think about previous coursework—a religious studies course. Relating the novel to her previous coursework made Shelby comfortable and made the story come alive because she already had the cultural background she needed to fully engage the narrative.

For some participants, the novels provided an opportunity to learn a different perspective on a well-known historical event. In our discussion of *Climbing the Stairs*, Natalea expressed that she had wanted to know more the main character best friend who was Jewish, but the novel did not explore that character's experience of being Jewish during World War II in India. However, Ashley viewed as a positive the fact that the novel did not center on that aspect:

I almost liked that they *didn't* focus so much on the best friend because she's also Jewish. And I've always felt like whenever we talk about World War II, it always comes back to Jews and the concentration camps. So it was kind of nice because I didn't even know that India was ever involved. . . . I don't have a great background on the history of that. . . . I know the basics we all know. . . . so I thought that was kind of nice that we didn't focus so intently on her religion.

Ashley indicated that in her experience, discussions of World War II tend to focus on the Holocaust, but the novel provided an additional perspective on the war. Similarly, Lauren C. explained that reading about Zimbabwe and South Africa in *Now is the Time for Running* was interesting because it presented an event that was new to her and outside of the typical scope of the curriculum:

I liked reading this one [novel] too 'cause it was really cool, to me, to read something that was more obscure. Like, India, I've read about before, maybe people have read about before. But this thing in Africa is something new to me. I knew part of it would take place in South Africa, and I was like, "Oh, like Apartheid, whatever." And then it was like, "Oh, it really isn't about that at all. It's about this whole other thing I had no idea about." So that was interesting to me. . . . It's very widening—the worldview, which I think is interesting.

In her reading response to this novel, Lauren C. explored a similar idea:

I thought that since some of the novel dealt with South Africa, that there would be issues stemming from apartheid. I was surprised though to see that the problem of post-colonialism is present in other countries. Even though Zimbabwe had banded together to push colonizers out of the country, things didn't get better for them. Instead, they were betrayed by their own people, causing even more problems. It shows that the problem of post-colonialism is still present in our contemporary society, an idea that students may not be familiar with.

Lauren C. expected that, because part of *Now is the Time for Running* is set in South Africa, it would explore Apartheid. Instead, this novel expanded her historical and political knowledge of the African region beyond Apartheid to also consider the issues other countries in Africa faced after independence. Like Ashley, Lauren C.'s comments speak to a narrow curriculum where the same few historical events or geographical locations are explored, such as the Holocaust during World War II or Apartheid in South Africa. However, novels such as *Climbing the Stairs* and

Waiting for Snow in Havana bring new perspectives to well known historical events, and books like *Now is the Time for Running* introduce countries in Africa that are not typically covered in the curriculum—such as Zimbabwe—as well as offer an updated look at South Africa.

As they acquired new knowledge through reading these texts, some participants expressed a desire to find out more about these events and issues. In her reading response to *Now is the Time for Running*, Lauren C. wrote, “I know that after I read it, I wanted to know more about Zimbabwe and what happened to the people there.” For others, reading these narratives actually prompted them to research the historical and contemporary events on which the stories were based. For instance, Shelby wrote in her response to the graphic novel *Aya* that, “the context was not something that I was familiar with. Getting to research the history of ‘the Ivory Coast’ and what is referred to as the ‘Ivorian Miracle’ was very interesting.” Participants would often share this additional research with the group when we met. During our discussion of *Climbing the Stairs*, Shelby consulted the author’s website, which had additional resources for teachers, and brought printouts to show group members:

I would like to, at this point, show you guys—I went on the website, and the website has awesome resources. And, actually, on the left [column], they have little buttons, and each one is a different character. And for the Jewish best friend, they actually have ((leafs through printouts)) they actually have more things on the, um, ((pages rustle)).

Shelby’s research helped to start answering Natalea’s question about Jews living in India during World War II. Natalea stated to the group:

Natalea: I was wondering why when they first mention that she’s Jewish, I’m like, “What is a Jewish person doing in India?”... According to the thing [printout], apparently, India’s very common in celebrating religious diversity. And thinking about that... *that* would’ve been something good to bring up, especially considering the fact they’re ...especially this family—and Brahmin—that is so focused on adhering to traditional caste systems and that kind of thing... It would’ve just been such, something to go into—accepting the Jewish culture, and other cultures as well, when they’re fighting this culture war of their own.

For Natalea, the novel revealed questions she had not thought of previously, and Shelby's research helped to confirm that the presence of Jews in India during World War II was a topic worth exploring further even though the novel only makes mention of it.

In Book Club A, certain texts also prompted some participants to do additional research. In her written response to *Now is the Time for Running*, Elnora stated, "Since it's a fiction book I thought the author exaggerated a lot of parts but I looked up the articles on Wikipedia about xenophobia in South Africa and the riots really were that bad." In our meeting, when I asked Elnora what had inspired her to find out more information, she responded:

I was like, "How can people be so cruel?" And then I was looking up that stuff, and then I {got on} other stuff that's happening in Africa. And I was just like, "Wow. This is really happening. And nobody seems to know about it."

The words in quotations show Elnora's thought process from wondering about the issues in the novel ("How can people be so cruel?") to finding out for herself that these events were "really happening" currently.

The stories also provided the opportunity to do research during book club meetings. At some point in the discussion that night, Elnora asked: "This is off the topic, but didn't—were any of y'all familiar with that whole inflation thing they had? 'Cause, I really thought he [Deo] had a billion dollars ((laughs)). I was like, wait a minute!" Elnora was referring to a scene where the main character Deo describes stuffing a billion dollars in his soccer ball:

I know where Amai [mom] hides our money...I find several fifty million dollar notes, a few more hundred million dollars. There is no time to count it all. It's not much, but it will buy us some food...I stuff them into the leather pouch. The money fills out the ball nicely, and I find a piece of string and sew up the patch. I toss the ball into the air. Nobody will know I have a billion dollars in my soccer ball. (p. 32).

Elnora's self reflections describe her shift from reading the novel as fictional ("I really thought he had a billion dollars") to no longer being able to suspend her disbelief ("Wait a minute!")

about what seemed an excessive amount of money for a boy to have. In reconciling the fictional aspects of the story to the ones based on facts, hyperinflation indeed made it possible for Deo to be in possession of a billion dollars. Similarly, Lauren B. made herself a note in her reading journal to look up the exchange rate to support the claims in this part of the story. In our discussion, she responded to Elnora: “I actually wrote down in my chapter-by-chapter thing- I’m like, ‘Need to look up exchange rate. Their dollar is obviously worth less.’” In response to this exchange, I took advantage of the technology in the room where we were meeting—that night we were in the university library, in a study room with a computer and a large screen mounted on the wall—and looked up an article that discussed the conditions that led to hyperinflation in Zimbabwe. Later, when we met in the office suite, I would occasionally use my laptop computer to look up information about which participants wondered, such as the meaning of a word or the geographical location of a country. While we did not integrate technology in the book clubs to the extent that I had anticipated, having a personal computer and Internet access made it possible to conduct inquiry in the moment. Thus the texts selected for the study made it possible for participants to gain new perspectives on well known historical events, to learn about regions of the world and contemporary events that are not typically explored in the curriculum, and provided the impetus to do additional research about these.

Addressing Knowledge Gaps as Teachers

Because all the participants in this study were pre-service English teachers, our book club meetings naturally extended to talk about teaching. In one conversation in particular, Natalea connected the gaps she identified in her own schooling to her future career as a teacher. While we waited for a few more participants to arrive to our book club meeting, she recalled a visit to the education resource room in the university library earlier that summer:

[T]here's actually a textbook of world literature in the education resources center in the library. During the summer we were looking at a textbook, and it kind of showed where I lacked. I knew nothing in there, 'cause it was all non-European. And the only European stuff was Renaissance. And like, it was just like, I know *none* of this. Nothing.

Natalea realized that what she had learned or remembered about literature outside of the U.S. was exclusively European. For her, this realization was shocking and revealed to her the gaps in her own knowledge. She continued, "With that, it's kind of daunting as a teacher, or as a future teacher, being like, 'I'm going to have to teach this, and I know *nothing about it*,' because in *my* background I haven't gotten it." Natalea was overwhelmed by the reality that there is a whole body of literature with which she is not familiar and that she might have to teach one day.

I asked participants to elaborate on how they planned to address this once they start teaching. In contrast to Natalea, Betty did not seem disturbed by these gaps in her knowledge. She had already accepted the fact that in any new teaching appointment, "you're not going to have read everything that you're going to teach your students." She drew from her current education coursework and her experience as a parent who homeschooled her daughter to explain her approach to teaching material that she had yet to encounter in her own courses:

[T]he limited exposure that I had was in college... It made me think more along the lines of what we're learning in EDCI [curriculum and instruction courses] about not being the authority and throwing it back in *their* [students'] laps to form the knowledge *anyway*, to find their own meaning in the literature *anyway*. So, a lot of times we're, from what I'm getting is, we're advised to, if the student's writing on something, you [teachers] should be writing it also. If they're doing a journal on something they're reading, you should be doing it also. And a lot of the things that they're doing, you do right alongside with them. And a lot of times, you are doing the learning with them.

From her education coursework, Betty gleaned that she should do the same kind of work she assigns to her students—reading and writing—without positioning herself as the authority, but encouraging students to make meaning for themselves. Betty also drew the same conclusions from her experience homeschooling her daughter. She shared with the group:

I had that experience once with my daughter. I homeschooled her for one year. And a lot of the stuff that we did together, I was learning for the first time right alongside her. So, I have no shame in approaching a class, going, “Let’s do this together.”

Betty’s approach to learning the material at the same time she was teaching it to her daughter was confirmed in one of the instruction methods covered in her education courses, and she was confident that she could use the same approach in a classroom. I shared that I used a similar method when I taught and that, even during the course of this study, I remained open to reading new novels. Lindsay echoed as well:

Plus the thing too is there’s that whole aspect that the teachers and the students can learn together, you know? I mean, I know we’re supposed to be the teacher[s], but I think part of teaching is that collaboration of learning anyway between people.

Lindsay’s comment supports Betty’s approach to teaching new texts—a collaborative approach, rather than the banking method of education (Freire, 1992) where the teacher holds the knowledge and deposits it into students, lends itself well to exploring new texts. In addition to addressing the gaps in their own knowledge as teachers, participants also developed several teaching ideas and strategies for teaching the texts we read; I explore these in depth in the “Reading for Self and Reading for Teaching” section of this chapter.

Revising Assumptions through Counter-narratives

In keeping with the collaborative design aspect of the study, I asked participants to share with me the regions about which they were interested in reading more young adult literature. The participants mentioned the Middle East, East Asia, and Latin America as regions of interest throughout the study. One participant explained that she would be living in the U.S. Southwest and expected that she would have a majority of Hispanic students. She imagined that they might learn from and more readily relate to young adult literature that featured protagonists living in Spanish-speaking countries, and she wanted to start collecting books that she could share with

them. Other participants did not give reasons other than wanting to learn more about those areas. However, these regions of the world are ones with which the U.S. has tense relations—various countries in these regions have been featured in national news media recently due to war, political unrest, economics, or immigration. Thus participants’ desire to learn more about these regions coincided with news media’s focus on the same regions.

The geographical regions and cultures depicted in the texts that we read provided participants with counter-narratives to news media representations of the same areas. For instance, in her written response to the graphic novel *Aya*, which is set in 1970’s Côte d’Ivoire, Ashley explained:

I also liked the fact that her [Aya’s] story was focused on her life, friends, and the situations young adults get into, rather than war, disease, or famine which is what most media outlets focus on when it come to Africa.

Likewise, the visual component of the graphic novel *Aya* helped participants imagine Côte d’Ivoire in a different way than the African region is often portrayed in the media. Betty, for example, wrote in her written response to the novel:

I usually like to envision the characters in my own mind, but in this case, I think it is effective to show readers the setting. I believe that including images of the housing, the clothing, and the markets were very important to give the full effect of Aya’s world to the reader.

Betty brought up this point during our discussion of *Aya*, when she noticed, sitting on the coffee table, the graphic novel version of *The Kite Runner* that I brought for the group to look through.

She made the following observation:

[I]t’s been a couple years now since I read *Kite Runner*, and I loved the book, and I thought that it was well written. At the time, I probably had some idea in my head of what the images were. But this ((pointing to the book)) makes it right there, in case it’s this, especially when it’s not *your* world. It puts it there for you to see what these things look like, what these clothes look like. I couldn’t have read this ((pointing to *Aya*)) without the pictures and got the full picture.

Betty's comment speaks to the need for accurate visual representations of cultures when one is reading outside of one's own culture. When readers engage their imagination to construct for themselves the world about which they read, they draw images from a visual library built on their own experiences. As Betty stated, "I probably had some idea in my head of what the images were." However, a graphic novel fills in some of these gaps by providing a visual representation of the objects, clothing, architecture, and landscape particular to a culture, which may or may not differ from the same items in the reader's culture. Had *Aya* been a traditional print novel without images, Betty is sure that she would not have had "the full picture." In addition, in the preface to *Aya*, Dr. Alisia Chase provides cultural, economic, and political background information on Côte d'Ivoire, indicating that by depicting the country during a time of prosperity, *Aya* offers a narrative that belies "the news channels unremittingly tragic narratives and unsettling images" of "swollen bellied children, machete wielding janjaweds, and too many men and women dying of AIDS...that dominate the Western media." In response to Betty, Shelby reminded the group of the function of this graphic novel:

Shelby: Because the author was saying she's trying to go against this media grain of depicting Africa as this, you know, underprivileged, impoverished—

Lindsay: Right. We probably wouldn't get that picture.

Shelby: Exactly. We probably wouldn't and our kids wouldn't if we were teaching that.

In her written response to the novel, Shelby also explored the importance of examining a narrative that competes with dominant media narratives about cultures in the African continent:

Even though the area's economic success came to a halt within a few years of the book's setting, the history of the Ivory Coast's success after independence in 1960 is a positive message that can be taught both about an area's economic and social health after independence from an era of colonization, as well as about the culture of Africa itself and the ease with which we can make ties on a very human (and teenage) level, despite the media's tendency to portray to social ongoings [sic] in Africa as something alien to our own.

Consequently, in publishing this story, the author provided an alternative take on news or film media narrative constructions of Africa.

Media narratives are powerful, however, and in some ways, the visual element of the story also confirmed those images from news and film media. For instance, Ashley noticed a contrast between city and village, referring to a scene where a young girl, who is new to the city, is going on a date for the first time in a formal restaurant, and comparing it to her expectation of a “traditional African village”:

Ashley: I just really liked these scenes where they’re in a restaurant. She’s like, “This is my first time. I’m in a real restaurant.” I can’t imagine being late teens or early twenties and being like, “This is my first time in a real restaurant.” And she’s asking for help, like, “Can’t I eat with my fingers?” And it’s such a contrast because you see some traditional, like what you think of African villages look like, and things like this ((points to a page)) and then you see this ((point to the restaurant scene)). And to me it kind of looks like *Lady and the Tramp*. They’re in candlelit, Parisian-like café.

Sybil: What was the other page you were showing?

Ashley: I just flipped to a random page. Just like, you know, on [page] 56, what you think of traditional African villages or small towns look like—dusty roads, older cars, that type of thing.

Ashley most likely used the pronoun “you” with the same meaning as “most people” or “one,” when she referred to “what you think of traditional African villages or small towns look like—dusty roads, older cars, that type of thing.” Ashley’s description of what she expected to see fits media constructions of Africa as homogenized and monocultural. However, the graphic novel also complicates this representation of the African continent by including modern images such as the “candlelit, Parisian-like” restaurant in contrast to the young village girl who is not sure whether or not she can use her hands to eat. In a way, this counter-narrative triggered a process of negotiation for readers who drew on previous visual media about the region to make sense of the story.

One novel in particular, *The Kite Runner*, helped some participants to revise their assumptions or perceptions of Afghan culture. As I mention at the end of chapters three and four, some texts selected for the book club fell outside of the criteria I devised for post-colonial young adult literature. *The Kite Runner* was one of those texts, but as it satisfied Book Club A's interest about the region and was already in use in high school English classrooms, participants had a generative discussion. Two participants specifically—Lauren B. and Lexy—indicated that reading the novel changed their perception of Afghanistan, which they had heretofore cultivated primarily through news media. In her written response to the novel, Lexy explained how her ideas about Afghanistan shifted as she read:

I also really enjoyed learning about the Afghan culture. So often we think of Afghanistan as a place of terror and mad men. We think of Muslims as crazed killers, out for blood. This novel put a lot of those images to rest. The author shows a place full of life, joy, good smells, rolling mountains, and green trees. The descriptions of pre-war Afghanistan are enticing. I never thought of it as an actual place with deep-rooted culture and dynamic individuals. The characters expound on some of the true values of Islam and challenge those of the extremists like the Taliban. Throughout the novel there are references to the danger of extremists and the danger of their behavior. The true Muslim characters in the novel serve as a contrast to the extremist characters we as Americans have become so familiar with. For me this novel was a huge contrast to the images and perceptions that have been engrained in our minds over the past ten years.

For Lexy, reading the novel provided her with an opportunity to think of Afghanistan “as an actual place with deep-rooted culture and dynamic individuals,” aspects that news media tend not to cover during wartime. Hosseini's characters also provided her with alternative perspectives to “the extremist characters we as Americans have become so familiar with.” Although Lexy's word choice of “true” to describe the “values of Islam” and “Muslim characters” is problematic, she acknowledged that Hosseini's representations run counter to popular media representations of “Muslims as crazed killers, out for blood” and of “Afghanistan as a place of terror and mad men,” and concluded that, for her, “this novel was a huge contrast to the images and perceptions

that have been engrained in our minds over the past ten years.” Lexy brought up the idea of the novel as a counter-narrative in our discussion as well. In response to my critique of the novel as being uncritical of the adversarial social response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and its consequences for U.S. American citizens of Arab descent and residents with Middle Eastern nationalities, Lexy countered:

Lexy: I feel like it, the issue he’s [the author] dealing with here, this isn’t a novel...to talk about what Americans are, their bad perceptions. It’s to disprove, it’s to show *us* what’s going on in Afghanistan from a narrative perspective. I feel like *that’s* the issue he’s more concerned with.

Joel: He’s not concerned about what’s happening in America.

Lexy: Yeah. He’s concerned about what *we* think about his country.

Lauren B: That makes sense.

Lexy: He wants us to see—because then that way, if we can see Afghanistan for more or less what it was or what it could have been or whatever—

Joel: And what it became—

Lexy: Then we don’t— we’re not so angry perhaps at people just living in America.

Sybil: And so had he been more critical, it might have—

Elnora: Taken away the focus from the Afghanistan part of the story.

Lexy identified the author’s purpose as painting a humanizing portrait of his homeland through this novel as a counter-narrative to negative and homogenized media representations. Group members echoed and built on Lexy’s line of thought, concluding that if the novel had focused on the social ramifications of the media’s portrayal of “Muslims as crazed killers,” as Lexy wrote, for Muslims living in the U.S., it would have “taken away the focus” on representing Afghanistan as a real place with complex and multidimensional characters.

In the same conversation, Lauren B. also reflected on how the novel helped her revise her perceptions of Afghanistan. I asked participants to share some other scenes with which they connected and whether or not they related to this text, and Lauren B. replied, “Not really... I guess not— not on a personal level.” She had shared earlier that she had been moved to tears while reading, and I reiterated, “But it moved you.” Lauren B. responded:

I did. I guess it... I don't know... opened my eyes to a new way of thinking about Afghan people. I mean, not that I ever really considered myself racist, but I did have a different painting of what Afghanistan—I just—I guess I always assumed that it was people living in caves and violence. And according to his tale it wasn't *always* like that. That's how the media has portrayed it since 9/11.

Although she did not identify “on a personal level” with the events in the story, reading the novel provoked an emotional reaction while she read, and helped her to reconsider her views on Afghanistan. Lauren B. was careful to establish that, while she did not consider herself to be racist, she could recognize that media portrayals of the region had shaped her perceptions and that the novel presented a different perspective. Joel added to the idea that there was more to life in the Middle East than the media portrays:

Joel: I mean, even today, it's not all like that. There are businesses that run and stuff.

Elnora: Yeah. Like, before the Soviets came, he [the main character, Amir] was talking about how his dad had a Mustang. In the movie it shows, like— when he goes back, I think it shows how the streets there were full of shops and all these colors, and then afterwards it was all run down and what like you would think Afghanistan always was like.

LB: It's informing. {Others agree}.

Elnora had read the novel and watched the film adaptation of the novel prior to joining the study. Building on Joel's comment, she referred to the film's visual representation of Afghanistan in the 1970s before the Soviet Union invaded the country, one that was more than “people living in caves and violence” depicted in news media today, but “full of shops and all these colors.” In

sum, these novels served as counter-narratives to media representations of places and cultures outside of the U.S. In addition, in the case of the graphic novel *Aya* and the film adaptation of *The Kite Runner*, the visual elements reshaped or added to participants' repertoire of images that represent the cultures depicted in these texts.

Summary

This section explored the many ways in which the participants in this study used the texts we selected in each of the book clubs to expand their awareness of post-colonial issues. First, the narratives revealed to participants some gaps in their knowledge of historical and current events pertaining to post-colonial countries. Upon reflection, participants identified these absences as lacunae in their own schooling and in news media. This finding also indicates that the participants in this study drew upon their previous coursework—which spanned religious studies, education methods, and history courses—as well as news and popular media to situate what they knew (or did not know) about the geo-political and historical of stories we read, in order to engage the stories more fully. Second, in light of realizing what information they were missing, participants used the texts either to learn about a culture, a historical or contemporary event with which they were unfamiliar, or to expand their knowledge of a well known historical event by considering it from a new perspective. As such, the narratives functioned as heuristics for learning more about post-colonial issues, histories, and cultures. As an extension of this, some participants were also inspired to do further research about these events and cultures, an approach we also used during book club meetings. Third, some participants expressed concern that they had never learned, but might one day be asked to teach, world literature, and other participants shared approaches they had already considered for teaching texts they had not previously explored in their own coursework. Finally, the texts functioned as counter-narratives

that helped some participants to reconsider their perceptions about the culture represented. This revealed for some participants the role media play in shaping their views about the world, and the potential visual media such as graphic novels and films have for providing counter visual narratives and enriching their cultural visual repertoire.

Reading for Self and Reading for Teaching: Establishing Connections Across Difference

Participants approached the texts we selected simultaneously as readers and as teachers. As such, there seemed to be a tension between research participants' needs and desires for the stories, what they imagined their future students' needs could be, and the possibilities the stories offered for teaching. This section illustrates five ways in which participants approached the narratives both as readers and as teachers. First, participants came to the book clubs with certain expectations for young adult literature that were challenged and expanded by the contexts of post-colonial realities. Second, as participants' experiences fell outside of the events they encountered in the novels, some expressed that they were not able to identify with the cultures and events represented in the novels. However, participants worked to establish connections to the stories for themselves through secondhand post-colonial narratives that they had gathered from other people and media such as news, films, or novels with similar plots. Third, some participants connected to events in the stories that evoked cultural similarities such as coming of age, relationships with family members, and other scenarios that cut across cultures. Fourth, as future teachers, participants imagined ways their students could also relate to the story, and raised some issues they might potentially face as new teachers in using such novels in middle or secondary English classes. Finally, participants developed multiple approaches for teaching these texts.

Coming to Terms with Post-colonial Realities

Although most of the texts we explored in the book clubs were fictions—except for Eire’s (2003) memoir—they all drew from actual historical or contemporary events. As such, participants had to contend with the facts and realities of the texts we read versus their desires or expectations for young adult literature. For example, in Book Club A’s discussion of *Now is the Time for Running*, Lexy expressed that she felt “surprised at how depressing it [the story] was.” She explained, “I guess just the beginning, you know—they’re playing soccer. I’m thinking, ‘Oh, this is going to be about kids playing soccer and whatever.’ I just didn’t think that any of it would get that real.” Participants were also perturbed that one of the central characters was killed. Joel exclaimed, “It’s not what a writer does! A writer goes for the happy ending!” Likewise, Nick stated that the ending of that novel did not meet his expectation for young adult literature as established in the course he and the rest of the book club members were taking: “I know in Dr. B’s class we had talked about how endings in most novels is usually hopeful or optimistic in some way, and I just don’t know if I see the hope at the end of this book.” When I probed further about his expectation for the ending, Nick explained, “I don’t see that he’s [Deo] going to be okay.” Towards the end of the story, the main character, Deo, becomes homeless. By a fortunate turn of events, however, a coach for a soccer league for homeless youth spots him playing soccer under a bridge and recruits him onto the team. The final scene of the novel describes Deo playing in a soccer tournament alongside homeless youth and refugees from all over the world. Although the story does end on a hopeful note, Nick felt some doubts when he read the postscript where the author shares that he was inspired to write the novel from his conversations with some young male refugees at a homeless shelter. Nick explained:

I don’t know if you all read...the notes at the end of the novel when he [the author] talks about the xenophobia and the three guys that he meets in the shelter, serving food, and

that's where he got his inspiration with this story. And I just thought, after reading that—after reading the book, I thought, “Okay. If these guys are still—you know, they all lost their parents, they're no older than twenty, they lost their families, they're just living from soup kitchen to soup kitchen, and like, how's it going to be any different from Deo, for Deo?”

Nick expected for the novel to provide closure about the character's life; however, Williams' (2011) anecdote about the young men he met at the homeless shelter suggested that Deo's future was also far from resolved.

Ambiguous endings are fairly typical of post-colonial literature. As Bradford et al (2008) explain, these texts “suggest transformative directions without proposing specific social and political orders” (p. 78). In other words, the fact that *Now is the Time for Running* ends with the soccer tournament suggests that Deo has begun the transformation needed to overcome some of the obstacles in his life; however, the outcome of his life is largely undecided and perhaps still dependent on national policies and measures for refugees and homeless youth. As Lauren B. noted, “I don't close the novel thinking, ‘Oh, well there's going to be a scout in the audience, and they're going to enlist him to some professional soccer team, and life's going to be good for Deo from now on.” In response to the group's desire for a satisfying ending, Elnora, who had researched the events on which the novel is based, proposed that the author might have intended for a more realistic ending: “I guess he wanted to keep it realistic because people in this situation, they don't ever get out. They just stay in the slums.” A few minutes later, she added, “Maybe it was his [the author's] way of bringing awareness. That's why he never really comes to a happy conclusion 'cause... stuff like that really happens.” Lexy contended that, “maybe that's just the reality... it's not just a story.” Later in the conversation, Lexy reiterated that, “it's kind of hard not to like think of it as a fictional story, 'cause I guess it's so, almost unbelievable to us. But it is real.” Thus, through their discussion about their expectations for this young adult novel,

participants in Book Club A moved from viewing the text as fictional to considering the story as a realistic and plausible narrative representation of young refugees living in South Africa today.

Identifying Gaps and Establishing Connections

Post-colonial young adult literature presented a tension between relational and differential experiences of adolescence for participants. On the one hand, the novels often depicted cultures, events, and places that fell outside of the participants' identities and sets of experiences, and thus presented gaps or obstacles for establishing meaningful connections. On the other hand, the experience of coming of age was also familiar. During our conversation about *Now is the Time for Running*, Lexy touched upon this tension:

Lexy: ...it [the novel] deals with things like none of us have ever experienced. But at the same time, there are those themes that we all know, like, you know, race hatred or like people, immigrants taking each other's, or taking jobs... I think we all can like understand that, even though this person [Deo] has gone through really, really intense things.

Sybil: Good. So it's relatable is what you're saying. So, even though it's taking place outside of...I guess, *here*, you can still relate because it has {Lexy: Right} similar—

Lexy: And then you can't relate in some ways, which makes you...like, opens your eyes, I guess.

For Lexy, this novel contained aspects that she could understand because of similar issues at play within the context of the U.S. such as racism and the national debate on the employment of illegal immigrants. However, there were also events with which she could not identify; while she does not name these events in this excerpt, Lexy does indicate that they were nevertheless eye-opening.

Other participants also expressed that they did not identify with the characters, cultures, or events represented in the novels because the stories did not reflect their own experiences or identities. For instance, in his written response to *Climbing the Stairs*, Joel stated that he did not

feel a connection to the main character, a fifteen year old Indian girl: “I found myself unable to identify with Vidya. Whether it was a cultural difference or a gender issue, I don’t know, but something just didn’t click.” Joel narrowed the lack of connection possibly to either Vidya’s culture or gender, as he was positioned outside of both these identities. Likewise, when I asked participants whether or not they related to *The Kite Runner*, Lauren B. responded, “Not really...I guess not...not on a personal level,” even though she had found the novel moving and informative. In her post-study questionnaire, Ashley expressed that one of the challenges she experienced while reading the novels was that, “Sometimes it was difficult relating to the literature as it was from various cultures.” However, she added, “It helped discussing the novels with the group after reading it [the book].” In spite of those experiences of disconnect, as readers, participants sought to make a meaningful connection with the characters and events depicted in the books we read and deployed a variety of strategies to do so.

Personal Connections

Some participants were able to establish personal connections to the novels we selected because they had either heard similar stories from people who had lived in the regions about which we read or they had traveled in nearby regions. For instance, Lauren C. already had insight into the issues presented in the memoir *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy*, because she had two Spanish teachers who grew up in Cuba during Castro’s regime:

Lauren C: ... in high school, all my Spanish teachers were Cuban. And two of the women, they did live under Castro for some amount of time, so I’d heard stories about them when I was younger, so it was interesting to see.

Sybil: Where did you grow up?

Lauren C: Me? Near _____ (name of city). But I learned Spanish from Cuban ladies, so they would tell us things about Castro or whatever. So that was cool to see that. I thought they should read this ‘cause it would be cathartic, I don’t know, to see somebody else’s perspective.

Sybil: Are you in touch with them?

Lauren C: Yeah. The lady that I'm still in touch with, she's very sensitive whenever the topic comes up, so I don't know if she would really want to but I feel like she could benefit from seeing— {Sybil: It's traumatic} I was telling Rian on the way over here, the story that always stuck out to me was, when she was in school, at lunch time, they would have the kids put their hands in front of their eyes and ask God for their lunch. And they would open their eyes and there would be nothing there. And they would make them do it again, and they would say, "Now ask Castro." And when they would open their eyes, there would be all this food on the table.

For Lauren C. reading the novel gave her an additional perspective to the stories her teachers had told her about their childhood in Cuba and made her want to share this perspective with the Spanish teacher with whom she was still in contact. In addition, the fact that Lauren C. shared these stories with the book club helped to expand our experience of reading this memoir—through Lauren C., we were all only one person removed from individuals who had lived through similar events.

Lindsay was another example of a participant who established a connection based on her lived experience. In the spring of 2011, Lindsay had spent two months working at an orphanage in Liberia, which shares a border with Côte d'Ivoire. She was able to speak about the similarities to the landscape (and the culture to some extent) depicted in the graphic novel *Aya* by drawing on her experiences. Since the story takes place in the late 1970s, she noted the similarities and differences between the illustrations and the place where she stayed:

It's a different time, but it's funny, or sad, actually. Because of all of the upheavals and everything, in Liberia, things have been stuck in time. So it's actually really, really, really similar. Especially the architecture. I mean ((sighs)), I don't know. It looks like...yeah, no, it looks pretty similar.

Lindsay added that, while she was there, people from Côte d'Ivoire were immigrating to Liberia to escape political turmoil in their homeland: "[W]hen I was there, we had, there was some civil unrest going on in Ivory Coast in political elections. And Liberia had a lot of, sort of, evacuee

people come in.” I made the connection to the similar circumstances in *Now is the Time for Running* and she reflected:

It was really interesting ‘cause I went to Liberia mainly inspired by the fact that it is this country that’s still re-developing itself after a lot of civil war and all these awful, awful violent things. But when I was there, it was acting as an aid for another country who was having some trouble. And it was really kind of neat, in a way. And luckily there wasn’t a horrendous amount of violence going on in Ivory Coast, but it was enough to shove people out, to want to leave.

Although Lindsay had not visited Côte d’Ivoire, her proximity to the country about which we were reading expanded what the group could know about the place beyond the novel itself. Her comments about civil unrest in contemporary Côte d’Ivoire also stood in contrast to the novel’s depiction of the country during a time of prosperity. Lindsay’s and Lauren C.’s stories established for them, and for the rest of the participants by extension, distant but powerful connections to the regions about which we read.

Popular Culture

Most of the participants in this study did not have lived or distant experiences to which they could link the stories. Therefore, they had to deploy different strategies to make meaning of the stories. For instance, in our discussion of *Now is the Time for Running*, Nick often referred to films he associated with the novel:

I couldn’t really relate to this situation because obviously I’ve never been through anything that traumatic before, but I found myself thinking about movies set in similar situations, like *Hotel Rwanda* or *Blood Diamond*...about the corruption and the governments, how the people are so exploited. And that ...made it a little bit more real for me.

Nick did not identify with what he called a traumatic situation—in the novel, the main character loses his whole family, crosses illegally into another country, and becomes homeless, none of which were events that Nick had gone through. He also mentioned the science fiction thriller *District 9*, which is set in contemporary South Africa:

I think it's similar to—I mean, it's a totally different storyline with aliens, but it's the exact same theme of xenophobia about two different cultures clashing, and they can't get along. One takes advantage of the other. And like, very, very depressing.

When I told him that I appreciated his references to films, Nick explained, “I just find that it's so easy to relate this to that,” meaning relating the novels to the films. Thus, Nick's experience with films that have depicted similar states of upheaval in different countries in Africa—“the corruption and the governments, how the people are so exploited”—provided Nick with visual, geographical, and cultural references beyond his own lived experiences, ones he could draw on to imagine and forge a connection to Deo's life.

Another way that participants were able to establish connections to the narratives was through various popular culture references in the novels we read. For example, the participants in Book Club B referred to U.S. American popular culture such as fashion trends, television shows, and films that were featured in the graphic novel *Aya*, which is set in Côte d'Ivoire in the late 1970s. Betty shared with the group that she identified with these:

Betty: I can so relate to that...she's younger than I am... the author. I mean, I wasn't these girls' age in this year, but I was old enough to put on disco clothing and go to the teen club even though I wasn't a teen, 'cause I looked like I was, so...((others laugh)) I was like, “Oh my god.” Yeah, I mean, the Steve Austin reference? I got that.

Sybil: *Dallas*.

Betty: Yeah, my dad was a *Dallas* freak. Everybody kind of was that—with J.R.

Ashley: Yeah, I knew J.R.

Betty: *The Six Million Dollar Man*?

Others: Yeah.

Shelby: We can rebuild him?

Betty: Yes! ((others laugh)). Oh my god. That's so corny though! And the other guy who's in the John Travolta suit, right? He's right on ((points to a page)). You see him? He's right there. He's John Travolta. ((laughs)) But anyway I lived, I lived some of that.

As a graphic novel, *Aya* represented both in images and text the global reach of U.S. American popular culture. For Betty, these images and references triggered childhood memories that mirrored those of the characters in *Aya*, who loved to get dressed up and go dancing. Although most book club members had not grown up during that time, we nevertheless shared this collective understanding of the seventies through popular culture—myself, Ashley, and Betty all remembered the show *Dallas* with its infamous character J.R. Likewise, at Betty’s mention of *The Six Million Dollar Man*, Shelby immediately recalled one of the show’s catchphrases, “We can rebuild him.” In an illustration of an outdoor disco—people dancing, music notes floating in the air, and a text bubble indicating music blaring from a loudspeaker—Betty pointed to the image of the man wearing the same white suit as John Travolta in the film *Saturday Night Fever* (Aboutet, 2007, p. 8). This book club meeting was full of laughter as we recognized how the seventies, U.S. American popular culture, post-colonial Côte d’Ivoire, and all of us intersected in this moment. Across these cultural, geographic, and historical divergences, there were still connections.

However amused by these references, in her written response to *Aya*, Betty had also examined them critically:

There are many other moments throughout the book that reveal western influence on the Ivory Coast. There are television references to Steve Austin (*The Six Million Dollar Man*) and *Dallas*. There is also a guy dressed in a white polyester suit at the dance, an image straight from *Saturday Night Fever*. And one clear connection to the influence of French colonization is that the furniture in the boss’s house is from Paris.

Betty noticed the western cultural influences in the novel from the U.S. and from France, the latter of which had colonized Côte d’Ivoire until 1960. In our discussion of the novel, she added that she perceived both a cultural clash and instances of cultural assimilation or hybridity in *Aya*:

I'm also a history major so I've been reading a lot of literature from that lens, and I see the underlying conflict. I see the cultural clash, which is not conflict like what we think of conflict, but we, you see the old culture versus the new, more French and, like Paris, and, you know, "don't eat with your hands" and that kind of stuff, you know? You see the cross of, or the clash of cultures, and it's an assimilation that's going on. And it's what post-colonialism is about. They're holding on to their old identities, but they're like a hybrid? [There's] hybridization going on?

Thus, in her reading of *Aya*, Betty engaged two ways to make meaning of the text. She was able to establish a personal connection to the novel's popular culture references by drawing on her childhood experiences. In addition, she drew on her training as a history major to read literature using a historical lens in order to achieve a critical understanding of the dynamics at play in these popular culture references.

Cultural Similarities

When they could not identify with the culture or refer to popular culture references or news media, participants established a connection to themes that seemed familiar to them, such as coming of age, particular scenarios, or traits of characters in the novels we read. For instance, in her written response to *Climbing the Stairs*, Lexy stated that she and the main character had a common approach to reading novels: "I liked her relationships to books and reading because they were similar to mine. We both use reading as an escape from the world and we see it as a tool to better ourselves." In Lindsay's case, she made a connection to a particular event in the graphic novel *Aya* (Abouet, 2007), when the main character, Aya, is illustrated in three wordless panels as walking by herself in the street and is accosted by a man she does not know. He tries to get her attention, saying, "Hey, you! Wait up!" (p. 39). When she continues walking without acknowledging him, he grabs her arm and says, "Did you hear me? I'm talking to you!" (p. 39). Aya tries to get away from him, and he follows her until two adults intervene. There is an element of danger and sexual harassment to this scene—when Aya finally walks away, the man,

pointing his index finger as a warning, says, “She was lucky cause I would have shown her.

Look at those skinny bamboo legs” (p. 41). In our discussion of that scene, Lindsay explained:

I can relate to that ‘cause guys are pretty much the same. ((others laugh)) I mean, no, not to that extent, but I think we’ve all had a run in that, you know, similar, maybe not quite as forward, but like, a little bit of that disrespect. And that part just made me mad, made me cringe.

This scene spans only three pages in the story, but speaks to the familiar threat women face in sexist societies. Lindsay made the connection to this scene to her own lived experience of what she calls “disrespect” from men, who are “pretty much the same,” perhaps regardless of culture. Moreover, she acknowledged that all the book club members (this group had no males in it) had most likely also shared similar experiences when she said, “I think we’ve all had a run in [in] that...disrespect.” This gendered moment cut across cultural differences for Lindsay, who empathized to the point of feeling mad and cringing when she read both the text and images associated with that scene.

In our discussion of *White Teeth*, where the majority of the story is set in contemporary London, Nick wondered whether students would relate to the story because it does not reference the U.S. in any way. In the following excerpt, participants responded to my prompt to consider the parts of the novel to which they or their students might be able to make connections:

Lauren B: The family dynamic—I think that’s relatable.

Nick: The impending war and stuff like that. There’s always going to be wars. Archie was in the war and now they’re having to deal with the cold war stuff, the wall being torn down. There’s always going to be bigots and racist people, and regardless of where you are, you’re going to experience that or there’s going to be evidence of that.

Lexy: The fact that...Millat doesn’t feel like he fits in anywhere. And I don’t think Samad does either. And I think a lot of these characters don’t feel like they belong in any certain place.

Sybil: So how are you saying that it relates to—

Lexy: Kids in America?

Sybil: Yeah.

Lexy: I mean, shit, *I* feel out of place, you know? ((everyone laughs)) It's an everyday-maybe not everyday, but that's something that I feel like everyone struggles with.

Elnora: Especially young—adolescents.

Joel: Everyone wants to fit in.

Although the story takes place outside of the U.S., participants identified several scenarios on local (family, fitting in), national (racism), and international (wars) scales that they and their students would already find familiar. Nick added:

It's weird, but I think it's the most relatable book we've read so far. For me at least. Just the family dynamic like Lauren [B.] said. While I've never been to England or any of these places, just the stuff that they go through seems like...things that every day people would go through. It's not like *Now is the Time for Running* where people are getting shot at and stuff like that necessarily, but...I just found myself very into it for whatever reason, and I was like, "Oh, man. What would I do here?"

Nick pointed out that the topics explored in *White Teeth* matched his own lived experiences even though he had "never been to England or any of these places," in contrast to the events depicted in *Now is the Time for Running*. Thus, even in the context of a post-colonial narrative, participants were able to establish connections when the narratives offered characters and scenarios that mirrored their own lived experiences.

Another example of identifying with the cultural similarities in stories is Book Club B's discussion of the graphic novel *Aya*. In her reading response to the story, Natalea wrote:

As I was reading *Aya*, I had to keep reminding myself 'This is 1978 Africa,' because it literally could have happened today. I liked that the story had universality to it and could see students really enjoying this, especially the drama.

In our discussion of the novel, Natalea referred to a dramatic scene where one of *Aya*'s friends, Adjoua, discovers that she is pregnant. Adjoua was not feeling well and went to see *Aya*'s

mother, Fanta, who is a healer. When Fanta tells her that she is pregnant, Adjoua exclaims, “Tantie, that can’t be. I’ve never done it!” Fanta responds, “Adjoua, I’m not family. Stop lying to me.” Adjoua cannot believe this news and protests, “But I always count my days,” to which Fanta retorts, “Then you don’t know how to count” (Abouet, 2007, p. 52-53). Natalea explained that the narrative of teenage pregnancy combined with Adjoua’s close relationship to her friend’s mother were familiar to her and she found them engaging:

I just really felt like it could happen here... This sarcastic wit and then... I loved the way that they interacted with one another throughout. That was just a really great example. But I loved it because it was just something— ‘cause we almost see the way that people in other cultures, we almost see them as something else. And we’re like, “Oh, we’re American. We’re like this and dadadada.” But really, this happens everywhere, just kind of connecting us. And for students, especially seeing something as dramatic as this and being like, “Oh, it’s not just America that’s crazy, it’s all of us that are crazy.”

For Natalea, the familiarity of this moment functioned to close a cultural gap—teenage pregnancy is also an issue in the U.S. as represented in popular and news media by shows like *16 and Pregnant*, which Lauren C. refers to later in the conversation. In addition, Adjoua’s relationship to Aya’s mother is familiar to Natalea, especially the frank and sarcastic ways in which Fanta talks to Adjoua. This familiar moment thus works against a cultural divide—“Oh, we’re American”—that insists that one ought to perceive “people in other cultures... as something else.” Instead, for Natalea, recognizing that “this happens everywhere” is, in fact, what connects people across cultures. Natalea also understood this moment as potentially significant for her students as they might realize that all cultures have these issues, that “it’s all of us that are crazy.”

Identifying common experiences in literature is indeed important for readers to establish connections across cultures. However, calling the elements of any text “universal” can also be problematic because what readers recognize as universal may actually be elements particular to

or deemed to be valuable in their own culture and may lead them to overlook or to avoid engaging cultural differences. As Crocco (2005) and Saldanha (2000) conclude in their work with pre-service teachers who respectively read post-colonial young adult literature and multicultural children's literature in their courses, "ethnocentric universalism" (Crocco, 2005, p. 570) is one way readers evaluate the experiences depicted in novels as valid or not (see Chapter Three, p. 33-35). In post-colonial young adult literature, however, the similarities participants identified across cultures also worked in tandem with the differences that exist between cultures. In her written response to *Aya*, for instance, Betty identified both cultural similarities and differences:

Aya has plenty of material that shares common ground with western teen life: romance and dating, blossoming sexuality, boy troubles, having a big brother to watch over you, getting in trouble with your parents, dances and parties, finding something to wear for a wedding, getting your hair done, dangers of the streets, desire for independence, thinking about the future (whether it means nabbing a husband or having a career). However, *Aya* is sprinkled with cultural details unique to its Ivory Coast setting. Besides the obvious differences in clothing (the pagne worn by the girls) and food (the allocos that Aya eats with Hervé), there are several other customs that differ from American customs. For example, on pages 13-15, we see a room with at least 9 people sleeping in it, including one infant on the floor. Then there is the reference to people eating with their hands, something westerners don't consider appropriate except when eating specific foods (fried chicken, ribs, etc.).

Thus readers have to grapple with both the elements in the story that echo with their own lived experiences and with those that evoke difference. In the case of *Aya* especially, the visual format of the graphic novel may also work against readers' impulse to reduce the narrative to one that fits an "ethnocentric universalism" (Crocco, 2005, p. 570) as it constantly reminds readers of the characters' race, the cultural particularities of their clothing, food, and the physical landscapes in which they dwell.

Imagining Students and their Needs

At the same time that participants worked to make meaningful connections to the novels for themselves, they also approached the novels as teachers concerned about the needs of their students. At the time of the study, ten of the twelve participants were in their final year and were either already student teaching or placed in classrooms where they did field observations. Consequently, most of the participants could imagine and anticipate their future students' needs by drawing on their past and current field placements. At the heart of every discussion was the need for the story to be relevant to students or for teachers to have the ability to connect the reading to students' lives. During one of Book Club B's meetings, participants spent some time articulating that making these connections was a central feature to teaching English successfully and that novels focused on social issues—especially contemporary young adult literature—provided the crux of that relevance. Natalea explained why she thought that social issues resonate with young adults:

And I also think, especially with young adults...they're coming into their own, so they're wanting to know their place in the world and where they stand with social issues. And this is putting it bluntly, but they're really nosy, so they really want to bring up issues... We read *The Bet* by Chekov, which basically brings up the point "Is the death penalty more humane or is life imprisonment?"... I was like, "We are not trying to decided that in this classroom, do not bring it up." ...they want to do those tough arguments 'cause they love arguing about them. And it's funny, but it's true.

Although that day Natalea chose not to let her students debate whether the death penalty was more humane than life imprisonment, in this example, she made the point that her students were already pre-disposed to engage these social issues because they wanted "to know their place in the world and where they stand with social issues." Betty reasoned that while relevant social issues are more easily found in contemporary young adult texts, teachers must also make these connections available to students with classics:

Well, I guess, in a way though, I mean, we can find, more easily, things in these books because they are more current. But if we look back at those old things [texts], I've seen teachers relating them to current things too, so it doesn't really matter if you're using *Romeo and Juliet*. I've seen a teacher use that to talk about gang violence! You know? Or teenage pregnancy or— you know what I'm saying? You can pull any of these old texts and, in fact, that's the *only* way you're going to make that interesting to this generation anyway. 'Cause [they're] like, "Why the heck am I reading this four hundred year old story?" Because you pull out something social they can actually relate to! To make them get through it!

Betty built on Natalea's comment that social issues are already interesting to students, and regardless of the text the class is reading, teachers have to establish meaningful connections between the text and the issues relevant to students' lives in order for students to engage the story. In the same vein, Lauren C. added that her students often demand to know the reasons behind a particular text selection:

[T]oday, I was doing observations of kids, [and they were] like, "Why do we have to read this? Like, "Why are we doing this?" I feel like that's the major question from kids. And if you can be like, "Well, it relates to this and this and this that's going on the world. Don't you want to be more educated about the world?" That's an answer to something, you know?

In this way, Natalea, Betty, and Lauren C. all drew from their field observations of teachers and students to determine the importance of not only selecting texts that are relevant to students, but also having strategies for establishing these connections when they are not obvious to students.

As these pre-service teachers were acutely aware of their students' need for relevance, they consequently spent part of every book club discussion identifying young adult themes they imagined students could relate to and that they could use as a bridge to explore world cultures as well as socio-political issues that are pertinent to life in the U.S. For example, Lauren C. stated in her written response to *Waiting for Snow in Havana*, "I could see his [Carlos's] childhood problems and concerns being relatable to students, but I could see his problems as a child in America widening the worldview of adolescents in American classrooms." As Eire's (2003)

memoir related both his childhood in Cuba and his experience as an immigrant in the U.S., Lauren C. saw the potential for adolescents reading the story not only to identify with the experience of childhood, but also to widen their worldview while learning about issues related to becoming an immigrant.

Betty also focused on immigration issues in *Now is the Time for Running* as a way to make a meaningful connection for students. In our discussion of the text, she said:

I thought that it was very pertinent because of the immigration issue...because of people's reaction to that here, in this country. When I'm thinking about how students might relate to this besides the whole issue of racism in general, you know, the xenophobic thing, "You're not really from here" thing. And just that immigration is the first thing that comes to mind. It's something that's current. That is what's going on in that [novel].

Betty added that the difference was that the characters were refugees, but she could see the connection to immigration issues in the U.S. In the same discussion, Lauren C. also articulated this push and pull between cultural similarities and differences:

[I]dentity would be a normal teenage theme, but it's heightened and intensified and it's made so much more complicated by the post-colonial elements in their [the characters] life...That's why I really like this book because I could really find where I thought it was just that—pure young adult— things that I would use that have to do with young adult [themes], to where I really think that...you could present it [to students] in a way that the kids could totally relate to it even though on the surface it's this completely foreign occurrence.

Lauren C. recognized the theme of identity in *Now is the Time for Running* as common to coming of age narratives and saw it as providing an opening for students to engage the story; at the same time, she acknowledged the ways in which this experience of coming of age is different because it is "intensified" and "complicated by the post-colonial elements."

In the same way that participants noted the cultural similarities with which they could identify, they also identified themes relating to coming of age that they imagined their students could engage. In doing so, participants acknowledged the complexity of teaching post-colonial

young adult literature because they must also address the cultural differences present in the text. Lexy, for example, imagined teaching *Now is the Time for Running* in a way that engages *both* similarities *and* differences, one that makes the novel not only relevant for students, but also makes them consider viewpoints beyond their own lived experiences. In response to my question about how, as teachers, we might address participants' concerns about the violence in the novel or the absence of a resolved ending to story, but also the necessity to teach these realities to students, Lexy said:

[Y]ou just are— have really good lesson plans— that the outcome of *this* is to teach that... maybe the ways that some of these themes are relatable to kids' lives—like feeling lost or an outsider or whatever. Take that and tie that to actual kids' lives. And then show them how, like I said earlier, it's not relatable because there's so much violence and it's so awful.

The emphatic “this” Lexy referred to may have been the experience of the book club or the book itself—it was not clear from the context of the conversation, and I had no notes from the field that indicated what she was referencing. However, Lexy was clear that in presenting novels like *Now is the Time for Running*, teachers must have “really good lesson plans” to help students not only read the novel in ways that engage their own lived experiences but also have students consider the parts with which they cannot identify.

In keeping with imagining their students' needs, some participants raised concerns about instances of implied or explicit violence, profanity, and sexuality in the novels we read. They wondered, for instance, about the appropriate age group or grade level to teach such stories or whether the novels were appropriate for classroom use. However, participants also appreciated these aspects of the stories as realistic, relevant to their students' concerns and interests, and having the potential to widen their students' worldviews by exposing them to the social issues that occurred in these countries. For example, in Lauren B.'s response to *White Teeth*, she wrote:

I do see how there are obvious postcolonial themes present in the novel...but there are other aspects of the novel thus far that make it extremely inappropriate for a secondary classroom setting. The language is not something that can be easily overlooked, and neither is the emphasis on masturbation...But on the same vane [sic], the vulgarity that I'm half-condemning this novel for is part of what gives this novel its humor. The reader gets a somewhat stream of consciousness modeling of the characters' thoughts, which really helps to make them genuine and relatable, especially to this young white American facet of the audience.

On the one hand, Lauren B. was concerned about using a text with explicit language and sexual content in a classroom setting. On the other hand, she conceded that these issues were precisely what made the novel humorous and the characters "genuine and relatable." Lauren B. considered this conflict during our discussion of the novel and expressed her concerns about the reality of teaching such a text:

Lauren B: ...it was really vulgar. ((others laugh)) I mean, it didn't bother me, but I couldn't imagine trying to get this past the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] to try to teach it in a classroom.

Joel: And the references to masturbation would not go over too well in front of the PTA either, I imagine. Although, enlightened America—they might be okay.

Nick: I might have read this as a junior or senior on my own, but I can't imagine reading it to a class.

Elnora: Yeah.

Lexy: Really? Why not? I want to teach it.

Joel: I can't imagine reading it at my ... private school, but I can imagine someone trying to teach it to juniors or seniors. I don't know how successful they'd be.

...

Nick: I think it could be taught. However, I don't see it getting past the school board or whoever approves [the books].

Joel: It would definitely be an uphill battle, yeah.

Nick: I think you could teach anything, but there's, I think there's going to be someone that's going to say this isn't appropriate or something. Not that I agree or disagree with that.

In the above exchange, participants in Book Club A raised some very real obstacles for teachers who might not have the freedom to select material for the courses they teach. They understood the objections that some parents and administrators might have about their children reading books with explicit language and sexual content in school, but they also saw the potential for teaching a text such as *White Teeth* and the reality that students would not only find it engaging, but that they would probably read it on their own, outside of class. This conversation highlighted, for me, the importance of achieving a balance between finding novels that students will find engaging, that will expand their perspectives on post-colonial issues and cultures, and are also appropriate for the classroom.

Although not all texts are appropriate to teach, it is nonetheless necessary for teachers to be able to recommend material students will find engaging. For instance, several participants thought that *Aya* would not be appropriate to teach because of its adult content—teenage sexuality, pregnancy, abortion, and so on—but that these issues were exactly what would make the story relevant to students. In her written response to the novel, Lindsay outlined the advantages and limitations of the novel:

I like that this story is very relatable to secondary students. It felt as though I was watching an African Sitcom [sic] or bad soap opera. I think I would be more reluctant to *Aya* in my future classroom versus the other books we've read this semester—*A Time for Running* [sic] and *Climbing the Stairs*—because it does not raise awareness of the deep issues I'd like to discuss with students. However, it is full of the more surface-level social issues that are equally important for student learning—teen pregnancy, sex, obedience, loyalty. And, it would be helpful for students to see a different and accurate side to the reality of African lifestyle. The graphics are also useful in order to teach students the language of art. Ultimately, the book would be a refreshing read for students, and it would be interesting to see how they engage with a graphic novel vs. traditional text.

Lindsay saw the potential for using the text in a classroom—social issues relevant to students, engaging West African culture, and the graphic novel genre. She also noted the novel's limits—

“a bad soap opera,” “surface-level issues.” Shelby had an interesting solution to this: she included the novel as part of her classroom library. In the spring of 2012, Shelby had been hired as a ninth grade English teacher. She emailed me to share the news and that, “I’ve had two students check out *Aya* from our classroom library!” (Personal communication, January 23, 2012). Shelby’s note further cemented for me the importance of being able to recommend and make available to students texts that feature protagonists of color and genres such as young adult literature or graphic novels that students will find engaging.

Developing Ideas for Teaching Post-colonial Young Adult Literature

Although participants understood relevance as a central feature of successful teaching, one of the groups explored the tension between examining the social issues that are relevant to students and addressing the traditional skills of teaching English. Thus, participants developed specific teaching ideas to address both the traditional and social issues aspects of teaching English.

For instance, when we discussed *Climbing the Stairs*, participants suggested several approaches for teaching the novel. During our discussion of the novel, participants in Book Club B outlined how a traditional approach could focus on imagery, symbolism, allegory, and vocabulary (the author includes Hindi words without a glossary):

Lauren C: I mean, I think that it’s a good opportunity to do symbolism. {Others: Mm hmm. Yeah, definitely.} Yeah. That’s a definite—

Lindsay: There was a lot of different imagery in there that I really liked. Like, she talked about, she compared things to women’s jewelry a lot and—

Ashley: Flowers, then the garden.

Lindsay: Lots of nature imagery. And it, I feel like that also connected you with her surroundings a little bit too.

Natalea: Like we were talking about—the symbolism of the festivals.

In addition, as historical fiction, the novel lends itself well to a multidisciplinary approach using inquiry, historical overview, and exploring a new perspective on World War II. Lauren B., for example, suggested that one way to explore both the culture and the historical context of the story would be through inquiry:

I thought too, when I was reading it...there's no way you can separate her culture from this novel at all. So, I thought it would be interesting to, if you were doing a, like teaching it as a historical fiction kind of unit, you could assign research papers. I feel like research papers are going to be a good tool for every one of the books we're going to read.

Finally, participants in both groups discussed a social issues approach to teaching the novel including feminism—discussing, for instance, the practice of arranged marriages—examining the colonial relationships and state of mind of various characters in the story, or even exploring the approaches of violence versus non-violence to achieve peace.

As a contemporary and realistic fiction novel, *Now is the Time for Running* was also suitable for inquiry. Lauren B. remarked:

[L]ike we talked about earlier, I definitely think with work like this, tying it to a research paper to show that, you know, this *is* real, and especially because—I didn't even notice that it gave these links in the back. But, I think you definitely need to follow it up with some kind of research paper on current events, or less than current, but still relevant events.

Inquiry, in this case, was the to research a current event and to lend even more authenticity to the narrative as a “real” or plausible account of a young person living in the world today. Other participants also thought they could use this novel to forge interdisciplinary collaboration with social studies teachers and to discuss with students national and global current events, such as immigration. Some participants also suggested a more traditional approach to the novel, such as exploring plot devices—Natalea noted, “if you're looking at heroic cycle or like the quest kind of thing, this is a modern adaptation of a quest—trying to reach a safe haven of sorts.” Lauren C.

thought of examining the narrative perspective of the novel and pairing it with a classic like *Catcher in the Rye*:

I was thinking that it would be interesting to do it with *Catcher in the Rye* because they're both first-person accounts from a male. And talking about the aspect of not having a home, like him being at this boarding school or whatever. I think he has a lot of...the same issues.... [I]t would be incorporating it with a classic. And then tying this too, would show more of an updated version of that.

In addition to participants' approaches, I suggested that we could perform a rhetorical analysis of the novel. Lindsay replied that she had noticed that the author used language that suggested that the main character Deo was in a state of shock: "I *loved* his pacing. I thought...the language was just perfect for it...it was fast and short and cut and dry. And it was numb. But it was *so* heavy at the same time." In these ways, participants devised multiple approaches to teaching contemporary young adult literature.

Participants also had several suggestions for teaching genres such as graphic novels and memoirs. In the case of *Aya*, participants in Book Club B discussed the opportunity for expanding on students' visual literacy skills in addition to reading skills:

Shelby: You're more engaged when you're reading actual text because you have to visualize. And the fact that you don't have that interaction with visualizing, that's why you have to somehow incorporate ways to analyze the pictures.

Lindsay: That's such a good point.

Lauren C: But you can go the opposite way with it because you don't have as much text. I mean, it [reading graphic novels] is a completely different experience. When you do read, you have to think of things yourself, but I think it's interesting to do the reverse too. Like, [pages] 94, 80, 28, 16—those are all huge pictures with not a lot of words. So, I think it would be interesting to go through and just look, and show the kids the big pictures that don't have any text or have little to no text, and tell why is this valuable to the story.

Lindsay: I guess it really helps. Yeah, it engages them with the idea [of] a different type of literacy. Like with art. So you could even bring that into [it], like how to interpret artwork, 'cause that's what it is.

As we examined Aya from a visual perspective, participants realized that they could teach students how to interpret and analyze the art of the novel and how it contributes to the narrative.

Eire's memoir was the only nonfiction story we read, and although it is a coming of age story, it was not necessarily written for young adults. As such, Rian noted that, "I thought it would probably have to be [taught] in an advanced class or just an individual suggestion. I feel like I have to know that my students would be capable of getting through all of it." Because the text was over four hundred pages long and the author's writing style was fairly complex, participants saw the potential the text offered for teaching students in advanced English courses.

Lauren C. focused on the writing conventions the author used:

I could see [using] it in a writing workshop setting. I'm thinking about that 'cause it is kind of unique in that it's very conversational. A lot of the reviews about it and everything, [said] it's about capturing an image, this tropical lush island and these things that are happening on it, which he definitely does. So that would be interesting too if you were doing a writing workshop and you want people to write about places they've been, this is an interesting way to write about a place they've been because it's so infused with the culture as well as the physical setting.

Ashley added to the conversation style of the author as uniquely cultural:

[H]e says that's how people in Cuba are. He's writing like they talk essentially. So I thought that was really neat to show a different culture's way of writing and speaking. There's not just one right way to do it. You can break the rules essentially, if you want to.

These approaches to teaching are all standard ways to teach novels. The fact that the participants listed so many different approaches for teaching post-colonial young adult literature speaks to the possibilities the genre holds for classroom use. These texts can serve several purposes: young readers can learn about a place, time, culture, or issue they might not have previously known, students can find aspects of the narrative that are relevant to their own lives, and teachers can approach these texts in traditional as well as innovative ways.

Summary

In this section, I described the ways in which participants approached the novels as readers and as teachers. When participants read for themselves, they had to come to terms the post-colonial realities represented in the texts we selected, which were all based on actual current or historical events. *Now is the Time for Running* was one novel in particular that did not fit participant' expectations for young adult literature because of its realistic, but somewhat unresolved ending—a typical feature of post-colonial young adult literature (Bradford, et al., 2008). This realism prompted participants to consider this novel a plausible representation of the experiences of some adolescents living in the world today. As participants had not had these experiences for themselves, they were sometimes unable to identify with characters or events in the stories we read. However, participants used a variety of literacy skills to engage the novels in meaningful ways. For instance, some shared stories they had gathered from personal acquaintances or from their travels—narratives that indirectly related to the cultures or regions represented in novels, but nonetheless expanded the group's awareness beyond the information in the books themselves. Other participants referred to films they had seen about the region described in the novels—they used these films to help them make sense of the stories. Some stories had popular cultural references familiar to participants, and discussing these television shows and fashion trends highlighted for the group the cultural aftermath of colonialism and imperialism. Lastly, participants referred to the cultural similarities in the novels to make meaningful connections—issues related to gender and sexism, coming of age, and the local, national, and global contexts of growing up. Participants also approached the novels as teachers who recognized their students' need for relevance. They drew from their field placement observations and student teaching to make the argument that their current students were already

predisposed to ask why they were reading a particular selection as well as eager to discuss social issues because they were at an age where they were trying to find their own place in the world. Thus, participants concluded that establishing connections between the material they teach and their students' lives was central to good teaching. Participants also expressed concerns about the appropriateness of some of the novels for the classroom even as they recognized that the issues that might make the novels inappropriate—explicit language and sexual content—were also apt to be relevant and of interest to their students. Finally, participants developed several teaching ideas that incorporated relevant social issues, inquiry projects, as well as traditional approaches such as rhetorical and literary analyses.

Articulating Understandings of Post-colonial Concerns through Stories

One of the most significant aspects of the book clubs was the ways in which participants used events in the story as a springboard for having complex conversations about salient post-colonial concerns such as identity, sexism, racism, xenophobia, refugee/immigrant issues, economics, and politics. In this section, I examine two extended stretches of conversation in which participants articulated their understanding of these issues. In the first example, I explore a discussion in Book Club A on prejudice in the novel *Now is the Time for Running* (Williams, 2011). Specifically, I examine the ways in which participants built on one another's comments, starting with the novel and extending the discussion to ongoing U.S. national issues. The second example focuses on one participant in Book Club B—Lauren C.—and the ways in which she began the process of articulating and complicating her concept of identity in response to the memoir *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy* (Eire, 2003).

Exploring Prejudice through *Now is the Time for Running*

In one extended stretch of conversation, participants in Book Club A explored the topic of prejudice during our discussion of the novel *Now is the Time for Running* (Williams, 2011). This part of the discussion extended from talk about films participants had referenced to make sense of the African region and my own mention of the film *Invictus*, which depicts how Nelson Mandela used rugby to begin to bridge racial and social divides in post-Apartheid South Africa. The author, Michael Williams, uses a similar device with soccer in the novel.

Sybil: ...so far you've mentioned *District 9*, you have *Hotel Rwanda*, *Blood Diamond*. After reading this, I looked at... What's that movie with Matt Damon and Morgan Freeman {Joel: Oh, the one about rugby} about Mandela?

Lexy: *Invictus*.

Joel: *Invictus*!

Sybil: *Invictus*! Yes. And that [movie] reminded me a little bit of that [novel]. {Joel: That was the Apartheid film} Obviously, [a] more hopeful ending ((laughs)).

Joel: But that's a good analogy, and I've never seen that movie—

Lexy: Yeah, but obviously, it's full of crap ((everyone laughs)) because this is still going on!

Lexy's objection that "this is still going on" refers to the fact that *Now is the Time for Running* is a novel based on the xenophobic riots that took place in 2008 in South Africa. Joel then added another layer to the discussion by making a distinction between institutionalized racism and xenophobia:

Joel: Well, ...in some ways it is ... but it's not Apartheid. Now it's xenophobia and it's outsiders. It's not the race that matters, it's "You are not a part of *our* group," which, I don't know if that's better or worse.

Sybil: Uh, let's talk about that.

Lexy: It's essentially the same thing though, right?

Joel: It really is. It's just, it's more of a, I guess it's more of a civilized prejudice.

Although I asked Joel to elaborate on the phrase “civilized prejudice,” the conversation moved on with Nick stating the similarities between racism and xenophobia:

Nick: It's still a bias against a group of people that's different than you, and that's all it boils down to, I think.

Lauren B: Yeah, that's how I feel about it. It's- prejudice is prejudice.

Nick: And if anything, I feel like these people have been taken advantage of so widely in each of these countries that it would make sense for them to come together. But instead, they just, they tear each other apart. And it's—

Lexy: ...it makes sense for them to come together in their country groups because ... they all deal with pretty much the same stuff...and I mean, racism and all that, it's pretty much based on putting someone down to make yourself feel better. So, “Well, at least I'm white; at least I'm not black,” that whole mentality. So I think that's playing into what's going on there. It's like, “Well at least I'm South African, and I'm not from Zimbabwe.”

While participants recognized the distinction between Apartheid and xenophobia, between race-based prejudice and prejudice based on culture or nationality, they maintained that the underlying motivations of intolerance and discrimination are the same. Thus talk about prejudice remained at the individual level—the racist mentality Lexy describes—and did not fully consider the ways in which institutions establish and maintain inequity. In the next segment of the conversation, Joel added yet another layer of complexity when he made the connection between prejudice and economics. He referred to a part of the story when the main character Deo and his brother have found work as illegal immigrants, picking tomatoes on a farm located near the border. At first, Deo can't believe his luck:

When we first arrived at the Flying Tomato Farm, I had to pinch myself every morning to make sure that I wasn't dreaming. Innocent and I had beds to sleep in, with our own blankets and pillows. We had a roof over our heads, and we weren't running. We ate two meals a day, and at the end of the month, we got fifty South African rands—almost seven billion Zim dollars each, just for picking tomatoes! (Williams, 2011, p. 114)

Deo is aware of the difference between Zimbabwe and South African currency, but not necessarily the extent to which the Zim dollar is devalued because he thinks he is making a lot of money. However, upon leaving the farm to play soccer with the children in the neighboring village, Deo is met with animosity by the locals who are out of work. Back on the farm, his friend Philani explains,

Before the people started coming across the river from Zimbabwe, the men from Khomele village worked on the Flying Tomato Farm. In those days Foreman Gerber paid them four hundred rand a month... There are thousands of people who come to find work in South Africa. And it is hard for the men from Khomele. They lose their jobs, and then they see people come from across the river eating the food they used to eat and getting the money they used to get. They're very angry, and who can blame them? (Williams, 2011, p. 124-126)

Joel referred to this scene when he made the connection between prejudice and the fight over resources, compounded by people like the farmer, who sees an opportunity for making a profit by exploiting illegal immigrants who cannot go to the police for fear of being deported:

Joel: And on the same level, there is ...the economic aspect, how, when he [Deo] goes into the village, he sees all these people who are hungry because they got laid off so that the guy [the foreman] could pay so much less for, so that he could exploit the immigrants.

Sybil: ...When he first crosses the border, and the job he gets at the tomato farm?...

Joel: I thought that was interes[ting]. 'Cause he goes into the village, and all these people, they *can't* work anymore because the foreman won't hire *non*-immigrants cause he can pay all these people coming over from Zimbabwe so much less. I remember it's somewhere like—how many rand?

Lexy: 50 to 400.

Joel: Yeah, so it's 8 times as—he gets to pay them an eighth of what he used to be paying the locals. And so you could see how that's hurting the people around them. And so I think it's interesting how Deo sees, "Oh, well these people are completely screwed over because *I'm* getting something."

Joel's comment helped Nick to make his own connection between this scene and current illegal immigration issues in the U.S.:

Nick: It's the same thing that's going on in the southwest right now....with people crossing the border and finding cheap labor.

Joel: And so, as a result of that, there are a lot of people who can't get even low class labor jobs because those have been—

Nick: There's always going to be someone who's going to work—

Joel: For cheaper because they don't have to report them and stuff.

Here, Joel and Nick took turns completing their narrative about illegal immigration in the U.S. Lexy, who is from Texas, responded in kind and brought the conversation back to the issue of racism at play in this scenario:

Lexy: Well *and* that... in Texas people *hate* Hispanic people. Like, *really*, it's—

Joel: It gets to be kind of—

Lauren B: It's ridiculous.

Lexy: ...It's not on this level. It's not violent.

Although they do not necessarily come to a consensus, through this discussion, participants collectively acknowledged that racism and xenophobia are both forms of prejudice that stem from or are exacerbated by an economics system where the disadvantaged are exploited and pitted against each other. The excerpts from this discussion illustrate the ways in which pre-service teachers used events in the novel as a springboard for discussing social issues on global and national scales. The group setting also contributed to a complex discussion as each participant built on the previous comment and added a new element to the conversation, drawing from the novel, films, as well as their broader knowledge of social issues, resulting in a collective learning environment.

Conceptualizing Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in Response to *Waiting for Snow*

In this sub-section, I focus on one participant's response to Carlos Eire's (2003) memoir, *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy*. The day we met to discuss this text, only three participants out of seven attended the sessions—Rian, Ashley, and Lauren C.—as several book club members canceled at the last minute due to student teaching and employment concerns. However, our sparsely attended meeting created a forum where participants could take longer turns and explore a topic in depth, in contrast to the rapid and frequent turn-taking that characterized our past, and more fully attended, meetings. Such was the case for Lauren C. that afternoon. She found the memoir compelling and was able to make a personal connection to the reading because her Spanish teachers in secondary school were Cuban and had told her stories about their childhoods under Castro's regime. In the excerpts that follow, I focus on how Lauren C. used an event in the memoir to articulate her understanding of the distinctions and overlaps between race, ethnicity, and nationality.

Lauren C. referred to a chapter where Eire (2003) remembers his childhood as a privileged, white, blond haired boy in Cuba. Even as a child, he understood that his privilege was tied to his race, in contrast to the impoverished African Cubans he observed throughout the island. Eire (2003) recalled a misguided childhood fear that he might turn black from eating foods that were black or brown. At the end of the chapter, Eire (2003) notes how his race eventually changed when he immigrated to the U.S. in 1962:

They'd been right after all, those who told me that dark food couldn't turn you into an African. What they didn't know was that it would take only one brief plane ride to turn me from a white boy into a spic. And I'm reminded of it every time I have to fill out a form that lists "Hispanic" as a race, distinct from "white" or "Caucasian." It wasn't any food that stripped me of my whiteness. No. Just one forty-five minute plane ride over the turquoise sea. (p. 160)

Lauren C. summarized what she remembered of the scene:

There's one part where he's talking about how growing up he always thought of himself as white and when he came to America, he marked his race—it was Hispanic—and he was talking about that evolution to thinking that. He always thought he was—"Oh, well I'm white." And then from seeing it like, "Oh, no. You're," you know, whatever...the derogatory term for—spic. I don't even like saying that. When he's talking about becoming a spic, that really struck me as something that would be so traumatic. I don't know...

The idea of Eire's race changing "from a white boy into a spic" (Eire, 2003, p. 160) struck Lauren C. as a traumatic experience. The conversation moved on to situate Cuba as a former colony of Spain, and Ashley commented that she used to believe that most people from Spain had dark hair and dark skin, but that she learned that many Spaniards and Hispanics are also fair. Lauren C., who had majored in Spanish language and literature, drew on the extensive knowledge she gleaned from her studies to explain that Eire's family was from Galicia, which has cultural ties to Ireland, thus explaining the author's fair skin and hair. Lauren C. came back to her earlier point about Eire changing race, when she said:

Lauren C: And I guess that would be something to think about, right? 'Cause he's, for this book, because, I don't know. There is no type of person you can say is Hispanic. And to him [Carlos Eire], being Hispanic isn't even a concept. So, it's kind of interesting. I don't know.

Sybil: That is interesting.

The various pauses in the excerpt above indicate Lauren C.'s initial struggle to articulate what she was thinking: that "There is no type of person you can say is Hispanic," and that the identity category of "Hispanic" was not even a concept for the author as a child, who is subsequently stripped of his whiteness upon becoming an immigrant. The idea of "Hispanic" as an identity construct that is imposed prompted Lauren C. to share how her own thinking about what constituted "Spanish" evolved throughout her education:

Lauren C: In high school, I had my Spanish teachers, and they were both Cuban, and I was like, "This is what being Spanish is like." And then I got to school [university], and I had a Puerto Rican teacher, and I was like, "It's completely different." They don't talk

the same way, they don't have the same beliefs about things, they don't have the same ideas about, I don't know. I kept going, and my last, one of my Spanish teachers last semester, she's from Majorca. She has blonde hair, she has light eyes. Majorca's an island too. It's not even continental Spain. So my whole concept of what it was like is completely different about Latin American, South American Spanish.

Sybil: But where did you get that idea- oh, so you got the idea of what Hispanic is from-

Lauren C: From my Cuban Spanish teachers. {Sybil: Right. Okay} And I had another Cuban teacher when I was young too, so that was my concept of what people who spoke Spanish were like Cuban people. And then I got to college, I was like, "Oh, okay!" Like, there is, I mean, I don't know. I had, one of my teachers is from Costa Rica and she's light, light, light skinned and dark-haired; and like from Chili—Chile. She's light-skinned. I don't know.

Lauren C. recounted how her concept of "Spanish" expanded as she took courses with new teachers—these teachers challenged her previous understanding because they represented a wide spectrum of Spanish-speaking cultures—Cuban, Costa Rican, Chilean, Puerto Rican, and Majorcan. In the context of our conversation about race, and in response to Ashley's comment that her understanding of "Hispanic" changed from picturing only people with "dark hair, dark skin" to including those who are fair, Lauren C. also described the varied include racial characteristics of some of her Spanish teachers.

Lauren C. was starting to articulate the contrast between the generic label of "Hispanic" and the diversity of races and ethnicities that comprise it. I pointed out that countries are often represented or imagined as racially uniform—for instance, the understanding of Cuba as white or of Spanish descent ignores the Afro Cuban population that makes up a significant part of the culture. As a way to deepen the discussion, I also shared with the group some of my own experiences growing up in Haiti and immigrating to the U.S., which mirrored Eire's (2003) account in some ways, albeit in a different time and place.

Sybil: [T]o me it's interesting where these concepts come from, you know. When you say, when I think of Hispanic, what that means, and every single one of your experiences are like, "Wait a minute!" There are more and more exceptions, and then you're like, well

what really is the rule? What is that? And so that's kind of the difference between race and ethnicity or culture, when you have to figure out- there are really no clear lines.

Lauren C: Race and ethnicity- that's how I'm trying to think about it. It's weird.

Sybil: And culture and nationality—all of that plays into it too. And where do you draw the line? And there's no- you can't easily categorize. But one of- I always tell this story- but one of the biggest things that was frustrating to me when I first moved to the States was the idea of race. And what box do you check? Because often it said "African American," and I was like, "Well, that's not my culture, and there's no box for me." And in Haiti, I was just Haitian. There was no race box for you to fill on these forms. I would change them a lot ((laughs)). Sometimes I'd write "Haitian"- I would put "other" and write "Haitian." If it had "black/African American," then I would check that. But it was really weird. And so I can imagine for Hispanics too—it's a made up category {Lauren C: Right} and so you could really be from anywhere. And so if you're from Spain, what do you [write]?

Lauren C: You're not Hispanic, you're Spanish. When you're in Europe, you're European. I don't know! ((everyone laughs)) What are you supposed to say? I mean, and Spain had issues with that too, 'cause physically, Spain is cut off from, with the Pyrenees, it's cut off from the rest of Europe. And like when Spain was—I just took Spanish History last semester, so it's in my brain all the time. {Rian: You studied it all the time} I did! I had too! {Rian: No, still.} Oh, yeah. {SD: It's fascinating!} So, when they're developing their cultural identity until modern times when you could cross those mountains, they weren't Europeans. They were just Spanish. But they went to these other places. There is a couple cities in Africa that are still considered to be Spanish just because- I can't remember what they're called. There's a place in Morocco, I think, and I don't know. They have these settlements that are still culturally—the people living there would still consider themselves to be Spanish, but they live in Africa...And Spanish people are really Arabic. For the whole southern half of it, they're not really European. They're Arabic.

In sharing my own struggles and questions about understanding the differences and overlaps between race, culture, ethnicity, and nationality, and feeling that mine were not always adequately represented on forms that required demographic information, I echoed the author's sentiment that these identity categories are very much contextual. However, in response to my question about whether people from Spain are "Hispanic," Lauren C. replied, "You're not Hispanic, you're Spanish. When you're in Europe, you're European." Although she had previously complicated these identity categories, Lauren C. significantly reverted to national or

geographic identity constructs that ignore the multiple identities included in these overarching labels. At the same time, Lauren C.'s course in Spanish history helped her to see the ways in which Spanish national identity had shifted over time, and how people from various cultural groups have migrated and settled, resulting in varied racial demographics and cultural backgrounds within the same country. I took the opportunity to ask her to reflect on this:

Sybil: So, what does that do for you then? How do you make sense of this?

Lauren C: I don't know. It's weird to me to 'cause in America, I'm technically ethnically English and French, but I would never say that. I would never even think to say that. I'm American. I don't know. But in these other countries, I feel like it's different. I don't know. I can't imagine being from a place where everyone was the same. Does that make sense? But people aren't really the same in other places either, I just don't know that. I don't know.

Here, Lauren C. reflected that although she is ethnically English and French, she would never even think to call herself that, and indicated a preference for describing herself in terms of her national identity instead. As a sociologist whose work focuses on race and ethnicity, Waters (2001) explains:

[T]he option of being able not to claim any ethnic identity exists for Whites of European background in the United States because they are the majority group—in terms of holding political and social power, as well as being a numerical majority. (p. 431)

In contrast, Waters (2001) continues:

Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians do not have the option of a symbolic ethnicity at present in the United States...[because their] lives are strongly influenced by their race or national origin regardless of how much they choose not to identify themselves in terms of their ancestries. (p. 432)

Thus, Lauren C.'s comment, "I would never even think to say that" is consistent with the experience of being white in the U.S. At the same time, she implicitly acknowledged the racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S. when she said, "I can't imagine being from a place where

everyone was the same.” She quickly revised her statement, realizing that “people aren’t really the same in other places either,” that every country is in some way multiracial or multicultural.

Participants spent some time sharing where they were from—two of them expressed difficulty in tying their identity to a single geographic location because their families had moved around the U.S. and were not originally from the South. However, Lauren C. observed that, on a trip to Europe, she was often identified as U.S. American, something that had to do with more than just race:

Lauren C: I didn’t realize that until I did a summer abroad in Europe, and I was like, “This is weird! Now we’re the outsiders.” We were in Italy, so people knew you were—they were like, “Ugh. You Americans.” ... We’re all white but, guess what? They knew we were all Americans. {Sybil: Really} Yeah. They could just pick you out on sight. {Sybil: Wow.} ... It’s just weird. So being white didn’t really, had no sense of, it’s crazy.

Sybil: Like, mediating how you relate to others. It was still a cultural thing.

Lauren C: Yeah. And it wasn’t race. It was more... I guess in Europe, a lot of countries are white. So, in Europe, it’s like, “No, I’m not white. I’m French. I’m Italian. I’m French. I’m English.” I feel like it’s not the same thing as in America, where people are just like, “You’re white.” Or, like you said, “you’re African American,” which isn’t even necessarily true. But I feel like that’s just how people—or “you’re Hispanic,” but that’s not true either. It’s just different.

Although earlier she expressed a preference for identifying as “American” rather than referring to her ethnic background, Lauren C. could also see that people in the U.S. are referred to by their race or cultural ancestry—“you’re white.” Significantly, Lauren C. revised her comments as she referred to immigrants by adding, “which isn’t even necessarily true,” which indicates that the identity categories used for immigrants in the U.S. had become more complicated for her in this discussion. She also noted that these identity labels are dependent on context: in Europe, although she and the locals shared a common race—“we were all white”—they referred to themselves not by race, but by nationality—“I’m not white. I’m French. I’m Italian.” In addition,

although they also identified her by her nationality, it held a negative connotation, as “the outsider.”

The participants explained that the experience of being identified as U.S. American also had something to do with fashion:

Rian: You just look really American.

Lauren C: Apparently you do. You can tell.

Sybil: Is there such a thing as an American look? ((laughs))

Lauren C: Well, when you’re in Europe, people dress very differently. {SD: Ahh}. People have a very different sense of style, fashion.

Ashley: [U.S. tourists] They’re all wearing norts [Nike shorts] and all that. That’s why. My roommate went to Europe and everyday she wore norts and a Northface- or whatever. She looked like she was an American white girl.

Lauren C: Every time we saw girls with these shorts ((points to her own)), I was like, “Oh, there’s more Americans here!”

Thus a particular style and certain items of clothing are markers of U.S. national identity outside of the U.S., to the point that even Lauren C. herself used them to identify other U.S. tourists. The multiple ways Lauren C. talked about identities reminded me of Yon’s (2000) study with Afro-Caribbean youth who also reframed the concept of “race” to include nationality, fashion styles, and culture (see Chapter Two, p. 17-18).

The excerpts in this section illustrated the difficulty Lauren C. had in articulating how she understood identity. As she revised, clarified, and qualified her comments, she exemplified Yon’s (2000) statement that “Identity is therefore always partial, capable of telling us something, unable to tell us all” (p. 71-72). Lauren C. drew on multiple sources and discourses—her lived experiences with her teachers, her coursework on Spanish language, history, and literature, as well as the novel we read for that day—to begin making sense of the identity categories of race,

ethnicity, and nationality in a global context. In addition, she considered where she fit in these categories and how she defined her own identity. Although this conversation did not resolve these definitions nor did it address the systemic inequities that inform them, our discussion provided an opportunity for Lauren C. to explore, articulate, and complicate how she thought about identity. Moreover, Lauren C.'s comments described a pre-service teacher *in the process of* conceptualizing these ideas.

Summary

This section explored two examples where participants used events in the novels we read to articulate their understanding of issues such as prejudice and identity. The first example examined an extended stretch of conversation in Book Club A, when participants discussed prejudice in *Now is the time for Running* (Williams, 2011). Participants established that there was a distinction between the xenophobia in the novel and the system of Apartheid that existed in South Africa—prejudice based on ethnicity or nationality versus prejudice based on race. However, participants maintained that these forms of discrimination were essentially the same in their construct that one group was less desirable than another. Some participants complicated the discussion by referring to parts of the novel that highlight the role economics, hyperinflation, and the employment of illegal immigrants play in exacerbating tense relations between groups. Participants also established a connection to similar immigration issues in the U.S. today. This group discussion illustrated how the space of the book club functioned as a collective learning environment, in which participants shared knowledge they had gathered from the novel as well as news media to explore the issue of prejudice in some depth.

The second example in this section focuses on one participant—Lauren C.—who responded to *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy* (Eire, 2003).

Specifically, she was struck by a passage where the author reveals that his race changed from one country to another, from white to Hispanic, upon immigrating to the U.S. Lauren C. used the space of the book club to articulate how she understood identity. She referred to the memoir as well as her lived experiences to make sense of identity categories like race, ethnicity, and nationality: Spanish teachers she had throughout her schooling expanded her ideas about Spanish-speaking cultures; Spanish history, language, and literature courses she took gave her insight on Spanish culture over time; her travel experiences in Europe helped her to see that identity categories are context dependent. Together, these examples illustrate the ways in which participants used the novels, a variety of discourses, and to some extent their experiences, in the space of the book clubs to articulate, to revise, and to complicate their understanding of these issues across personal, national, and global contexts.

Chapter Six: Implications and Conclusions

In a position paper written for the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), Cart (2008) asserts that young adult literature is valuable because it addresses the needs of adolescents in their transition from childhood to adulthood:

By addressing these needs, young adult literature is made valuable not only by its artistry but also by its relevance to the lives of its readers. And by addressing not only their needs but also their interests, the literature becomes a powerful inducement for them to read. (para. 8)

In addition, Cart (2008) argues that young adult literature also offers “portraits of the lives – exterior and interior – of individuals who are *unlike* the reader” (his emphasis, para. 11). He concludes, “In this way, young adult literature invites its readership to embrace the humanity it shares with those who – if not for the encounter in reading – might forever remain strangers or – worse – irredeemably ‘other’” (para. 11). In a similar fashion, post-colonial young adult literature depicts the experience of coming of age in various historical and geo-political contexts. It cuts across trends in young adult literature—realistic fiction, romance, sports, historical fiction, fantasy and science fiction, and graphic novels—as it explores the particularities of a culture and place. Post-colonial young adult stories are based on actual events and invoke colonial histories that inform the present. In that way, the novels used in this study were not just stories; instead, they invited readers to consider plausible accounts or metaphorical ethnographies (Bean, 2004) of young people’s experiences during or after colonization. Moreover, the novels selected in this study feature young protagonists of color growing up outside of the cultural contexts of the U.S., stories that are underrepresented in the young adult literature market (Cart, 2010; Koss & Teale, 2009). Thus, this study supports the move to identify and categorize post-colonial young adult literature as a genre or subgenre of young adult literature that provides U.S. readers with the means to begin engaging worlds and cultures beyond their own.

More specifically, this narrative inquiry has described the dynamics and discussions of two book clubs in which twelve pre-service English teachers read and responded to post-colonial young adult literature. The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the possibilities and challenges of using post-colonial young adult literature in education settings. The findings of this study illustrate that reading about and discussing cultures around the world that have been transformed by and have emerged from a state of colonial oppression can provide valuable critical insights for future teachers. In this concluding chapter, I discuss the implications these findings have for curriculum, teaching, and teacher education. First, I provide a summary of each finding. Next, I discuss the implications these findings have for education—specifically, the possibilities as well as the challenges of engaging post-colonial young adult literature. I also make recommendations for teachers and teacher educators based on these implications. Finally, I suggest areas for further research.

Summary of the Findings

The first finding, “Expanding a Limited Awareness of Post-colonial Issues and Cultures” (p. 103), revealed that participants had a limited awareness about the geo-political and historical contexts of the regions depicted in the novels selected for the study. However, because participants had volunteered to join the study, they were already curious and willing to learn more about this genre of literature. The novels thus revealed some events and perspectives about which they had no previous knowledge. Becoming aware of this new information alerted some participants to the gaps in their own education as they reflected on courses they had taken that related to the regions about which we read, but that did not offer the information contained in the novels. For some participants, this realization prompted them to do additional research. For

others, reading about these events and cultures from a post-colonial perspective helped them to reconsider their previously held assumptions.

The second major finding, “Reading for Self and Reading for Teaching: Establishing Connections Across Difference” (p. 123), illustrated how participants used a variety of strategies to establish meaningful connections for themselves across cultures. As readers positioned outside of the culture about which they read, some participants acknowledged that there were aspects of the texts with which they could not identify. However, when participants could not refer to their lived experiences to establish meaningful connections with the characters or events in the novels, they referred to other stories from acquaintances, their travels to places near the regions about which we read, their previous coursework, films, news, and popular culture to make sense of the stories. These secondary experiences provided them with the background and visual images they needed to make meaningful connections to the stories. In addition to the ways they made sense of the novels for themselves, participants also considered how they might teach them with their future students. The majority of the pre-service teachers in this study were in the final year of their program—they were either already student teaching or observing classrooms in their field placements. As such, they positioned themselves as teachers who could speak with authority about students and teaching. Specifically, participants were concerned with how they might make post-colonial young adult novels relevant to their students’ lives while also expanding students’ global awareness. Participants also identified potential issues for using these texts in secondary education settings, including not being in control of their own curriculum and resistance from parents and school administrators for using texts with explicit violence, language, and sexual content.

The third finding, “Articulating Understandings of Post-colonial Concerns through Stories” (p. 148), illustrated the ways in which participants articulated their understandings of post-colonial concerns in collective and individual ways, beginning with the novels selected for the book clubs. The format of the book club facilitated a collective learning environment where participants pooled their knowledge to explore a topic—such as prejudice—in depth and in complex ways. Individually, some participants used the space of the book club to (re)conceptualize their understandings of a particular issue or concept—such as race, ethnicity, and nationality—in light of the information they encountered in the novel. This finding indicates that this form of learning is a process by which participants begin to expand and revise their prior knowledge of these issues. Taken together, these three findings support the idea that reading and discussing post-colonial young adult literature in a book club setting can offer some critical and potentially transformative insights for pre-service teachers and perhaps, by extension, for their future students.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study have a number of implications for education, including curriculum, teaching, and teacher preparation:

- Visual media such as news, films, or graphic novels function as supplementary references that help participants make meaningful connections across the cultures, histories, and geographies depicted in novels.
- Post-colonial stories are a means to engage narratives of trauma in a safe way and provide counter-narratives that prompt participants to reflect critically on established media and national narratives.

- Book clubs offer a framework for enacting post-colonial pedagogy—engaging cultural narratives in affective, analytical, and self-reflexive ways.
- Book clubs can function as professional development spaces where pre-service teachers deepen their knowledge on a topic of their choice and develop teaching approaches with peers.
- Implementing post-colonial narratives in secondary education poses some challenges because teachers might not be in control of the materials they teach. In addition, post-colonial young adult literature could be taught in uncritical ways.

In the remainder of this section, I discuss each of the above implications in more depth.

The first implication for teaching from global perspectives is that, in order for readers to be able to make a meaningful connection with post-colonial narratives and read across cultures, they need to have an expansive cultural visual repertoire. While readers might find some common ground with the experience of coming of age, they also need to be able to engage the different worldviews post-colonial novels offer. This narrative inquiry highlighted the important role visual media such as news, films, or graphic novels played as supplementary references that helped participants to make meaningful connections across cultures, histories, and geographies. Since all educators likely use resources that do not reflect their students' cultures, they should provide students with both print and non-print texts such as movies, film and photo documentaries, graphic novels, music, art, and so on. Without these, and a rich background in world history, readers may not be able to imagine cultures that fall outside of their experiences.

Post-colonial stories invite readers to witness potentially traumatic stories from a first-person perspective, while maintaining a certain distance through the medium of the book (Tarc, 2009; Miller, 2007). As Miller (2007) explains, “Memoirs [and other texts] from sites of danger

provide a safe space for readers to ponder the nightmare of global relations, even as the pages display the extreme difficulty of living in times of traumatic history” (p. 542). In this way, first person narratives provide experiences that may not be available to readers otherwise (Tarc, 2008; Phillion & He, 2004). In her pre-study questionnaire, Lindsay understands this as central function of literature:

I think it [literature] plays a very important role to raising awareness of these issues and to sparking conversations primarily because fictional characters are just that...fictional. It is sometimes easier to discuss sensitive topics about people that are not “real,” and therefore, it may also be easier to have deeper conversations and allow room for more contemplation since no “real people” are up for speculation.

Although the characters are fictional, post-colonial literature tends to draw on actual events, which provides readers with a “metaphorical ethnography” (Bean, 2004) that allows them to engage these narratives as both fictional and plausible. While classics also function in this way, post-colonial literature offers a glimpse of cultures that are not typically represented in the secondary school curriculum. Lauren B. drew a similar conclusion in her post-questionnaire:

[T]here is a plethora of [post-colonial] texts available that teach the same themes and lessons as traditional canonical texts that can bring something else to the educational table. These texts have themes and messages that are central to any piece of literature one would want to teach in a classroom, but they also expand readers’ understanding of the world around them and of different cultures that they would not otherwise have a way of experiencing.

Post-colonial stories can also provide powerful counter-narratives that prompt readers to reflect on established media and national narratives in more critical ways. Lexy’s and Lauren B.’s experiences with *The Kite Runner*, for instance, especially highlighted this for me. Prior to reading this story, they had not considered how news media might have shaped their views on Afghanistan. Reading this novel provided them with an insider’s perspective to Afghan culture, which enriched their own perspectives and helped them to rethink or reconsider the viewpoints covered in the news. Educators should therefore carefully select novels that provide alternative

accounts of cultures around the world. It is, however, not sufficient to rely on post-colonial narratives for provoking these critical insights. Readers—teachers especially—must do more than simply read such narratives and engage with the culture represented. Teachers also need to be able to evaluate these texts (Freeman & Lehman, 2001), to consider issues of representation in the narratives and whether or not they, as readers, are engaging in ethnocentric universalism (Crocco, 2005) when they identify with certain themes in the stories. Educators who use post-colonial young adult literature in their courses should consider pairing the novels with critical or theoretical essays as well as explicitly discuss issues of representation and ethnocentric universalism (Crocco, 2005) that surface when we read cultural texts.

Another important practical implication of this study is the potential book clubs have for enacting a post-colonial pedagogy—reading affectively, analytically, and self-reflexively (Asher, 2002, 2005; Johnston & Mangat, 2000; Tarc, 2009). The space of the book club invites readers to extend the solitary act of reading to a social and collective learning environment (Farr, 2005; Long, 2003). There, readers can use stories “as springboards for reflecting on and sharing personal experiences” (Flood et al., 1994, p. 22) and as “heuristics and explanatory devices for making sense of their worlds in social, relational, safe contexts” (Kooy, 2006, p. 662). In sharing these ideas with the group, the research participants in this study engaged a variety of perspectives across book club participants and deepened or revised their initial interpretations of the story. This study also shows that this self-reflexive practice is a process, as exemplified by Lauren C.’s shifts in articulating her understanding of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Educators need to keep in mind that through reading and discussing counter-narratives in the social and relational space of a book club, students’ understanding of these issues can deepen and become more complex. However, students might not revise their prior understanding immediately—

rather, as their understanding becomes more complex, students will have more literary and cultural experiences on which to draw in their future conversations about global perspectives (Mosley, 2010). As I discussed in Chapter Two, there are a variety of ways that book clubs can be implemented in classrooms (p. 44-47). In addition, the student-centered, collaborative, and self-reflexive pedagogical practices of book clubs provide a framework for implementing post-colonial pedagogy in the classroom.

Book clubs can also serve as professional development for pre-service teachers as they read to deepen their knowledge and as they develop teaching ideas on a topic of their choice (Burbank et al., 2010; Reilly, 2008). The findings in this study revealed the ways in which pre-service teachers in their final year were already professionals—they knew their students well and were concerned with building a curriculum that addressed their students' needs. They used the space of the book club to develop how they might approach these novels with students. For instance, Lexy shared that she developed a conceptual unit for one of her methods courses, using *Climbing the Stairs* to explore identity. This suggests that book clubs are a space that participants can use to conceptualize teaching approaches for texts they do not encounter in their education courses. For example, in her post-study questionnaire, Lauren B. stated that the majority of the readings in her Modern Criticism course were theoretical: “We primarily read through essays and articles in a textbook.” She added that, “Through this book club, I realized I could take that concept and apply it to a secondary education classroom.” Thus educators might implement book clubs in their courses to support students in exploring a topic of interest in a social, relational, and collective learning environment and in developing how this topic could be applied in the classroom. Teacher educators could also include global perspectives in the methods and young adult literature courses they teach. In fact, one unexpected result of this study was that the

professor for the young adult literature service-learning course in which participants Book Club A were enrolled told me in passing that she would be including *Aya* in her young adult literature course next fall.

While this study explored the possibilities of using post-colonial young adult literature in education settings, it also revealed that there are some challenges for implementing them in secondary school curriculum. An additive approach to implementing post-colonial novels in the curriculum is simplistic and perhaps an unrealistic expectation for new teachers. In our discussions, participants raised the concern that they might not be in control of the material they teach or that parents and administrators might object to novels that feature explicit language and sexual content for classroom use. A month into student teaching, Betty confirmed that this concern was well founded. In her post-study questionnaire, Betty stated:

Now that I am student teaching, I see many limitations that might prevent me from using any of these books in the classroom. I might be able to recommend independent reading to some students, but the existing administration and time restraints make it next to impossible for teachers to select their own material. In an ideal world, the book club method would be great for encouraging students to actually learn to like (or maybe even love) to read. Sadly, I don't see that as a goal in our public schools.

Unless and until schools support an interdisciplinary curriculum that integrates global perspectives, teachers will need to find ways to circumvent the limits of the curriculum. Recommending post-colonial texts to young adults, creating a class library for students, or creating a student-led book club during lunch or after school are just some examples teachers can support their students in cultivating a global awareness through reading.

Another challenge in using post-colonial young adult literature is the appeal of implementing such novels in the curriculum in the same unthreatening ways as multicultural literature (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001). For example, during our discussion of *Climbing the Stairs*, one participant in Book Club B suggested that she could use the topic of arranged

marriages to create fun activities for her students without suggesting how she might problematize the topic for and with students. Teacher educators would thus need to discuss why such approaches are problematic and find ways to support pre-service teachers in developing in critical and interdisciplinary ways to teach post-colonial young adult literature.

Conclusions

This dissertation has engaged the possibilities and challenges of using post-colonial young adult literature in education settings by describing how twelve pre-service English teachers read and responded to such texts in a book club setting. Specifically, this narrative inquiry has explored the stories that emerged for pre-service teachers as they read post-colonial narratives, the variety of strategies they use to establish meaningful connections across cultures, and the ways in which participants envisioned using these texts with their future students. This dissertation contributes to the literature in its exploration of the pedagogical possibilities of book clubs and post-colonial young adult literature for teacher preparation using narrative research methods.

In terms of teacher preparation, the findings from this research confirm previous studies on the pedagogical possibilities of using book clubs with pre-service teachers. The study contributes additional examples of using book clubs to explore texts—in this case, post-colonial young adult literature—that provide counter-narratives and uncover gaps and silences for pre-service teachers while supporting them in discussing these issues in safe and relational ways. In addition, this study contributes to the field of young adult literature by locating and categorizing such novels as post-colonial. As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, these novels invoke a colonial history and give readers insight to the experiences of young people coming of

age during and in the aftermath of colonization. As these stories are based on actual events, they invite readers to establish meaningful connections across cultures, histories, and geographies.

This study also contributes to narrative methodology. Narrative inquiry is generally concerned with research participants telling stories from their lived experiences. My study, however, essentially asked participants to talk about events that they had not experienced in their own lives. Paired with post-colonial literature and theory, this inquiry offered opportunities for participants to begin to consider the absences and silences of post-colonial experiences in their education and in their lives, to reflect on the possible reasons behind these absences, and to identify the tensions and contradictions that comes with acknowledging these new narratives.

This narrative inquiry offers several possibilities for further research with pre-service and practicing teachers. As the participants in this study were all pre-service English teachers who volunteered to join the study, a study using post-colonial young adult novels as part of a course with a general education student population might reveal whether or not these texts are equally evocative for participants who do not intend to use them in their future classrooms. Likewise, as most of the participants were in the final year of their program, a study with pre-service teachers at earlier stages in their coursework would indicate if post-colonial young adult literature helps them to expand their global awareness in self-reflexive ways. Finally, a longitudinal study with in-service English and Social Studies teachers and their students could further explore how teachers might implement post-colonial young adult literature in their secondary school curriculum and whether such novels resonate with adolescents from various cultural backgrounds.

Additional studies of post-colonial book clubs could experiment with texts. As participants drew on films and their own research to make sense of the novels we read, future

book club studies could include visual media as part of texts participants can view and discuss. Likewise, studies that use novels alongside seminal articles on post-colonial theory could prove useful in examining the potential of book clubs as critical sites for professional development with pre-service and practicing teachers. Specifically, such book clubs could draw on McHenry's (2002) notion of literary activism, whereby book club members read and discuss literature with the intent to learn information that can help them intervene in or resolve issues in their classrooms, schools, or communities.

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- Williams, M. (2011). *Now is the time for running*. London, UK: Little, Brown and Company.
- Willinsky, J. (2006). High school postcolonial: As the students ran ahead with the theory. In Y. Kanu (ed.) *Curriculum as cultural practice: Postcolonial imaginations* (pp. 95-115). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Yon, D. A. (2000). *Elusive culture: Schooling, race, and identity in global times*. New York: SUNY Press.
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Appendix A: Data Collection Instruments

This appendix contains the research instruments submitted to and approved by the Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board as part of an Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight.

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight



Institutional Review Board
 Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
 131 David Boyd Hall
 Baton Rouge, LA 70803
 P: 225.578.8692
 F: 225.578.6792
 irb@lsu.edu
 lsu.edu/irb

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

– Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at <http://www.lsu.edu/screeningmembers.shtml>

– A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:

- (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of part B thru E.
- (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
- (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
 *If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
- (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
- (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>.)
- (F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<http://www.lsu.edu/irb/IRB%20Security%20of%20Data.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator: Rank:
 Dept: Ph: E-mail:

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

Jacqueline Bach, Assistant Professor
 College of Education, Department of Educational Theory, Policy, and Practice
 225-578-6879
 jbach@lsu.edu

IRB# ES1e3le LSU Proposal # _____
 Complete Application
 Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title:

Study Exempted By:
 Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
 Institutional Review Board
 Louisiana State University
 203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
 225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
 Exemption Expires: 9-14-2014

4) Proposal? (yes or no) If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if YES, either This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
 OR More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students)

*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the ages, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature Date (no per signatures)

** I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted Not Exempted _____ Category/Paragraph 1
 Reviewer Mathews Signature Robert C Mathews Date 9/15/11

Consent Form

1. Study Title: Reading Postcolonial Young Adult Literature: A Narrative Inquiry of a Book Club with Pre-service Teachers
2. Performance Sites: Louisiana State University; observations of participants who teach lessons related to the content of the book club in the participants' student-teaching field placements; various book club meeting sites.
3. Contacts: The following investigators are available for questions M-F, 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM
 - a. E. Sybil Durand, 225-578-6879, eduran1@lsu.edu
 - b. Dr. Jacqueline Bach, 225-578-6879, jbach@lsu.edu
4. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which pre-service teachers make sense of postcolonial issues and cultures as they read and discuss such narratives as a group.
5. Subjects: Participants will be students enrolled in English education courses at Louisiana State University.
6. Number of Subjects: 10-20
7. Study Procedures: Participants will fill out an initial, brief questionnaire after agreeing to participate in the study. They will also keep a reading journal detailing in writing their responses to novels as they read. Group discussions of the literature will be audio taped and transcribed. The researcher will also conduct individual interviews with participants after the last group discussion at their convenience. As a follow up, the researcher will observe participants who are interested in teaching lessons related to the content of the book club in their student-teaching field placements. Some of the data will be collected through email correspondence and a wiki designed for the book club.
8. Benefits: Participants will be supplied with novels and other reading materials at no cost. Pre-service teachers will be encouraged to use these texts in the future with their students as well as any pedagogical strategies discussed in the book club. In addition, the study is expected to contribute to scholarship in the fields of teacher education in general, English language arts in particular, and postcolonial literature.

9. Risks/Discomforts: There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.
10. Right to Refuse: Participants may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.
11. Privacy: Participants may choose whether or how they would prefer to be identified in the dissertation resulting from the study. If participants prefer anonymity, then no names or identifying information will be included for publication, and participant identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Participants may change privacy options at any point during the study.
12. Financial Information: There is no cost for participation in the study, nor is there any monetary compensation to the subjects for participation. Participants will keep the novels provided during the study.
13. Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225)578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researchers' obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.'

Printed Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Pre-Study Questionnaire

1. What made you decide to join this book club?
2. Describe any experiences with ethnicities and cultures other than your own that you have had in and/or outside of the U.S.? In school or university settings?
3. What experiences have you had discussing immigrant or international issues and cultures through the course of reading literature? What experiences have you had discussing the works of authors of color who are not from the U.S.? (For example, when discussing texts in a World or Post-colonial Literature class).
4. What role might literature (including young adult literature) play in initiating and informing these conversations?
5. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) have written standards to support teachers and students in the English language arts classroom. Standard 2 states that, “Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g. philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience” (www.ncte.org/standards).

The NCTE/IRA explain that:

Because literary texts enable students to envision and explore worlds (both actual and imagined) from perspectives other than their own, they help students to imagine and challenge different worlds. Students who have learned, through literary texts, to view their own lives and the world around them in new and different ways are more apt to consider alternatives rather than simply accepting things as they are. Literature thus plays a vital role in the development of critical thinking. (p. 22)

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? How might looking at literature this way be relevant to your own future teaching?

Reading Response Journal Prompt

As you read through the novels, write down your reactions, feelings, ideas, and questions that arise in response to the events and characters in the story.

Sample Follow Up Interview or Email Questions

Connections to self:

1. How would you describe your experiences reading post-colonial novels (by yourself)?
2. How would you describe your experiences discussing post-colonial novels with peers?
3. What difficulties or challenges did you encounter while reading and discussing the novels?
4. What stories would you say were the most powerful and why? What connections did you make? What realizations did you have?

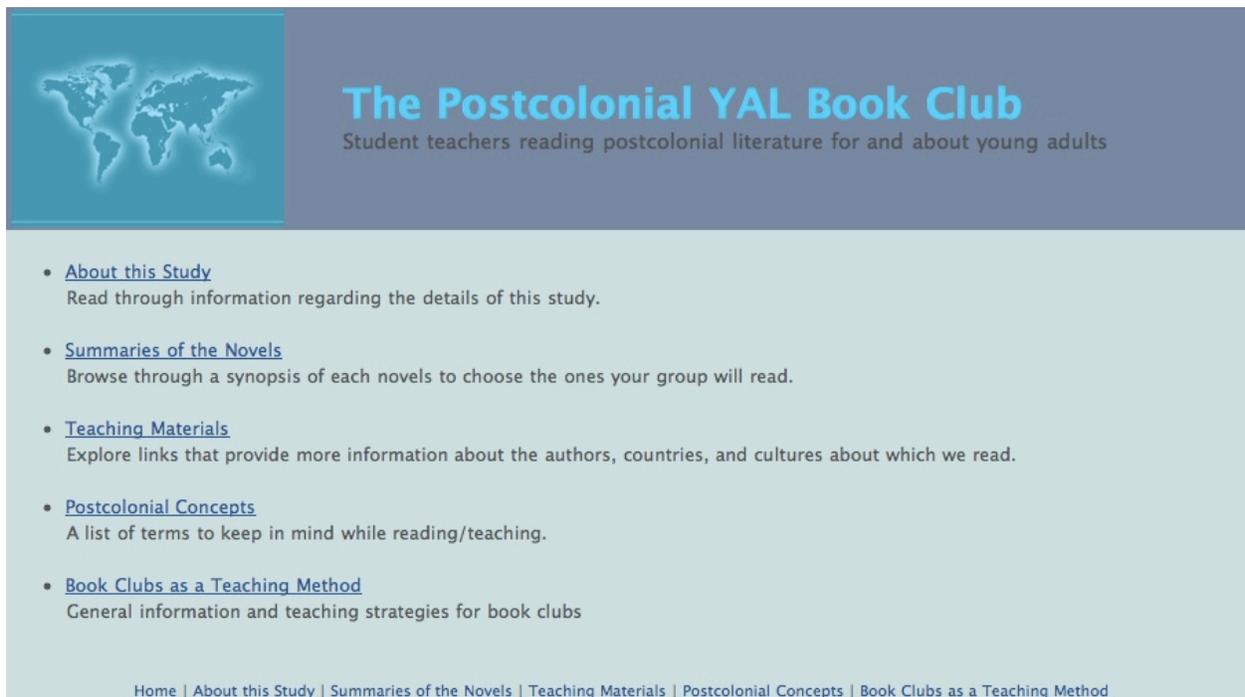
Connections to world/post-colonial issues:

1. What new ideas would you say you learned through reading post-colonial young adult literature?
2. In what ways, if any, did reading and discussing the novels help you to think or to learn about global cultures and issues?

Connections to practice:

1. Tell me about your experience of the book club. How was it useful or not useful to you as a pre-service teacher?
2. What do you think about the book club as a teaching method? What advantages and/or limitations do you see in terms of your own teaching?
3. What possibilities and/or challenges do you see for using these novels with your future students?

Sample of the Book Club Wiki



The Postcolonial YAL Book Club
Student teachers reading postcolonial literature for and about young adults

- [About this Study](#)
Read through information regarding the details of this study.
- [Summaries of the Novels](#)
Browse through a synopsis of each novels to choose the ones your group will read.
- [Teaching Materials](#)
Explore links that provide more information about the authors, countries, and cultures about which we read.
- [Postcolonial Concepts](#)
A list of terms to keep in mind while reading/teaching.
- [Book Clubs as a Teaching Method](#)
General information and teaching strategies for book clubs

[Home](#) | [About this Study](#) | [Summaries of the Novels](#) | [Teaching Materials](#) | [Postcolonial Concepts](#) | [Book Clubs as a Teaching Method](#)

Appendix B: Post-colonial Young Adult Novels Considered for the Study

- Aboutet, M. (2007). *Aya*. (H. Dascher, Trans.). Montreal, Canada: Drawn & Quarterly. (YA Graphic Novel, Côte d'Ivoire)
- Adichie, C. N. (2003). *Purple hibiscus: A novel*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books. (Adult Fiction, Nigeria)
- Alexie, S. (2009). *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company. (YA Illustrated Fiction, U.S. Native American)
- Allende, I. (2002). *City of the beasts*. New York, NY: Harper Collins. (YA Magical Realism, South America)
- Alvarez, J. (2002). *Before we were free*. New York, NY: Laurel-Leaf. (YA Historical Fiction, Dominican Republic)
- Alvarez, J. (1994). *In the time of the butterflies*. New York, NY: Plume. (Biography, Dominican Republic)
- Alvarez, J. (2007). *Return to sender*. New York, NY: Yearling. (YA Fiction, Mexican illegal immigrants in the U.S.)
- Brand, D. (2005). *What we all long for*. Toronto, Ontario: Vintage Canada. (Adult Fiction, Immigrants in Canada)
- Cheng, C. W. (2005). *My Australian story: New Gold Mountain: The diary of Shu Cheong*. Australia: Scholastic Press. (YA Historical Fiction, Chinese immigrants to Australia)
- Guène, F. (2004). *Kiffe kiffe tomorrow*. (S. Adams, Trans.). New York: Harcourt Books. (YA Fiction, Algerian immigrant to France)
- Dangarembga, T. (1988) *Nervous conditions*. New York, NY: Seal Press. (Adult Fiction, Zimbabwe)
- Dangarembga, T. (2006). *The book of not: A sequel to Nervous Conditions*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. (Adult Fiction, Zimbabwe)
- Danticat, E. (2002). *Behind the mountains*. New York, NY: Orchard Books. (YA Fiction, Haitian immigrant in the U.S.)
- Danticat, E. (1994). *Breath, eyes, memory*. New York: Vintage. (Adult Fiction, Haitian immigrant in the U.S.)
- Eire, C. (2003). *Waiting for snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban boy*. New York, NY: Free Press. (Adult Memoir, Cuba)

- Hosseini, K. (2003). *The kite runner*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books. (Adult Fiction, Afghanistan/U.S.)
- Ihimaera, W. (1987/2003). *The whale rider*. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc. (YA Fiction, New Zealand)
- Kincaid, J. (1985). *Annie John*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Adult Fiction, Antigua)
- Kincaid, J. (1990). *Lucy: A novel*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Adult Fiction, West Indian immigrant in the U.S.)
- Machado, A. M. (2002). *From another world*. (L. Baeta, Trans.). Toronto, Ontario: Groundwood Books. (YA Fiction, Brazil)
- Mathabane, M. (1998). *Kaffir boy: An autobiography: The true story of a black youth's coming of age in apartheid South Africa*. New York, NY: Touchstone. (Original work published 1986). (Autobiography, South Africa)
- Noyce, P. (Director). (2002). *Rabbit-proof fence*. Australia: Rumbalara Films. (Historical Film, Aboriginal Australia)
- Okorafor-Mbachu, N. (2005). *Zahrah the windseeker*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company. (YA Fantasy)
- Okorafor-Mbachu, N. (2007). *The shadow speaker*. New York, NY: Jump at the Sun/Hyperion Books. (YA Science Fiction, Nigeria)
- Persaud, L. (1990). *Butterfly in the wind*. Leeds, England: Peepal Tree Press. (Adult Fiction, Trinidad)
- Pilkington, D. (1996). *Rabbit-proof fence*. Australia: University of Queensland Press. (Memoir, Aboriginal Australia)
- Ryan, P. M. (2000). *Esperanza rising*. New York: Scholastic. (YA Historical Fiction, Mexican immigrants in the U.S.)
- Santiago, E. (1993). *When I was Puerto Rican*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press (Memoir, Puerto Rico/New York)
- Selvadurai, S. (1994). *Funny boy*. Toronto, Ontario: McClelland & Stewart. (Adult LGBTQ Fiction, Sri Lanka)
- Selvadurai, S. (2005). *Swimming in the monsoon sea*. New York, NY: Tundra Books. (YA LGBTQ Fiction, Sri Lanka)

- Sidwha, B. (1991). *Cracking India: A novel*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions. (Original work published 1988 as *Ice-candy man*). (Adult Historical Fiction, India)
- Smith, Z. (2000). *White teeth*. New York, NY: Vintage Books. (Adult Fiction, Indian immigrants to England)
- Venkatraman, P. (2008). *Climbing the stairs*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons. (YA Historical Fiction, India)
- Williams, M. (2011). *Now is the time for running*. London, UK: Little, Brown and Company. (YA Fiction, Zimbabwe)
- Zobel, J. (1997). *Black shack alley*. (K. Q. Warner, Trans.). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. (Original work published 1950). (Adult Historical Fiction, Martinique)

Vita

Elizabeth Sybil Durand was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and grew up in the suburb of Pétion-Ville until the age of 15. Due to political instability in her home country, Sybil and her family immigrated to Miami, Florida. There, she completed the last two years of high school and went on to earn her Bachelor of Science degree in communications at Florida International University with a major in advertising and a minor in visual arts. She moved to Southern California to begin a career in advertising; however, within a couple of years, she decided to pursue a second career as an English teacher. She relocated to West Lafayette, Indiana, where she pursued a Master of Science in curriculum and instruction from Purdue University. During that time that she joined her first reading group where she became acquainted with post-colonial literature and began formulating an idea for a dissertation. Sybil moved to Louisiana to continue her graduate studies at Louisiana State University, where she pursued her research interests in post-colonial theory, post-colonial young adult literature, and the ways in which post-colonial studies can inform pedagogical approaches in both teacher preparation and English language arts classrooms.

Sybil credits her travels for her desire to understand the world from a variety of perspectives. Her research and teaching goals are to find multiple ways to have students and teachers seek out and engage these global perspectives. Sybil has taught a study skills course to undergraduate students as well as a variety of courses as to pre-service teachers. She also taught World and American Literature to high school sophomores and juniors. Sybil is looking forward to continuing on her journey to cultivate new perspectives by moving yet again to a new part of the U.S. where she hopes to form another post-colonial young adult literature book club with fellow teachers and scholars.