

Interview with Katherine Blouin

Ancient History beyond Eurocentrism: Indigenizing Teaching and Research

A História Antiga para além do Eurocentrismo: indigenizando o ensino e a pesquisa

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This interview is part of the Special Issue entitled *Antiquity in Historical Culture: School and Public Experiences* for the *Journal História Hoje*. This Special Issue is motivated, on the one hand, by recent developments in Brazilian basic education – the establishment of a unified national curriculum and the reformation of Brazilian High School, which reconfigured the Humanities disciplines in a transversal organization –, on the other, by the progression of the research on the teaching of Ancient History.

Brazilian Higher Education system was greatly influenced by the French model, and in this context, the field of History was particularly dependent on French practices of research and teaching History before the recent imposition of the Anglo-Saxon language and patterns of research.

To become a History Teacher for students from 11 to 17 years, the person must have graduated in History, an undergraduate degree with at least four years. The degrees in History are composed by disciplines divided often in three groups: first, disciplines presenting past societies historical processes and events organized around the quadripartite chronological timeline (Antiquity, Middle Ages, Modern Age, Contemporary Age); second, disciplines on Theory and Methodology of History; third, disciplines on History

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teaching, which take a larger part of the curriculum for those that opt for “Licenciatura” (a major in History teaching). In this model, the courses often have 1 or 2 disciplines on Ancient History, usually focused on “Classical Antiquity” or “Greco-Roman Civilization”. The specialization in Ancient History happens only at the post-graduation, where masters and doctors are formed, researching exclusively Antiquity.

In Brazilian Higher Education, “Classics” is a term often restricted to Languages and Literature graduation courses specialized in Greek or Latin. The History students that wish to improve their formation often supplement it by taking disciplines from Classics (Language and Literature), Classical Philosophy and (more rarely) Ancient Archaeology. The conversation between History, Classical Languages and Literature, Classical Philosophy and Ancient Archaeology is effective, but the departmentalization of the field in Brazil restricts the professional practice to their original fields.

Priscilla: *You reminisced about your personal trajectory in the text “Classics Can Stay in its Cozy Cave of Whiteness While the Rest of Us Move On”.¹ In this text, you say your path leads you to a critical understanding of the Classics and of their future. Could you tell us a bit more about your own formation and your academic trajectory?*

Katherine: Yes, thank you for having me. So, I’m from Québec. I’m a French Canadian and my ancestors moved to Québec City about 400 years ago. We’ve always been there since. This is where I was raised and where I studied, together with a few years in Paris as well. On our school system: I think it has more similarities with the French one than what you’ll have in the rest of Canada. I’m from a middle-class family and I went to public school all along. I’m anticipating a question here, but we don’t have what was called the Classical Course, where you would learn Latin and Greek a bit like the *gymnasium* in Germany. It was a dismantled, I believe, in the 1960s. It’s the time when the Québécois kicked out the Catholic clergy, and it coincides with the rise in nationalism. I didn’t study Greek and Latin until I started University. If you want to start earlier, only very few private schools offer it. Since I went to public school, it did not happen. I did my undergraduate degree in the university in Québec City, called *Université Laval*. It was in a program called Ancient Studies, which I mentioned because it shows how it was essentially

the Greek and Roman world, but there was also Coptic and near Eastern Archaeology. They have a different conception of the field than the Anglo-Saxon “Classics” or “Classical Studies”. I did my BA in that program and then I shifted to History. I did my MA and PhD in History, and I did my PhD both at the *Université Laval* and at the *Université de Nice* in southern France. In Québec, we have these conventions, you can do, we call them “cotutelles”. I did that but I spent my years of studying in Paris, where you can attend all these amazing seminars for practically nothing. I think it was like 50 euros a year or something. Then, I did a postdoctoral degree in Papyrology because my research focuses on Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. At the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, they offer a proper postdoctoral *diplômé* (degree). It’s an actual diploma, which comes with a defense, like for a PhD basically. So, I did that in Paris at the EPHE. It was for two years, but then I got my job at the *University of Toronto* after my first year. So, I took five more years to finish it as I was starting my work in Toronto.

Priscilla: *We would like to know how issues related to Orientalism and Civilization appeared in your own research. Did those questions motivate your practice in teaching ancient History and in the field of Public History?*

Katherine: I was not exposed to this material throughout my whole studies and, retrospectively, I’m tying this to my position as a French Canadian who studied in Paris. By this I mean the Québécois people have what I call an “inferiority complex” with regards to the colonial Metropolis, which for us is France. For me to make it, I couldn’t make it by straight away pushing back or disrupting academia. At the time, I wouldn’t even have known how to do that really. I just had to survive. When I did my degree in Ancient Studies, we were not at all exposed to this material. I believe most of the history students were exposed to all these things but there was no decolonial literature whatsoever. My aim was to be an A+ student, to get out of Québec City and to find a job in Academia. If you’re from Québec, you must go to a Metropolis and, for most of us, this Metropolis is France, especially Paris, but other French universities will do. That’s how I ended up going to Paris. When there, I wanted also to survive and to show that I had the right to be there, together with all these French people. When you’re in Paris you are experiencing the opposite of our complex. There’s this “colonial complex of superiority”, and that is still

very much there. To this day, I feel many French colleagues are resisting the questions we are posing now. I had to adapt to working in a different environment. Coming to Toronto was like moving into a different country: different language, different education system, different values. It's not like it was pre-meditated. What happened is that: a group of us met at a Summer School in Papyrology, I think in 2007, and at that point, Rachel Mairs, Usama Ali Gad and I had gotten a permanent position. We had been observing increasingly problematic dynamics in the field of Papyrology and Classics, with racism, orientalism, lots of colonial condescension towards Egyptian colleagues. We noticed these things, but it came to a point where we thought: okay, now we can speak up, now speaking up is not going to mean that we might not have a job anymore. Then, we started *Everyday Orientalism*² and this process unfolded over a few years. I pretty much kind of educated myself at a later stage in my career. Now, I'm looking at undergrads here and realize: "oh my God, you are really updated". I was not updated like that when I got the job. Sometimes, I look back at myself and I'm not even sure I would, at the time, be necessarily equipped to have the conversations I'm having now. This is how it unfolded. It was not premeditated but looking back, I think that my position as a French Canadian also determined partly why I did not fully engage with these questions until a later stage. I don't think I would have made it if I had.

Priscilla: *Thank you. I think, it has many similarities with all our own three trajectories in Brazil, and we are all concerned with change, not only to the system, but on how to teach and to provoke a more equitable debate, to put people in less prominent positions to speak. Then, the next question is: Tell us about your activities related to Public History and Reception of Classics or, in a broader sense, Antiquity. How do you see your own experience with blogs and the social networks: twitter, Isis Naucratis,³ Everyday Orientalism and #EOTalks?*

Katherine: This aspect of my work, once again, there was no plan and it just happened organically. It's been really life-changing for me this journey with *Everyday Orientalism*. We started it, as I've said, coming from a very personal place and very early on we realized that both Rachel, Usama and I, all, come from families that were farmers. Usama is Egyptian and Rachel is Northern Irish and I'm Québécois. There is something about our positioning

that puts us in a space where we are particularly attuned to questions of subalternity and orientalism and racism. I'm saying that as someone who is aware that, as a white French Canadian, I'm both: a colonizer and a colonizer who's been colonized. So, I'm not saying that I'm in the same position as Usama. Well, we just went on with the blog in an intuitive way. It's like you have an urge from the muses or something: to write, or to start a conversation. We would do it. And our aim was to create a platform where conversations that are normally pushed aside – and that are not the mainstream conversations of our fields – could find a home. *Everyday Orientalism* as a title is a bit of a wink, it's about more than that. It was important for us to think both about what we are researching and teaching; what was Ancient History about; how we are doing this. Then, eventually, obviously, you have to think about questions of reception; about how Academia is constructed; about how our fields can speak to other fields, including Anthropology, for instance, which with Girish Daswani has been also pretty well represented in the blog. It's become very important for us also not to speak only to the usual Anglo North American and British crowd. So, we've really been trying to open up to people from outside these hegemonic centers of knowledge production. My experience with that and with Twitter, which I just started for fun, was really life changing. I see my research and my work now as being very different than it was. And because of the type of questions that we tackle and because of the relationships that I've been able to develop - a lot of them through Twitter, actually. I met Juliana [Bastos Marques]⁴ through Twitter. I was never invited to the US before I went on Twitter. My networks were in France and Egypt, and now people in the US have started inviting me. It wouldn't have happened without Twitter. But I didn't expect that: all these relationships and this community. It changes more than my work; it changes who I am as a person and it kind of permeates every area of my life. If I think of the work that I do, obviously, it's like a relationship: I think about things, I learn from other people and then it impacts my syllabus, it impacts how I teach, it impacts how I do my research, it impacts how I do my Public Relation scholarship. So, for me it's been transformative.

Priscilla: *Your trajectory is inspiring. Thanks.*

Katherine: Thank you. I should tell: *Everyday Orientalism* really of depend on social media. How could we have reached out to so many people without advertising? Through Twitter and Facebook, and now it's especially Twitter. I'm not looking at the stats very much, but it's very much Twitter. So, now I'm like okay, the landscape will change, what is it going to mean for the blog? It's going to be interesting to see that, but I think there is a synergy for us between the two.

Uiran: *Twitter really helps to get in touch with other specialists, but it also helps you to get in touch with non-specialists, with the larger public. I would like to ask you about your experience on the difference between these two publics: the networks you can construct with the specialists in our field and the response from people who are not working with Ancient History or Classics or whatsoever. They are probably students of History, but sometimes they're not, they're just people interested in the subject.*

Katherine: It's hard for me. I don't get that many direct feedbacks on *Everyday Orientalism*. So, obviously, we don't have the stats on that. We just have geographical stats with *WordPress*, and also by looking at the *#EOTalks panel* – that I basically developed to survive mentally during the pandemic, that's how it started – because I can get a sense of who's coming (and there's an optional affiliation entry). It's mostly academics and students. I don't think we have the same appeal with the general audience as historical or myth podcasts: the *Sappho podcast* or the *Endless Knot* with Aven McMaster, for instance. These podcasts reach very wide to general audiences, but what we've been putting out is a bit different. My sense is that we've been mostly read by colleagues, but interestingly enough because we're not just Classics or Antiquity, we don't care about the borders as long as it's relevant. I think there's a wider spectrum than, for instance, *Eidolon*,⁵ which was specifically meant for Classics. It's not a criticism. It's just a fact. The beauty of it is quite a bit of our posts are used as teaching material. I think this is where the non-specialist audience comes in. I find myself using some of the posts in the classroom. So, we have an echo from the students, and I've got other feedbacks from colleagues. And it seems that students react well to the posts in general.

But to be honest, I'm not sure we're reaching a more general audience very much.

Fabio: *Well, we're going to the next group of questions dealing with basic education. What is the role of Antiquity in basic education in Canada today, and what role do you think it should really have? Does this subject appear only in the discipline of History (as is the case in Brazil), or is it also present in other disciplines?*

Katherine: Throughout Canada, now, Greek and Latin are taught in private schools. The vast majority of students who enter an undergraduate program in Ancient History or Classics or whatever have not been exposed to Greek or Latin. This eventually also poses questions regarding class differentials; and there's obviously this intersection between class and race, right? As a rule, in the department of Classics at the main campus [of the University of Toronto], I would think that those who enter with already some baggage in Greek and Latin tend to be mostly white students from upper middle class or upper-class background. Everyone else starts at the year one of their BA. There's a broader conversation regarding this also in terms of language prerequisites and language exams at the graduate level, but this is for another day. But it's something I'm very annoyed by.

So, the role of antiquity in basic education is a *quasi nonexistent*, to be perfectly frank with you. There is obviously close to nothing in in primary school, in secondary school. I published a post a few years ago called "History is not a plant"⁶ which was criticizing this idea of the rise and fall of civilizations, and I was looking at High School curricula in the province of Ontario where I am now. As of a few years ago, if I remember correctly, if you take the average High School student, they will be exposed to one, at most two, compulsory course in History. It's going to be kind of modern history, right? The history of Canada, and obviously they're not going to start with 10 000 BC, when the Europeans weren't here. They will start, barely with the French, and then with the British. That's about it. And then if I remember correctly, there are optional courses. That's already for students who have more of an interest. There will be a course on from Antiquity to the Modern times. You can imagine that: there will be like one week on mummies, and another and Greece and Rome... Then the rest of it is almost nothing ancient, and another one

about the 20th century. At the end of the day, only a small number of students will choose these extra courses, because they already have a particular interest.

If you think of the majority of Ontarians, they are what I call historically illiterate. To me this is a real problem, and this is something that, ultimately, I would very much like to change in Ontario; and to be able to make a change. But we have a conservative government right now and I'm very realistic: I'm not sure it's going to happen. Most people have no clue. They don't know where they are. They are not able to decipher reality and they are not able to decipher the world around them, because the world is made of the past. I like to say the past is now, and all things considered, what we call Antiquity is very recent on the scale of the planet. It's nothing. I don't know how many generations...it's not even 100 Generations, I think. It's not that ancient. And you have another question about where do we see Antiquity in Canada. The amount of classical architecture and monuments in the city is huge, but people are not, a lot of them, are not are not equipped to see that. And I'm not saying that in a condescending way, but what happens when you don't have this understanding? I deeply believe that this gap truly fuels movements like the far right to capitalize on this illiteracy, to bring in people and weaponize their anger or, whatever, challenges, and issues and suffering that they're dealing with. It's very bad.

What proportion – and I'm sure in Brazil is the same – what proportion of the overall population in Canada has taken these extra courses in High School? It's very few. What proportion will actually do a degree in History? Very few. What proportion do a graduate degree? Forget it, it's almost no one. It also means that whenever I teach an elective course in University, like the first year big lecture we have on the ancient Mediterranean or the Roman World, this is a huge responsibility. Because half of my class is made of students who are majoring in science, biology and engineering. They are coming because they are interested. They are not interested because of what they learn in High School, because they learn close to nothing. But they're playing some video games, they saw some movies, read fiction, and so on. That was a kind of an entry point for them, and they want to know more. And then I think: "okay I have them". So I have to use this time right, because this is probably the only other thing they're going to get, that's actually historically accurate. I've been really working on that. There are colleagues who find this teaching

a waste of their time. A lot of colleagues, if they could just do research, they would be happy to. I love research, but I find that where I'm the most useful as a human being is when I'm in a classroom. So I've been really trying to get these students attention. Not just teach them from Archaic Rome to Constantine, but how is this relevant today, how is this history still with us, and how can this make a difference in the way you're looking at yourself, at the world and at your place in the world.

Uiran: *What you have just said about historical illiteracy reminded me of a concept by Peter Lee, which is historical literacy. I would like to know if you use his work and this approach?*

Katherine: No, I'm not!

Uiran: *I think it goes along the same lines you were describing. It's about understanding history as a school discipline which has his own language, and you have to understand the concepts, you have to understand how they work together. It's quite interesting.*

Katherine: Yes, okay! I need to check this out because, I guess, when I've been using historical illiteracy, I've been using this more mundane sense. People will walk along the street here and they will not... you're all historians, you know what I mean. When we walk in this street and we see things, we think differently. When we see stuff happening in the world, we think differently, because we have a depth, and a lot of people have not developed this depth. Our students now were not even alive when 9/11 happened, the 1950s is really another world for them. So I've been using it in a more mundane way. But, thank you, because I guess I wanted to clarify it if I use it in my writing.

Priscilla: *there is another scholar, the Portuguese scholar Isabel Barca, who works with historical literacy. It's also interesting.*

Fabio: *I don't know if you'll use it too, but the title of our special issue is also using the concept of historical culture, that dialogues with the concept of historical literacy. Well, let's focus on a precise part of the question that I asked you before. You were talking about your urgency to change the school curriculum. What role do you think Antiquity should or could have in schools?*

Katherine: First, I think the notion of Antiquity should be expanded. The Greek and Roman World Paradigm is tied to settler, white settler colonialism, and this is basically a tool of white supremacy. This should be expanded. We could enter into debates about World History and so on, but I really think that Ancient History both here in North, and South America in your case, and in conversation with what's been happening in Afroeurasia, should be expanded. Obviously, we have to be realistic. If I'm saying: "at the High School level, we should have one course just on Ancient History, then we should have one on the Medieval World and so on," it's not going to happen. But instead of having one survey course of all of world history, there should be two to cover a wider spectrum. And I think an emphasis has to be made on the importance of these ancient periods, and how they are relevant, still today, in terms of its links with modern history. Just thinking about the local, in the classical architecture and how colonial elite, San Francisco Jesuits were deciphering the landscape and the people they encountered when they came and colonized here. How the reception of ancient Egypt relates to some colonial projects in Africa and in West Asia? I think there are ways to make students understand and to bring in conversations about the ethics of displaying mummies in museums. These are kind of all over the place examples, but history should have a greater place. I would have more compulsory courses on that. And then it's about what is thought and how it is thought. I'm pretty sure it's the same in Brazil. There is really an overarching nationalist kind of narrative that is push through by public provincial, in our case, curricula. Because each province has its education, and in Canada is not National, it's a provincial competence. But it's politicized, it's very politicized. So, I think it would have to be both. A bit more history but being much more mindful about what is taught and how it is put in relationship with the world today. We should not underestimate students, they can understand, even if they're in high school. So I think there's also a lot of waste of time within even these historic classes, and I'm not to think that the problem is with the teachers. The problem is that with the curricula are built at the at the highest level.

Fabio: *I totally agree and I, actually, always try to speak with kids 10 and 11 years old about Ancient Egypt (I research in Ancient Egypt). And especially in Brazil, with a large black population, we can talk about whitewashing Ancient*

Egypt. They totally understand the subject. Well, we have other questions. Based on your own experience, how do you see the relation between research and teaching in Higher Education? Which strategies can be employed in order that investigations working outside the central institutions could have real impact in the field? Could such strategies help to bring Ancient History closer to the experiences of the past by other peoples, like Native-Americans and people from Africa, from African descent or others?

Katherine: This is a very important question and it ties into what I was saying about how teaching is really essential to the work that I do as a researcher. Because I'm learning a lot by preparing for my classes, but I'm also learning a lot from my students. At the University of Toronto, there are three campuses. There's a campus downtown Toronto, which is the biggest campus and all the graduate programs are there. And there are two other campuses. One in the eastern part of town – it takes from here like an hour and a half to get there –, it's called Scarborough. And one in the western part of town, which is called Mississauga. And so at the undergraduate degree, I'm teaching in Scarborough. And Scarborough is an incredibly diverse part of Toronto. All of Toronto is really diverse. But Scarborough and Mississauga are particularly diverse. In my classrooms, whatever I'm going to talk about, there will be students who feel like this speaks to their own identity. And I'm saying this because they've said that to me. If I'm talking about Egypt, there'll be Egyptians, there'll be Macedonians and Greeks. And then I'm talking about: "who does Alexander belong to?" There are students from Africa, from the Caribbeans, you name it! There are students from everywhere. The way they engage with the material impacts me, but it also means that it motivates me into opening up the way I teach. I really now make a conscious effort to lower the proportion of Greek and Roman, traditionally Greek and Roman material that I'm going to put, and I'm putting in emphasis on everything else that this world was about but did not make it in the mainstream Colonial Eurocentric narrative. And, obviously, this also impacts the way I do research.

My specialization, like Fabio, is Egypt, so straight away it's not main Ancient [Classical periods], like Cicero's Italy or Athens. So already it's a bit different. I would say that my practice of teaching is also tied to the environment in which I teach. Where there are colleagues in the United States, France and so on, or even here in Canada, who will say: "oh I'm teaching but most of

my classroom identifies as white”. But I would think that this opening up, this kind of disruption of the myth of Classical Greece and Rome as ancestors of the West, whatever that means – which is nothing –, this disruption should happen anywhere. I find myself very lucky to be teaching in such a diverse environment. Just to give an example: every other year I teach a big survey course called the Ancient Mediterranean, and last time I really lowered the place of the traditional Greece and Rome. There was a much bigger proportion of the class dedicated to ancient West Asia, a lot of time to the Persians, the Sassanians. I had the whole series of [meetings], a class on Nubia. Not just Egypt, but Nubia and ancient North Africa and so on. Emphasizing also the international global trade going all the way to East Asia and talking about ancient India as well. India being a series of Kingdoms or Empires. I think it was a big success. A few years ago, a student came to me. He identified as East Asian Canadian and he told me: “up until I took your class, I always felt that these classes were not for me, that these were classes for white people and that I was in the class learning about white people stuff. And it felt alienating to me. Now for the first time I felt like, oh! It was not just a bunch of white people. It actually speaks to me as well.” And that’s the biggest compliment I could get.

Fabio: *Yes, sure it is. Well, how do you compare school teaching, at the High School level, of Ancient History in Canada to that in France? Does Ancient History taught in school relate with local realities? How do you see the presence of Antiquity in everyday life, or more precisely in the Historical Culture, in North America and in Europe?*

Katherine: Okay, I didn’t do High School in France, so I only know about it second hand. Although I said that the school system in Canada is closer to the French model than elsewhere, in Canada there are some differences. We are more North American in the way that there is not this vertical hierarchy and the kind of classism is not as pronounced as [they are] in France. My understanding is that in France they have all these exams, maybe it’s also at the undergrad degree. You have the aggregation, and this and that. And if you go to *École Normale Supérieure* you have a stamp, it’s more certain you’ll get a job. Versus, if you just go to normal school, your chances to get a job are very low. In Québec we don’t have that. I would say the main differen-

tial is Humanities versus Science. When I was a student, which was in the late 90s, the idea was: “okay you’re really good! Why are you going to the Humanities? Why aren’t you going in the Sciences? Why are you wasting your time in the Humanities?” And said I was going to do what I wanted, but there was this pressure. I think in France they’re still having a bit more of this elitist system that is much more pronounced and unapologetic. In Québec structurally we don’t have that. However we have this difference between private school and public school. Private school you have to pay and it costs quite a lot. So obviously there’s an intersection with socioeconomic class – and this is where you can get more exposure to Antiquity and to Greek and Latin. But obviously this exposure typically is not done through at the colonial lands. It’s going to be more the mainstream Eurocentric model. I’m looking at the question again and I can speak a bit more in terms of University curricula in France, but for the High School system I don’t want to say too much, because I don’t have a firsthand experience. But obviously the French people also tied themselves to this ancient Greek and Roman past, given the Gauls became part of the Roman Empire. I think there is much more of an immediacy and a direct kind of identity tie that is experienced or push forward through the curricula. Even though it’s also the Gauls, right? So we’re both in and out. It’s the Asterix Trope basically. For us, it’s all a bit fine and it’s all a bit exotic. There is not this clear link.

And for the presence of Antiquity in everyday life, I would say most museums in Canada, the big ones, will have an Antiquity collection, a Greek or Roman collection. Its origins are tied with the context in which other big Antiquity collections were made. As a white settler Colony, Canada was also embedded in these Antiquities movement networks, through the British Empire in our case. Obviously, Canada was not the UK. For instance, I had a postdoctoral fellow who did a project on the Greek papyri at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, our big Museum. And it was interesting because we have a lot of papyri that were found by Grenfell and Hunt. They were part of a system of *partage* of papyri found in Egypt; brought back to Oxford. And then if people outside of the imperial core would give money to the Egypt Exploration Society, they would get some scripts of papyri in exchange. There was this whole thing about this guy currently getting papyri from the Egypt Exploration Society, but obviously you’re not going to get the best pieces. So

we have amazing collections, but there is still this hierarchy. You're in the Empire, you're white, but you're not London or Paris. So, Antiquity is visible in these museums and really visible in urban architecture and monumentality. Very much so.

Fabio: *I have one little question that I should have asked before, when you said about your stay in France, doing your postdoc. I actually got curious if you experienced racism in France, being a Québécois in a Metropolis? although you are white, you're clearly white.*

Katherine: Oh yes! I cannot be whiter than I am, yes. There's no way I experienced racism like non-white people, including French people themselves of African ancestry. At the time I was there - I'm not even sure whether it's improved, I haven't lived there in many years - but I remember meeting a French man from North African origin in a bar and he was saying: "we cannot find rentals, they won't rent us an apartment. You have to send a white friend to pretend like they want the apartment, if you want to get it". So, I'm going to say that's not the type of interaction I'm exposed to. I'm exposed to a kind of endearment. Like people will be amused. They will say: "oh my God! They're so cute! The way you talk!" It's mostly about the way I talk. Even though I've learned to standardize and to adjust my intonation, my vocabulary, my syntax and so on. I don't mimic a French accent, but I standardize. But even though I standardize, I still have a clearly Québécois accent. It's very exotic for them. They're very amused by it. I remember once I was giving a talk at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, and I could say that people were listening to me and they're smiling. They are not listening to what I say, they're listening to how I speak. And so I'm a bit of a curiosity. This is the type of exposure. It's not aggressive, it's not hateful. It's more like I'm a kind of a curiosity that is endearing, but obviously there's a bit of condescension in that as well. But no, I mean, this is not racism. I don't have a trauma from this. Does it annoy me? Yes, it does! Because underneath all that is the assumption that they know how to speak French and their French is the best. In a way, Québec differs a lot because we were separated much earlier from the Metropolis than their former colonies, who became independent in the 1960s. So there, even though there are the original accents, the standard has been for so long the Parisian one, that the difference is not as sharp as for us. And so it destabilizes them. They need subtitles

when they listen to our movies, they cannot understand us. We can understand them, but they cannot understand us.

Uiran: *We are moving to the last set of questions. The extreme right have intensified the appropriation of Antiquity in the last years in part as a reaction to the efforts in de-whiten the past, in part as a deliberate project to reinforce established structures of power. What challenges this right-wing appropriation of the past presents to scholars. I feel this can be related to what you were mentioning about the presence of antiquity in everyday lives of people, in the architecture, in the monuments and so on.*

Katherine: As you know we had the Freedom Convoy protest or occupation that took place for several weeks, over a month, in several places in Canada, especially in Ottawa this winter. And one thing that was striking to me was the quite predictable but still interesting and concerning, misappropriation of History, including in some instances Classical Antiquity by the people who were occupying and protesting. This is a real presence that is really tied to a similar kind of dynamics that are happening in the US and in other countries as well right now, with this kind of rise of the far right. Just to give a context, at the time of the Convoy, a spreadsheet of donors to the Convoy from a Christian platform was leaked out, and I got hold of it and so I thought to myself “let me check if there are references to Antiquity in that spreadsheet”. This spreadsheet is interesting because you have the name people gave themselves, that was visible on the platform. Also: their email, then you have the postal code, how much you donated. And you have comments that would have been on the platform as well. I started searching with some keywords, and started making this Twitter thread that, maybe you saw maybe not, that ended up being like a 200 example thread and eventually I expanded it beyond Antiquity, right to other historical references.

So, to come to your question, to me it made it clear that it actually forces us to reckon with this misappropriation. It really has real impact in fueling the rhetorics and the reasoning that lead to these real world violence, or violent kind of manifestation of white people. In this case I know it was not only white people, but it's essentially white settler violence. So, as an aside, I published a post with Curtis Dozier and his research assistants on *Pharos* about the misappropriation of classical Antiquity on this spreadsheet.⁷ The research

assistant went through the whole spreadsheet, they are 92.000 entries so it was long. Now I'm working on another project with two research assistants and my colleague, Anver Emon, who is a Medieval law historian and also the director of *The Institute of Islamic Studies* here. We're going to analyze the whole of the historical references in the whole Convoy spreadsheet. And it really gives us a sense of where ideologically is the profile of this movement, and how historical illiteracy is fueling it. Because you can see it in the way so many historical references are being pulled by these people in their names, emails, and in their comments. This much more visible instrumentalization and weaponization of Ancient History and History in general by the far right makes it much harder for us, as students and teachers of History, to not engage with this issue. It might sound a bit idealistic and I don't want to sound petty, but I know a lot of colleagues will just like black out on this and think this is not worth them disrupting their syllabus, and making their lives more difficult, but to me this is a prime example of why history matters and of why having people go through their lives with a much better understanding of where they're coming from is essential. If we want to build a world that is not going to self destroy through war, hatred and even the climate catastrophe, to me this is essential. But sadly I know it's not essential for everyone, but hopefully it's going to be a wake-up call. We've seen that it's been in the US. Before this stuff, I already had published several pieces on that, but I think several of us outside the US now have to very seriously engage with this in our research, but also in the classroom.

Uiran: *We have had our group of appropriators of antiquity as well here in 2020, when a group called Bolsonaro's 300 tried to get into the Supreme Court by violence.*

Katherine: Oh my God...

Priscilla: *It's the same movement as in the USA. They just have to translate it.*

Uiran: *Now we're going to a different set of questions. We are going back to our role as scholars and the way academy is structured. You made recent efforts to bring together people and their research on Antiquity from different parts of the global South with the #EOTalks Classics from the South. How important is it for*

you to review the international division of intellectual labor? What do you feel you and the other participants learned from these interchanges?

Katherine: From the very start with *Everyday Orientalism*, it was important to not reproduce coloniality by having conversation about colonialism only from a hegemonic positioning. And one phenomenon that we were aware of and had issues with was the tendency for these conversations to be monopolized by Anglo-Saxon Academia, essentially the US and the UK. And whenever people from outside this hegemonic bubble would be brought in, their own experience was not centered. The default ground for the conversation, the default context, the default challenges are those for us in the Americas, in the US. Maybe it's going to improve. As someone coming from Québec, I've attended so many of these panels and read so many of these publications, and it always comes from an American place, which is fine, but there is never, or extremely rarely, this acknowledgment that this is not a universal context. This is not a universal reality, like other people experience these challenges differently or have different perspectives to bring in. So for us with *Everyday Orientalism* it was very important to not replicate that, because I think it becomes recolonizing in many ways. We have friends outside of the US and the UK, and, over the course of the years, we've had a lot of conversations to that effect. At some point we thought "well why don't we just have panels on this?". So we had the first panel, and then everyone on the panel was so pleased with how it went, and the vibe, that straight after we were debriefing and there was a suggestion that we should do a sequel. So we organized the sequel. And this Friday we're having a panel on the precarization of Academia⁸ And we really make a conscious effort every time to not only have people from U.S Canada UK. We think it's important to decentralize and to disrupt this kind of hegemonic hold on these types of conversation. Do American colleagues come to these panels? From what I see, they are much less prone to come, so we're not doing this for American colleagues. And maybe some American colleagues will read that and be offended. I'm not putting everyone into the same basket. But I think there is truth to be said in the fact that, between a panel with American colleagues and big names on a set topic and a panel on the same topic but with people from all over the place but outside the US, Americans will be more prone to go to the American one. But we're not doing this for American colleagues, we're trying to create a different platform, where people

who might feel alienated by these conversations when they happen in these hegemonic contexts can feel like their positioning is more respected and centered. It's become part of our mission.

Uiran: *There is a recent scholarly trend on decolonizing the Classics and Antiquity. How do you understand this idea of decolonizing Antiquity? What would be the means to do that? This question also includes you talking about what you do understand for “Decolonial”.*

Katherine: Thank you! (laughing)

Uiran: *...Because this is a big problem, right? Every one of us understands it in a different way...*

Katherine: Yeah! My baseline is how do people belonging to First Nations, indigenous people in Canada understand decolonizing. This is what I'm going to follow, so their definition, which is to me the main meaning of the word, is to give the land back to the people whose land you've stolen. This is what it means, right? So can you decolonize Classics? No, because Classics it's not a piece of land, so you cannot decolonize Classics. Now, I can see that in the UK they use it a lot, even non-white colleagues use this commonly. I think I've become a bit annoying during the pandemic, because whenever there were panels, and they were using it, I was always putting the web link to the article “Decolonization is not a metaphor” by Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang.⁹ Yeah, I've put it in many chats. Some people might be at this point rolling their eyes, but to me decolonization is about giving back the land. So, as a practitioner of Ancient History and as a teacher, the question for me becomes another thing. I single handedly cannot decolonize Canada, right? And Classics cannot be decolonized and Classics is deep down a colonial discipline, so how can I contribute to decolonization? Or what little step can I make that can, down the road, make decolonization a reality? And this is where I think my teaching and my public facing scholarship comes into question: is through education, centering these questions and paying attention to what material am I putting in the syllabus. Am I dedicating time, even in an Ancient History course, for students to think about what does it mean for us to study this, here? Where are we? This is not neutral. This building, this

University we're in is not neutral. So let's just get a lay of the land, literally, first, and then, once students have this understanding, I'm doing this centering, I'm putting indigenous authors in all my syllabi. There's always a way to put this in and it really shifts the relationship of the students with the material, their relationship with where they are. I'm thinking we have a role to play in helping younger generations, who are in our classroom to really wake up. We also have indigenous students, and these indigenous students are already very aware of what's happening. But settler students and black students; I think it's important to open them up to the very real link there is between our disciplines, as they were traditionally conceived, in their genesis, and the settler colonial context we are in. I've been seeing it with some graduate students, whom I have been teaching this stuff to a few years ago, and I can see it. Those who were very invested in the material and took it seriously, it permeates the way they write, they do research now. They tell me it impacts the way they're teaching and the way they're carrying themselves into their world and even the way they relate to the landscape. I think this is what we can do. If I'm thinking about, for instance, Egypt: I work on Ancient Egypt but I'm not an Egyptian. Why am I working on this? It's about being very humble and very aware of your place, and why am I earning my life working on a country I was not born in. How can I contribute to disrupting the coloniality of Egyptology or Papyrology, in a way that is not recolonizing? Because, once again, the danger is you have all these white people pontificating about how white people are racist towards Egyptians and we have to do this and that, but without the Egyptians. You're still taking the space. So it's still about you. I'm trying to be very mindful in the way that I decenter myself. It's also why, for instance, with the #EOTalk panel, we've been sharing but we've not been participating very much. I think I was just in one panel because it basically forced me to be in it, the one on civilization, from last spring. But otherwise, we're just opening the platform and we let other people speak.

Uiran: *It was perfect! I love your definition of “Decolonial”. I'm going to use it.*

Katehrine: I'm glad to hear that.

Uiran: *Now we go to our last question. One of your most interesting contributions is the proposal to indigenize Antiquity and Classics. What are the theo-*

retical and methodological approaches guiding your practice? What challenges do you face? And what are the impacts you perceive in the public and in your own work?

Katherine: That’s an existential question for me. I guess you’ve seen the post “*Indigenizing the classics: a teaching guide*”.¹⁰ I want to repeat what’s in there. I must say a lot of this work that I’m doing now, I started doing it, I think, in 2016, and it started with conversations with Aven McMaster and this panel that the blog post is based on. It also started with a talking circle that I attended that was chaired by Lee Maracle, who passed away on November 11th last year. Together with the other colleagues who were at these talking circles, but Lee in particular. And Lee Maracle is really like a giant on indigenous literature and oratory in Canada. I still cannot believe that I got to work with her. Yesterday, I was telling my husband: “Lee had such a huge impact on my life”. She was so generous, and she says what she thinks, and... it completely changed my life. And I know it sounds cheesy, but that’s just the way it is. I think she did that to so many people. I for sure did not change Lee’s life, I don’t have this presumption at all. We met for a brief period of our lives, and not that many times, but this is how my work started. Me being more conscious and invested in these questions. It started at that time and I don’t have all the answers. It’s a work in progress.

To indigenize Antiquity and the Classics means different things to me. It means, as I’ve said in answer to the previous question, to really make it clear to the students where we are. To not just teach Classics in the abstract, in a depersonalized way, or in a way that says it’s objective, it’s neutral. No! From the start there needs to be time for them to understand: where are we? What is the history of this place? What treaty land are we in? what’s the landscape like? Then, we’re learning about this: why is this? Why is this happening here? what does it mean? So the Land itself with capital L is playing an important role in my pedagogy now. And once again this happens through centering the knowledge of indigenous people from this land. I do so through different mediums, because to me it also means challenging the primacy of the written form over everything else. I’m trying to shift the way I teach as well. I’ve implemented an assignment created by a colleague of mine which is called “learning from the outside”, and I make it clear that this is tied to indigenous pedagogies in certain parts of what is now Canada. And students have to go outside, and just be

outside, come back and then do some free writing. I've put more emphasis on orality and on art and different types of knowledge production. I've included the system of the Talking Circle, for instance. And every time, in the syllabus and in class time, it's pretty clear that it's not from me, that this is from a different indigenous pedagogical or knowledge production tradition. I've been inviting indigenous speakers as well, obviously giving them a compensation or paying them, as a token of gratitude for their work. So there is this dimension. Indigenizing through engaging deeply about where we are, and giving more robust context to the situation we're in and why this is happening: us learning about ancient multiculturalism in the Greek and Roman world, but in Toronto. Then the other important aspect is also to think about how these dynamics also are at play in the places that we study. Egypt, or what is now Greece. And paying attention also to the actual context of these places, beyond antiquity. Paying attention to the land there, paying attention to how these disciplines have emerged, how and in what context did they emerge geopolitically. We all know they are Colonial products. It allows us to once again make these dynamics and this knowledge less abstract. And then there's the question of ancient indigeneities. What happens when we decenter what is considered the most classical, when you decenter classical Greek, when you decenter Athens, when we decenter the Romans in Italy. When you put more emphasis on North Africans, the Egyptians, when you put way more emphasis on the Achaemenid Empire when you teach survey Greek. Or when you look at so-called myths as stories instead of "Myth". What happens when you think about these types of stories? Or sometimes even some literary productions that are considered to be not very historically reliable, like ancient novels for instance, what happens when you look at them through a North American indigenous lens? Because this is what I know the most. Maybe it applies to Brazil as well. When you look at them as stories because stories are ways to pass on knowledge. So it's not just about the minute details of the place and the date, but it's about something else, it's about values, it's about relationship to the land. And I've been trying to ask myself these questions when I'm doing research and when I'm teaching. And I find that it truly opens up different ways of understanding whatever stories have come to us. I'm hoping that it allows us to do more justice to the ancient histories that we

study. But also to make it clear to students and even to ourselves how they are still very much alive today. Hopefully that is the core here and an answer.

NOTES

¹ Cf. <https://everydayorientalism.wordpress.com/2021/10/18/classics-can-stay-in-its-cozy-cave-of-whiteness-while-the-rest-of-us-move-on>.

² Cf. <https://everydayorientalism.wordpress.com/>.

³ Cf. <https://isisnaucratis.medium.com>.

⁴ Professor of Ancient History in the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.

⁵ Cf. <https://eidolon.pub>.

⁶ Cf. <https://everydayorientalism.wordpress.com/2017/08/29/history-is-not-a-plant-some-thoughts-on-high-school-and-undergraduate-ancient-history-curricula/>.

⁷ Cf. <https://pharos.vassarspaces.net/2022/04/15/classics-ottowa-freedom-convoy-leaked-donors/>.

⁸ Cf. <https://everydayorientalism.wordpress.com/2022/10/28/the-gates-4-on-the-precaritization-of-academia/>.

⁹ Cf. <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630>.

¹⁰ Cf. <https://everydayorientalism.wordpress.com/2019/05/23/indigenizing-classics-a-teaching-guide/>.

