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Politicizing English Language Teaching: Confronting Political Violence and Enacting Social Justice

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Abstract

This presentation addresses a socio-critical reflection on the historical exclusion of political violence as an analytical category in English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in conflict-affected contexts such as Colombia. It emerges from a research project that interrogates the ongoing depoliticization of ELT and argues that language teaching is inseparable from the social, cultural, and political conditions that co-construct the identities, experiences, and epistemologies of both teachers and learners. While critical research from the Global South has exposed the colonial, depoliticized, and utilitarian foundations of ELT (Guerrero-Nieto, 2009; Bonilla-Medina & Finardi, 2022; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2020; Quintero-Polo, 2022), conversations of structural, symbolic, and political violence remain distant from mainstream ELT research.

Through a review of literature on political violence (Ortega & Herrera, 2012; Ortiz & Jiménez, 2012) and on recent ELT scholarship focused on memory, conflict, and decolonial pedagogies, we explore how political violence is not external to the English classroom. Rather, it intersects with it, shaping and challenging the ways language is taught, embodied, and imagined. We advocate for reclaiming the political dimension of ELT by placing ethics, alterity, and social justice at the center of its practices. This includes interrogating curricula, materials, pedagogical approaches, and recognizing English teachers as critical, ethical, and creative social subjects Enacting social justice.

Keywords: Politicizing ELT, Political Violence, Social Justice, Decolonial Pedagogies