

**ASSESSING FRANCOPHONE QUÉBÉCOIS UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS'
UNDERSTANDING OF INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCES IN HISTORY AND THE
PRESENT: IDENTITY, INTERCULTURALISM, AND THE “IMAGINARY INDIAN”**

MA DEFENSE

Alana Boileau

WMAX 110

3:00 – 6:30pm

The relationship between French Canadian Québécois and Indigenous Peoples in Québec is weighted in the complex and layered history of colonization. In an effort to both pursue and trouble conversations in the field of education that seek to understand and unsettle the settler mindset, this study attempts to explore the ways in which Francophone Québécois undergraduate students in two different fields of study narrate their understandings of the intersections between Québec nationalism, the politics of Indigeneity, and wider questions of belonging and legitimacy in the context of Canada. These two groups are senior level undergraduate history students and teacher education students. Drawing on the works of Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) and Plains Cree & Saulteaux scholar, Margaret Kovach (2009), the study also attempts to incorporate decolonizing principles into critical qualitative methods as a means of exploring and trying to think through some of the ethical challenges that are elicited by research undertaken with members of a “dominant” population. Through an analysis of transcripts and visual materials, I argue that these French Canadian Québécois students have internalized, reworked, and are regulated by, the discourses of the ‘two solitudes’ and ‘interculturalism’ in Québec. I also argue that participants embody, at least in part, the practice of what Hutton refers to as the repetition (as cited in Gardner, 2010) of colonial narratives, which denies Indigenous Peoples’ place as the First peoples of Canada, as well as their land claims and demands for sovereignty. Data analysis also points to the ways in which repetition or the trace of the colonial narrative is interrupted, as students display various levels of criticality about their place in Canadian and Québec history and attempt to navigate the matter of theirs and other peoples’ changing identities in the context of a globalizing world. However, such disruptions remain only partial, as students’ accounts of their encounters with Indigeneity convey a narrative in which these interactions have mainly been limited to brushes with an “imaginary Indian” (Francis, 1992), either distant in space or vanished in time. Though it is difficult to say whether the case of Québec is entirely unique, in keeping with scholarship by Québécois Jocelyn Létourneau, and Daniel Salée, this research suggests that the province’s narrative of historical marginalization may be undermining the potential for Québécois to develop an ethical politics of alliance building with Indigenous Peoples in the face of Canadian politics.