Teaching Critically Within Closed Border Spaces:
Localized Critical Pedagogy for EFL Teachers in Turkey

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Abstract

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Turkey's political climate has become increasingly tense. A failed military coup in July 2016 compelled president Erdoğan to implement six consecutive 'states of emergency,' giving him unprecedented power. Extreme polarization of political ideologies makes political discourse pervasive, even in ESL classrooms in a university language preparatory program that hires international staff from the USA, Canada, and the UK. Students enrolled in this program are often vocal about their discontent with the current direction of the country. Using a critical theory framework, this qualitative study explores whether international teachers, as outsiders, can engage students in a critical inquiry to challenge the status quo. Data collected from in-depth interviews with seven teachers revealed that the language classroom is a complex site of cultural negotiation, one not quite conducive to border crossing, where all but one teacher failed to see themselves as critical pedagogues. The study thus proposes a form of localized critical pedagogy particular to Turkey's EFL context. This requires teachers' creation of a counter-culture, or a safe space in the classroom, where students can safely voice their opinions. The discussion delineates implications and conditions required for international teachers in such educational settings to utilize a localized critical pedagogy.

Key Words:
EFL, Critical Pedagogy, Localized Critical Pedagogy, Border Pedagogy, Border Crossing,

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Almost every profession is subject to its share of pressures embedded in the very nature of the job. Consider a carpenter with a strict deadline for a contract, a surgeon in a high stakes operation, or a lawyer who has just lost a major case. In each scenario, the worker has likely received training on how to work in these types of situations or has gained experience that has taught them how to cope with pressures. Now imagine that the carpenter's rushed contract is for an electrical job, the surgeon has only a spoon as his tool to perform the critical surgery, and the lawyer herself is jailed for her failure. These are extreme and unrealistic scenarios, of course, but imagine for a moment how each workers' approach to their work would change. The carpenter may begin to doubt his past experience or his skills, the surgeon might quit his job to avoid inevitable physical and emotional trauma for all those involved in the surgery, and the lawyer would surely never have taken the case if she were aware of the consequences.

International EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers in Turkey find themselves endeavoring to complete a similarly difficult task. They arrive in Turkey to begin their contract at a well-renowned university, assuming they will be teaching English to adult learners, completing administrative duties, and attending meetings. What they are not aware of is that when they step into their classrooms, they face the immense challenge of treading lightly to navigate unfamiliar political and social discourses while tending to student's affective outside-class realities. For each teacher, a lesson inevitably goes awry early in their career in Turkey: perhaps a topic is introduced that is explosive, leading to heated debate, even to shouting in the class. This unexpected outcome is beyond most teachers' education, and certainly outside

their comfort zone. Consequently – like our carpenter, surgeon or lawyer – they withdraw from some of the responsibilities they may initially have considered part of the job. They turn to dreaming of holidays, finding work elsewhere, and neglecting affective aspects of their job.

In academic discussions about educational settings, critical pedagogy is widely held as a positive approach to teaching. It remains to be seen, however, how critical pedagogical approaches can be integrated into fragile and politically-tense contexts like Turkey. Especially for international teachers, who, as outsiders, may struggle to understand the perspectives of their students and to understand the complex background of the country to which they are newly arriving. When international teachers in Turkey experiment lightly with such topics, and they lead to an explosive classroom atmosphere, teachers understandably resolve to aim for cultural sensitivity and avoiding controversy at all costs. Besides, in the neoliberal paradigm, critical pedagogy is not encouraged. In this paradigm and context, the role of the teacher is to impart information so that the learners can acquire the training or skills required for their future jobs so that they can become workers in the capitalist system. Little space – and possibly little desire – exists for international EFL teachers in Turkey to engage with the oppressive power structures in the nation. That is, little space exists for international teachers to become critical pedagogues, or to appropriately harness and make use of the student voices and experiences beneath the explosive dialogues.

In short, a significant problem exists in international EFL classrooms in Turkey: the soul has been taken out of the classroom. The importance of the relationship in classrooms has been diminished, and the neoliberal tendency to 'teach the worker' has become predominant.

1.2 A Gap: Critical Pedagogy in EFL

Nearly every facet of education, including language education, has been touched by the notion of critical pedagogy. Riasti and Mollaei (2012) note a significant gap:

> While educators in the fields of literacy education, ESL, and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) have discussed a great number of articles and descriptions of the actual application of critical pedagogy… much less has been reported in the EFL context, since critical pedagogy has been set aside as culturally inappropriate." (p.225)

This is a very important insight. Critical pedagogy in foreign contexts may be considered 'culturally inappropriate' since a Canadian questioning the status quo in a foreign context could easily be perceived as a cultural imposition, or worse, a new form of imperialism. However, this perception is problematic as it limits the potential role of the international teacher to enable students to question their surroundings, which is essential in any context. Positively, some studies have analyzed whether critical pedagogy has a place in EFL contexts, and have found that it is possible. Shin & Crookes' (2009) study of EFL in a Korean school highlighted the possibility of implementing diverse forms of critical pedagogy. In unique contexts, increased sensitivity to diversity and different types of oppression is required to make critical pedagogy relevant in EFL (Ooiwa-Yoshizawa, 2012).

In the same vein, Kim & Pollard's (2017) research calls for local and contextualized critical pedagogy. They claim that since critical pedagogy has been so widely accepted as a successful approach to teaching, research needs to be done that acknowledges the "stress and resistance experienced by teachers and students, including the tendency for innovators to be overwhelmed" (p. 2). This resonates for Turkey's context, where overwhelmed teachers may

tend to disconnect entirely. Thus, Kim and Pollard (2017) advise discovering ways to practice critical pedagogy that account for this resistance, ways that are local and contextualised. My research works to follow this suggestion and fill a gap by defining a localized critical pedagogy for Turkey's specific unique context.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, I endeavor to understand the experience of international EFL teachers in Turkey. This includes developing a picture of the types of challenges they face in their classrooms and work environment and understanding how they handle varying social and political issues that arise. Second, this study analyzes the extent to which these teachers take on the role of critical pedagogues. The second aim includes both their self-perception of their role, as well as the stories they share about their classroom management and teaching approach. Although a teacher may shy away from the label of critical pedagogy, their teaching strategies may indicate otherwise. In this way, my study imagines possibilities for a localized critical pedagogy in a restrictive environment.

The central concepts guiding my study are border crossing and critical pedagogy. Henry Giroux (1992) suggests border crossing involves a teacher undergoing a transformation to understand their students' backgrounds and to view the world from their perspective, while simultaneously inviting students to undergo a similar journey into other perspectives. Border crossing values individual voices and experiences, and celebrates difference. My study views the classroom as a border space where such transformations can be made possible, and within which critical pedagogy is possible. As teacher and students engage in the understanding of

other perspectives, they begin to question their own opinions, and they develop a greater understanding of their society and their role within it.

With these concepts central to my study, I explore the experiences of seven international EFL teachers in a university in Turkey. Through in-depth interviews with each participant, I piece together an image of how critical pedagogy is already happening in some cases, and how it is entirely avoided in other cases. I explore limitations and possibilities for localized critical pedagogy, and suggest implications for more effective future outcomes.

1.4 Audience and Researcher

On a local scale, this study certainly would benefit EFL teachers and the English-medium institution in the research context. This work bears witness to growing trends that may be harmful to students and the direction of education altogether. Increased awareness of how to resist these harmful trends would be highly beneficial. Combatting neoliberal pressures begins at the individual level – within one teacher's classroom and their relationships with each student in the class. Were individual EFL teachers more aware of the valuable role they could play, it may have revolutionary effects over time. Further afield, the results and analysis of the problem in this study would be relevant in other similar academic institutions across Turkey or in other countries where wider oppressive regimes seem to limit the agency of teachers.

This study also benefits academics interested in critical pedagogy and border crossing in international contexts. This study explores a little researched phenomenon: critical pedagogy in a tense and oppressive political context. Suggestions made herein regarding a localized critical pedagogy build on existing research, but chart a new course, as well. I echo the admonishment that further research is required to finesse this type of localized critical pedagogy, and I believe

there is a need to explore further variations appropriate in other diverse contexts (Kim & Pollard, 2017). Therefore, this study would be of interest to others conducting similar research.

My curiosity about this project stems from my personal experience working in Turkey as an English language teacher for three years. During this time, I observed how delicate teaching becomes when trying to both provide students with academic support *and* care for their emotional needs. It involves expertise in classroom management, some degree of political awareness and no shortage of trial and error. I was excited to return to the context as a researcher, rather than a teacher, to examine how teachers handle the substantial demands of EFL teaching in this challenging context.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter begins with laying the conceptual framework foundation, including a detailed description of border crossing and border pedagogy, outsider identity, and neoliberalism. The conceptual framework is built entirely on existing research in the field, and here I clarify how I intend to operationalize these terms for this study. Following this, I provide extended background information about the research setting (the country, the institution and its commitment to neoliberalism). In describing the research setting, I have relied on expert voices within the field, Turkish academics, and on my recollection of the setting from my time working in Turkey from 2013 to 2016.

2.1 Border Crossing

2.1.1 Henry Giroux's Border Pedagogy

Border crossing is the initial concept sparking my interest in this study. There are several articulations of border crossing, including that of Edward Said, branching from Gramsci's organic intellectual (Hussein, 2002), or Hamid Dabashi. While these thinkers theorize transgressing boundaries on a macro level, my research follows Henry Giroux's articulation as it is more pertinent to border crossing as a pedagogical practice. Drawing on critical traditions and feminist theory, Giroux advocates a radical form of education which embraces educational sites as political and moral (Giroux, 1992). He views democracy in education as a politics of difference, or as a celebration of difference, stating, "I don't understand how you can speak to people if you don't celebrate their voices" (p. 13). Giroux states that students' diverse experiences and distinctive voices are relevant to the learning process, in that they can be used

as a basis to question the "historically constructed and socially organized" (p.30) norms that limit or elevate certain social forms.

While border crossing aims to allow students to better understand their reality through critical inquiry and encountering diverse Others, it is dependent on the prerequisite that teachers must "deepen their own understanding of the discourse of various others" (Giroux, 1992, p. 34), and develop a self-understanding of their own politics, values and pedagogy. This must occur prior to inviting Others into a dialectic where each student seeks to understand themselves in relation to the others. So, the pedagogical goal of the teacher is to exhibit enough wisdom and self-understanding as to "articulate difference as part of the construction of a new type of politics," which is "multiple and democratic" (p.35-36).

One sees in Giroux's border pedagogy an approach to teaching that rejects education as the transmission of knowledge and assumes a much grander overarching purpose. Doyle and Singh (2006) state:

> Giroux was honest enough to relinquish all claims to objectivity. He also attempted to refute, before his students, the usual claim that 'teachers were disinterested, that knowledge was unproblematic, and that teaching was merely a methodology for transmitting information.'" (p. 83).

2.1.2 Border Crossing in International Contexts

Giroux's research on Border Crossing is based on his observations in the United States, where he lives and works. Applying the concept more broadly to other cultural, educational settings expands possibilities of richness and depth in understanding Other perspectives. Putting border crossing on an international scale and building on Giroux's concept, Cleghorn

and Prochner (2010) use border crossing to describe a phenomenon occurring when an EFL classroom requires cognitive, cultural and/or linguistic shifts between worldviews on the part of the students and teacher. That is, 'crossing borders' requires recognizing the fundamental ways in which teacher and student backgrounds differ and require negotiation.

To exemplify in the Turkish context, Turkish students undergo a linguistic shift by speaking English in the EFL classroom. At the same time, they engage in a Western-centric curriculum with themes that often sharply contrast their own realities outside the classroom, constituting a cultural shift. Simultaneously, the international teacher experiences a social shift in attempting to empathize with students' perspectives and make sense of Turkish behavioral norms in the classroom. In short, the unique context requires a myriad of 'shifts' that can be disorienting for both learner and teacher.

Mainela, Phuakka, and Servais (2015) highlight a similar notion of border crossing as Cleghorn and Prochner (2010). They suggest 'boundary crossing' is a social and cultural *action*. They view the border as a 'third space' where "opposing words regularly meet and interact" (p. 175). This notion of the third space comes from Bhabha's (1994) work in culture and identity. Bhabha's third space refers to a productive space to imagine forms of cultural meaning outside of binaries which "provides a spatial politics of inclusion" for new signs of identity and collaboration (Meredeth, 1998). This notion has been adapted to English language education settings by scholars like Mainella, Phuakka, and Servais (2015), who emphasize the productivity space (the action) that occurs in crossing a border, stressing that an actual interaction and transaction are occurring. This can also be understood in terms of a process of developing a negotiated identity that bridges diverse backgrounds. The EFL classroom can thus be viewed as

a site of 'becoming' (Prochner, Cleghorn, Kirova, & Massing, 2016). This includes reconciling ideologies of the dominant and non-dominant, which is somewhat complex in the Turkish context. Within the classroom, Turkish culture and language would be dominant, with the non-dominant culture and language being that of the international teacher. On a global scope, English and 'Western-centric' culture would be considered dominant. Regarding politics, it is difficult to say what emerges as 'dominant' in any given Turkish classroom, but fair to presume that religious ideology is dominant in Turkey overall. Evidently, a complex intersection of cultural, linguistic and social aspects meet in the classroom and require a hybrid of dominant and non-dominant to emerge within a context of critical questioning (Prochner et al., 2016, p. 173).

Bridging these ideas back to Giroux's, a major aspect of facilitating this cultural negotiation, or border crossing, is the degree to which teachers can deconstruct the principles underlying their worldview and pedagogical decisions. Deconstructing one's approach allows teachers…

> …to restructure their pedagogical relations in order to engage in open and critical dialogue questions regarding the knowledge taught, how it relates to student's lives, how students can engage with such knowledge, and how such practices actually relate to empowering both teachers and students. (Giroux, 1992, p. 7).

This suggests that awareness of how an international teacher functions as an 'outsider' in the Turkish context must precede critical pedagogical attempts. Only with such a holistic and historical understanding of self and the wider context can an instructor begin to create a space in which the transformative effects of critical pedagogy can be realized. This pertains to what

Gramsci articulated as the need for teachers as intellectuals to "carry the responsibility of transforming the classroom" into a space of respect, learning and equality between teacher and student (Abraham, 2014, p. 7).

The research setting for this project is an EFL setting where English definitively needs to be 'transmitted,' and students must learn skills and strategies for effective language learning. However, Giroux's border crossing is a compelling model of education, especially in a context where many are unhappy with the current socially accepted constructs, and where the teacher as 'outsider' meets students in a unique context. The Turkish EFL classroom seems a location ripe with potential for border crossing. This study views border crossing as a teacher's intentional effort to change the classroom space into a border crossing space, a space of active negotiation and undergoing shifts towards understanding the Other perspective. In such a space, both teacher and student may experience a transformation together towards the greater depth of understanding one another. For this reason, my project is built upon Border Crossing and embedded within critical pedagogy. In fact, I view border crossing as a prerequisite to critical pedagogy, because making space for border crossing opens space for critical pedagogy.

2.2 'Outsider' Identity

Closely tied into border crossing in international contexts is the notion of 'teacher as an outsider,' so it is important to briefly explore the sociological and psychological challenges that EFL teachers face when pursuing a career aboard, particularly regarding their sense of belonging and identity. Trent (2011) defines identity as "our understanding of who we are and who with think other people are" (p. 179). An international teacher, consciously or not, develops a set of ideas about the Self in opposition to the Others they encounter in their

context. This sense of identity changes overtime, shifting when faced with new environments, people, and ideas (Xiong & Xiong, 2017). In other words, outsider identity is negotiated according to one's surroundings.

Outsider identity can also be intentionally created, as outlined by Duff and Uchida (1997), who see EFL teachers as 'cultural workers', or informants. As cultural workers, they play a role in the transmission of their own culture through their choice of class content and teaching approaches. They enable the learners in their classes to construct an image of a different culture while simultaneously developing, authoring and presenting their own identity as the outsider in the classroom. Orçatepe (2015), a Turkish professor, supports this notion, saying that the lack of exposure to the English language and associated culture(s) in Turkey makes EFL teachers both language teachers and cultural mediators. By this standard, international teachers are cultural mediators in Turkey. By answering cultural questions and selecting content, they become a representative of their home nations within their classes.

2.3 The Research Setting

In what follows, I will provide information about the setting in which this study takes place. I will begin by casting an overall picture of Turkey, then outline broad strokes of education in Turkey, and finally, specify characteristics of the institution where data was collected. For ethical reasons and to safeguard the privacy of the institution, I do not name the university in which this study was conducted. I will hereafter refer to the exact location in general terms, as 'the institution' or 'the research setting.'

2.3.1 Turkey

During my time as an educator in Ankara, Turkey, a constant stream of news-worthy events sparked ongoing conversation amongst colleagues and students. Almost daily, a new story captured the attention of all. The particular topic varied: the cancellation of LGBTQ events allegedly for security reasons ("Turkey cancels Istanbul gay pride," *The Telegraph,* 2016); the construction of an enormous $615 million presidential palace (Blair, 2014); the admonition from a person of political influence that 'women should not laugh in public' (Dearden, 2016); a sequence of devastating violent terror-related attacks linked either to the PKK (a separatist Kurdish group) or to Islamic State radicalism; a police raid and seizure of Turkey's largest independent newspaper ("Turkey police raid press offices," *BBC News,* 2016); an attempted military coup followed by the suspension of over 88,000 civil servants, including educational staff, police officers and judges (Gumuscu, 2016). Regardless of the exact topic, conversations would inevitably center on political opinion and the involvement of the current Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi* - AKP).

The AKP came to power in 2002 with campaign goals of gaining EU membership, stabilizing the Turkish economy and reforming the legal system with regard to divisive symbolic issues, such as headscarf legislation and abolishing the death penalty. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan began with modest and modern goals, working towards the creation of a 'New Turkey.' However, Toni Alaranta, an expert analyst of Turkish foreign policy and Middle East politics, points to the AKP's overarching effort to distance the country from modern secular values and move towards an intolerant Islamic-conservative ideology hidden beneath the surface (Alaranta, 2015). Indeed, the AKP has made instrumental use of a democratization discourse

under the guise of 'conservative Muslim democracy', only to mask the underlying creeping Islamization of Turkish politics (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008) and the advancement of a *holy cause* with deep historical roots, all while dismantling what remains of democracy in the country (Alaranta, 2015; Alaranta, 2017).

Historically, this democracy was established in 1923, when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk imparted his vision for a radical transformation from Ottoman governance to a modern, Western secular Turkey. The movement was a "state-instituted, top-down enterprise in social engineering carried out by a small military-bureaucratic elite that imposed its secular vision on a reluctant traditional society" (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008, p. 32). Secular reforms included abolishing the caliphate, establishing the Turkish language, secularizing the education system and ultimately eliminating religion from the public sphere. Democracy was established and a multi-party system developed in which parties campaigned on platforms based largely on either secular or religious adherence. In following decades, the pendulum swung between Islamic political rule and military intervention to ensure the government stays in line with Kemalist (secular) ideology. Several military coups throughout the 1960s-1990s served as accountability measures to maintain a balance between these conflicting ideologies.

This brief historical overview indicates that modern day Islam-oriented politics may just be another wave of this historical pattern. However, recently the AKP has secured an electoral hegemony (Alaranta, 2015) and its system of accountability seems increasingly powerless to keep Erdoğan's power-driven regime in check. Erdoğan has criminalized Western nations in the wake of the 2016 coup, blaming the USA for endorsing it and for harboring Fethullah Gülen, and has tightened his grip through a declared state of emergency which allowed him to implement

unchecked reforms and to consolidate control (Guiler, 2006). This control was further consolidated by the April 2017 referendum, which strengthened the presidential power and weakened the role of the parliament (Asmani & Austin, 2017). Furthermore, realigning Turkish foreign policy, shifting allies, and funding jihadist terror organizations fighting in Syria has rendered Turkey extremely vulnerable to regional instability and violent outbursts on their own land (Alaranta, 2016). Turkey now finds itself in an extremely fragile and politically unstable position of dealing with Islamic State forces, PKK fighters, the Syrian war and a refugee crisis (Guiler, 2016), not to mention "an overwhelming social polarization" created in the last decade by the AKP government (Alaranta, 2016).

2.3.2 Education in Turkey

Ataturk emphasized the role of education in modernizing and secularizing Turkey, a notion that has prevailed throughout the century, changing shape significantly with the advent of the global neoliberal system in the 1980s. Currently, there are over 175 universities in Turkey, 60% of which are state funded and the remainder are private (British Council & TEPAV, 2015, p. 55).

The Turkish Higher Educational Council (*Yükseköğretim Kurulu* – YÖK*)* has received "criticism for its centralized and authoritarian structure and negative impact on academic freedom" (Gök, 2007, 252). This refers largely to how students in the education system are constrained by mandatory high-stakes university placement examinations, which rank students and are used as basis for determining their academic potential, as well as acceptance or rejection to universities. These competitive placement exams have been widely critiqued for their low predictive validity (Ağazade, Caner, Hasipoğlu & Civelek, 2013) and an over-reliance

on objective testing (Grant, 2007). Moreover, YÖK constantly implements reforms that instigate frequent change, making the requirements from year to year ambiguous and complicated.

Regarding English language Education, Orçatepe (2015) notes that although the Turkish National Curriculum highlights the target culture as an important aspect of learning a target language, foreign language teaching faculties in universities fail to equip Turkish EFL teachers with confidence in providing intercultural insights for learners, or instilling a sense of intercultural sensitivity in their classrooms. Many institutions aim to offset this inadequacy by hiring international staff.

2.3.3 The University and the English Language Preparatory Program

The private university where this research is situated is highly ranked in Turkey and internationally. The institution admits students from all over the world to pursue studies through English medium instruction. English is chosen as the language of instruction to provide access to academic resources, facilitate research publication and academic mobility, and attract international staff (British Council & TEPAV, 2015, p. 56). Prior to beginning courses in their undergraduate programs, students must pass an in-house English proficiency exam to demonstrate that their English level is sufficient to listen to university lectures, maintain discussions in classes and write academic papers. Students whose acceptance to the university is conditional upon passing an English proficiency exam have the option to study in the university's own one-year English language preparatory program.

Achieving success within one year in the intensive English preparatory program is very challenging for students, especially if they begin at a low level. Students attend twenty-five contact hours of language instruction per week, divided amongst three teachers. Teachers are

recruited locally and internationally, with local Turkish staff outnumbering their international colleagues by around 5 to 1. Turkish staff are very welcoming to international recruits, offering support when needed.

The management style is top-down, and the institution is politically neutral. Therefore, despite the sometimes-shocking news and political tensions in the wider context, business continues as usual within school walls. Moreover, when faced with personal issues, neither students nor teachers are given any lenience in terms of expected attendance and fulfillment of class-related duties. The institution functions as a business and lacks a sense of *human-ness*.

***Student profil*e**

The typical classroom constitutes a colorful batch of bold personalities. Most students are Turkish and Muslim. A small number of students in the preparatory program come from abroad (mainly Azerbaijan) or are Kurdish. In terms of political beliefs ranging from secular to religious, the same polarization that exists outside the classroom is present within. However, students in this institution seem to represent a higher than usual percentage of the secular demographic. Many students are funded by their parents, meaning they come from wealthy middle or upper class, educated, *usually* secular backgrounds. Of course, one cannot over-generalize, and data does not exist to evidence exact ratios of students' political ideologies. Observation and conversation with students provide this foundational understanding.

Private university tuition is expensive, so parents are often the primary extrinsic motivation for students' enrolment and ongoing participation throughout the year. Students funded by parents are often entitled, bare-minimum achievers, perhaps spoiled, and expressive of their (often secular) thoughts and ideas. Other students are not supported by parents but

have received scholarships for having ranked highly on university placement exams. These students are generally more motivated and hardworking. Regardless, nearly every student is polite, well-intentioned, good-humored, inclusive and bright.

Students are engaged in popular culture and mass media. They stay constantly attuned to the events occurring in their nation through their smart phones, making them aware of current events and ready to engage in dialogue. Moreover, students are profoundly affected by their wider context. At times, they are personally affected by the tragedies that occur. For instance, a student in my class in October 2015 recounted her experience witnessing the twin blasts that killed 95 people at a peace rally in Ankara. She was present in class the day after the attack (a result of the rigid school attendance policy), but she sat in tears, doodling peace symbols into her notebook, and noticeably impacting the atmosphere for all students in the room, who were empathetic and focused on helping their friend after her traumatic experience.

International teacher profile

International teachers include native English speakers from Canada, the US, the UK, Ireland and South Africa. They are drawn to this institution for professional development opportunities, gaining university level experience and earning a competitive salary. International teachers range in their amount of teaching experience, but are not required to have any experience to take up a post – only a bachelor's degree is required. Many teachers complete certificates, diplomas, or Master's degrees while working. These teachers may be drawn to Turkey – or remain in Turkey – for various reasons, including seeking a unique cultural experience, travel, the high demand for EFL instructors, relatively high remuneration, quality of

life, a networked community of teachers, romantic interests, or academic and professional pursuits and promotions.

International teachers sometimes differ from Turkish teachers in terms of teaching style, classroom approaches, and areas of strength and weakness in English instruction. International teachers are perceived as 'fun' teachers whose lessons center on dynamic and communicative activities and games, often centered on speaking. They are well-liked because they offer an opportunity for authentic English language use and practice. Students seem intrigued by their international teachers, asking many questions to learn about their home countries and personalities. Students are also interested in a foreigner's perception of Turkish people, culture, food, government, and politics.

2.3.4 Neoliberalism in Turkey

Turkey and its education system have been undeniably impacted by the rise of the neoliberal capitalist world system. The structural adjustment policies implemented by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s were a major catalyst in this direction. These policies prompted Turkey to increase privatization of the economy and public services (Gök, 2007, 251). Thus, cuts to funding for public universities meant class sizes became larger, teachers were paid less and quality generally diminished. The desired and actual result was an increased demand for private schools, which were called 'foundation universities' to minimize the connotation of profit-making to which such institutions were inextricably tied. Alongside this, a huge number of university preparatory institutions (*özel dershaneler*) were founded to better students' chances of success in admission to their desired university. In fact, an entire industry developed, marking the commercialization of the educational system (Gök, 2007, 252).

The neoliberal system put YÖK in the position of elevating the importance of the above-mentioned university placement examinations as the only feasible tool to manage massive numbers of students wishing to enroll in higher education. This is a result of students' growing perception of a university degree as foundational to their success in the current paradigm. What is more, the better ranked the university granting the qualification, the more likely the student feels they will achieve success in their future careers. Thus, a highly competitive context emerges in which students with high rankings and high socio-economic status are more likely to succeed. This leads to the exacerbation of disparity amongst those with access to the right to education, namely segregating rich from poor.

The institution certainly represents the neoliberal system in which it is embedded. While the institution undeniably strives to be a leader in academic quality and sound instruction, it is also ultimately a money-making industry in which the student is the client, and instructors are the means through which the product is delivered. The product, a university degree, is valuable as it is a high-ranked university, and thus, it is generally earned by a portion Turkey's elite who likely go on to achieve success in future education and work. The school embodies what Giroux (2004) describes, in his belief that neoliberalism…

> … not only reduces all relationships to the exchange of money and the accumulation of capital, but also depoliticizes politics itself and reduces public activity… Within this discourse, all forms of political solidarity, social agency, and collective resistance disappear into the murky waters of a biopolitics. (p. 74)

Giroux illustrates how oppressive the neoliberalist system is in its ability to stifle those who wish to see a change in their surroundings through social responsibility and collective struggle.

Similarly, mainstream ideologies in Turkey will likely remain powerful, impeding potential for agency and silencing the conversation altogether.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The above overview has highlighted the shifting historical agenda of Turkey's political dichotomy and the current neoliberal context in which secular Turks are increasingly frustrated by the 'creeping Islamization' of governmental agenda. However, these secular voices find themselves unable to enact change within the confines of their context. Thus, I term the teaching context as 'politically-charged.' Students bring their outside-class experiences to the classroom and express their frustration, confusion or anger with the current status quo. Many students want a change, but struggle to imagine their potential to impact because their views represent a minority within the larger context. For this reason, I locate my research within a critical pedagogy framework, assuming education is never apolitical, and that the classroom *is* a space in which students can develop the agency to question structures of power and challenge the status quo.

Based on the above literature review of the research setting, I assumed that although the above-described diverse student profile and wider environmental context has proved constricting to date, agency may be imminently possible given the student profile and given that Turkey itself is being stretched through current political and economic conditions. After all, it is in moments of collective moral panic and dynamic change that discourses emerge that create space for change (Cohen, 1973). I reason then, that such a change could be imminently possible in Turkey, and that one of the spaces in which it could be realized is through EFL teachers' development of border space in their classrooms.

Critical pedagogy has its roots in critical theory, which can be traced back through the Frankfurt school tradition to an initially Marxist economic way of thinking (Breuing, 2011, p. 5). Critical theory has shifted from looking primarily at socioeconomic awareness and class inequality (Freire, 1968) towards discourses of internalized oppression of minorities, and the conscientization and deconstruction of hegemonic structures that limit agency (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005). To do so, critical theory focuses on a holistic and historical approach to explaining social problems and is inherent within current feminist theories in social science. These current theories highlight the importance of historical analysis of the impact of systemic hegemony in understanding the experience of - and providing a voice for - those who are marginalized (Parpart, Connely, & Barriteau, 2000).

Critical pedagogy functions on the assumption that "learning should be used to expand the public good, create a culture of questioning, and promote democratic social change" (Giroux, 2004, p. 76). This requires understanding how symbolic and institutional forms of culture and power are at play in constructing aspects of identity, agency and the social world (Giroux, 2004, p. 59). Put simply, critical pedagogy seeks to illuminate how politics and power are central to the functioning of a school (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). In a de-politicized neoliberal context, critical pedagogy requires educators to "make the pedagogical more political by linking critical thought to collective action, human agency and social responsibility, and knowledge and power to a profound impatience with a status quo…" (Giroux, 2004, p. 74); in other words, to foster critical consciousness amongst students and teachers in solidarity against the forces of global capitalism.

Realistically, re-politicizing pedagogy in the Turkish context for international teachers is complex. Re-politicization should involve teachers providing students with a chance to critically engage with the "cultural and social codes that define their own histories and narratives" (Giroux, 1991, p. 3). Tangible classroom evidence of this may include providing space for learners to become more aware of the strengths and limitations of their context and providing an opportunity to imagine possibilities for resistance to the status quo. Exploring the extent to which teachers are willing to do this – namely, (1) transform their classrooms to border spaces to understand one another and (2) become critical pedagogues in helping students understand their relationship to, and position within – is the basis of this study.

2.5 Summary

So far, I have suggested that Turkey constitutes a politically-charged context. Yet, within the neoliberal framework of the private university, politics are minimized. Students remain vocal about their political surroundings, and thus, international teachers find themselves stuck between a rigid institutional structure and student needs. To complicate matters, the international teacher is an 'outsider,' who may or may not have developed an understanding of the social structures at play in Turkey. They may or may not be aware of the biases that accompany their own belief systems as educators and as 'outsiders'. Nevertheless, international teachers engage in a complex process of border crossing themselves, while also inviting students to do the same. Since border crossing views the classroom as a space to engage student experience and celebrate a politics of difference, I have suggested that a critical pedagogy framework offers a useful basis for exploring these issues further. This implies an

understanding of the classroom as space where collective agency and disrupting the status quo are priorities.

I want to explore the specificities of the types of challenges faced by international teachers, learn about social and political issues arising in the classroom, understand if (and how) teachers incorporate politics into their lessons, and whether teachers see themselves as creators of border spaces to become critical pedagogues as mediators in this complex context. In the next chapter, I articulate research questions and specify which qualitative methods allowed me to gain insight as to how critical pedagogy is enacted in Turkish EFL classrooms.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Method

3.1 Objectives and Research Questions

I set out to explore the experiences of international teachers in the English language preparatory program of the private university described above. Given the unique context, the overarching objective of my study is to explore is how teachers negotiate students' affective needs and outside-classroom realities alongside the curricular goals of the EFL classroom. I aim to articulate and evaluate challenges that international teachers may face as 'outsiders' in the fragile and politically-charged context in order to evaluate the status of a critical pedagogical approach among international EFL teachers. The specific research questions that I explored are as follows:

1) What political and social issues do international teachers face in the classroom when teaching EFL to adults from middle-upper class professional backgrounds in Turkey?
    a. To what extent are international teachers aware of the current political situation in Turkey and of the historical context in which current political discourse is embedded?
    b. When significant current events arise (press releases, elections, news), do international teachers respond within the classroom, whether discussions about these events are voiced by students or not?
2) Given that students hold either secular or conservative political views, do international teachers perceive part of their role to be that of a *critical pedagogue*?
    a. Do teachers value creating space for border crossing and understanding varying perspectives amongst teacher and students.

b. Do international teachers perceive that they can foster a safe classroom atmosphere where student agency is activated and the status quo, challenged?
c. What limitations inhibit teachers from creating such an atmosphere (*question 2b*), and impede the potential for a critical pedagogical approach in a border space?

3.2 Locating the Study within a Critical Theory Framework

The methodology chosen to explore the above research questions reflects a critical pedagogy theoretical framework. Critical pedagogy maintains that education serves a political purpose (McArthur, 2010) and that it is oriented towards maximizing social justice by challenging accepted norms. Critical pedagogues find space for student voices, not only within the school but also allowing students to understand their experiences while engaging with wider society. For critical pedagogy to be actualized, schools must be democratic and public as the theory "stands firmly upon a normative basis that asserts that higher education should not succumb to narrow, economic interpretations of its role" (p. 303). However, in the neoliberal context in which higher education in Turkey is unquestionably entrenched, running a school with democratic and public intentions is a challenging goal. McLaren (2005) notes the tendency for schools to subscribe to public-private partnerships, sponsorships, and national standards maintained by national tests.

Certain institutions of higher education in Turkey do aspire towards societal political activism, exemplified by protests in 2013 surrounding construction projects through green areas of the METU campus ("ODTU Students in Tent Protest," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 2013), or protests at Istanbul University challenging the post-coup purges (Pamuk & Yackley, 2016). These outcomes evidence these institutions adherence to critical pedagogy-like education,

which allows both students and teachers to gain greater freedom and control by connecting them to issues of power (McArther, 2010). Approaching this study with a critical pedagogy theory lens is appropriate given that some liberal universities value this approach already, and are concerned with transforming oppressive relations of power that are at play in Turkey (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). My choice of this theoretical framework is based on my understanding of the historical context through research and instinct from my own experience in Turkey, sensing that many students and teachers were unhappy. That is, my research questions stem from the belief that international teachers in Turkey, by reason of them choosing to be in Turkey through a politically tumultuous time, may adopt a teaching approach that prioritizes enabling students to achieve social change in their country. This 'emancipatory interest' aligns my work with critical theory (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

I recognize that critical pedagogy as it is operationalized in this study has come a long way from its roots in critical theory. McLaren (2005) notes how egregiously "misunderstood and misrepresented" (p. 8) critical theory has become since its origin in Paulo Freire. Freire was concerned with social restructuring through political education to usurp hegemonic structures and foster emancipatory change. Overtime, critical theory has come to embody a much broader reach in education, branching into multicultural and language education. This postmodern form of critical theory extends to encompass identity politics and a focus on multiple literacies, race, gender, religion, and intersections of these factors (Crenshaw, 1991; Kellner, 1998). This is perhaps most clearly reflected in Giroux's (1992) notion of a *politics of difference*. It is within this vein of critical theory that the current research is founded.

3.3 Qualitative Methodology

Within the above theoretical framework, an in depth qualitative study was the best methodological framework for this research. The qualitative research approach allowed me to understand the complexities and nuances of the experiences of international teachers in Turkey. The benefits of conducting qualitative research in this study were multiple: I could capture comprehensive insights as to the discourses at play within the institution, and I could delve into the relationships and factors that underlie international teachers' experiences as outsiders abroad. Qualitative research enabled me to explore the significance of the factors affecting teachers experiences within the context and to really begin to understand *how* international teachers in Turkey conduct themselves both personally and professionally and *why* they behave in these ways. Furthermore, a qualitative approach allowed me to generalize cross-contextually by comparing the conclusions drawn from this study to the circumstances of other teachers in similar contexts (Mason, 2002).

I conducted an observational case study, confined within a 'bounded system' - the specific institution described above (McMillan, 2004, p. 271). I conducted rich, detailed narrative interviews with international teachers to reflect the dialogical approach needed in this type of critical inquiry (Hatch, 2002). I traveled to Turkey to complete interviews, which added the advantage of providing a holistic image of what research participants were experiencing day-by-day throughout the research (Bailey, 2007). I felt that participants were more transparent about their reactions to current events than they would have been if I had conducted interviews from a distance. They seemed to feel that my physical presence there implied I was as aware as they were about ongoing events. My presence in Turkey also enabled

me to recall more closely my own experience in the field so that I could better empathize with participants. The meant my questions for participants were better targeted, allowing efficient use of time to make each interview as valuable and informative as possible.

3.4 Participants

Prior to arriving on the site, I contacted participants and invited them to participate in my study. I knew several of the participants already from my own experience in the institution. These participants assisted me in inviting others to participate in the study. Once I received an email from each of my participants confirming their desire to be involved in the study, I emailed them a copy of the questionnaire and research participant consent form asked them to return these documents when finished. Once I arrived on site, I arranged meeting times to conduct interviews with each participant at a time and location convenient to them. I remain committed to participant anonymity and have used pseudonyms to protect their identity.

I collected data from seven teachers with varying degrees of teaching experience in the research setting. Two participants were in their first twelve months of teaching, two were beginning their fifth year, and the others fell in the middle. This range was strategic, allowing me to explore the challenges faced by international teachers with varying levels of insight and experience. Had I only spoken to newer teachers, I would have missed some depth and reflection that teachers who have been there longer offered. However, if I had only spoken to more experienced teachers, I would have missed the 'first impression' sense of how newer recruits understand their new social context as relatively fresh outsiders. Talking to both new and experienced international teachers provided a balanced sample of teachers to address my research questions. It allowed me to see how the outsider perspective changes with familiarity

to the teaching and cultural context.

Participants ranged in age from 20-40. Four participants were female, 3 were male. Five participants were American, one English and one Canadian. The following table briefly summarizes my participants' demographics. Further details about the characteristics and teaching beliefs of participants will be elaborated as needed throughout the findings section.

Pseudonym	Gender	Experience in the research Setting	Nationality	Age Range*	Turkish Level
Katie	Female	One month	American	20-25	Beginner
Curtis	Male	One year	American	20-25	Beginner
Ben	Male	Two years	American	26-30	Intermediate
Jane	Female	Three years	American	31-35	Advanced
Lena	Female	Four years	English	31-35	Intermediate
David	Male	Five years	American	31-35	Intermediate
Zoe	Female	Five years	Canadian	36-40	Fluent

* An age range has been given, rather than exact age, to protect the identity of participants.

All participants currently reside in Turkey, and all worked in the research setting within the last year. Two participants began a new position within two months of the data collection. Lena changed universities, and Ben changed roles within the same university. Since this shift was recent, I was happy to collect data from both Ben and Lena as their recollection of the position and research setting was still quite fresh, and each offered perceptive comments that helped address my research questions.

3.5 Methods & Materials

3.5.1 Questionnaire

I provided each participant with a pre-interview questionnaire via online correspondence in advance of the interview (Appendix 1). I asked that each participant complete the questionnaire on their own time and send it back to me via email. The primary purpose of the questionnaire was to familiarize participants with the content/topics associated with my research objectives and to allow them a period of individual reflexivity prior to the interview (Johnsen and Christensen, 2008). The questionnaire was semi-structured. It set the agenda but did not assume participant responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). I reviewed each questionnaire prior to the interview so that I could utilize participant responses as the basis, or springboard, for further discussion and elaboration in the interview. The questionnaire was brief, including one open-ended question, a closed-ended question section, and an agree/disagree rating scale section.

Open-Ended Questions.

Open-ended questions allow participants to respond in their own style and terms (Johnsen and Christensen, 2008). In a qualitative case-specific study, open-ended questions are the most effective mode of inviting a multitude of responses to address a complex situation. Although only one fully open-ended question was included in the questionnaire, the closed-ended sections also included space for comments or further elaboration, inviting open responses throughout. Participants were reminded (in the questionnaire instructions) that they were welcome to write as much or little as they liked, and that they would have further opportunity to follow up on these topics in the interview.

Closed-Ended Questions.

I used a basic set of 'yes/no questions' to determine topics deemed suitable for the teaching context. In creating this list of topics, I assumed there might be grey areas where teachers would struggle to choose either 'yes' or 'no,' However, I aimed to understand which teaching topics teachers viewed as starkly off limits. Participants who felt limited by this made use of the provide space for comments.

Rating scales integrate the flexibility of a greater variety of responses along with the benefit of drawing comparisons and correlations between participant responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). I designed a numeric fully anchored 5-point rating scale for participants to reflect on their teaching beliefs. Items included in this section were intentionally broad, as I intended to follow-up in the interview.

The closed-ended questions enabled me to notice broad patterns and trends across participant responses. A downside of such questions is their inability to infer any sensitivity, subtlety or 'other' comments that may not have been expressed due to the closed-nature of the scale (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). For that reason, I included space for participants to include additional comments, which most participants took advantage of. The purpose of the questionnaire was to incite reflection and provoke the need for further discussion during the interview phase of the study.

3.5.2 Interviews

Given the anticipated complexity and variety of participant responses, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews so that I would have the freedom to carefully listen to participants and to pose unique questions formulated specifically for each participant (Hatch,

2002; Perumal, 2014). Several key questions were asked of all participants, but the open-ended nature of the interview elicited broad and varied responses from participants, and I varied my follow-up questions accordingly (Creswell, 2014). Interviews were recorded and ranged from forty-five to ninety minutes.

I perceived the interviews to be a very valuable source of data, but one limitation of this method for my study was that participants might have filtered their comments based on the assumption that I, as the researcher, already knew the answers since I had previously worked in the same position as them. I suspect that some participants did not share information with which they thought I might already be familiar. One participant even made this comment: "*You probably know more about that than me"* regarding student behavioral issues. Another participant, after carefully answering one of my questions, asked, "*What did you find, in your time here?"* In such cases, I would briefly respond, but quickly return the focus to the perspective of the participant.

3.5.3 Researcher Observation

Throughout my time in the field, I remained abreast of news and current events impacting Turkey and impacting my participants as foreigners in Turkey. I noted when these events arose in interviews. For instance, each of my American participants made mention of the escalating tension between American and Turkish relations and the visa complication repercussions that were ongoing in October.

Furthermore, I made a note of participant behavior during the interviews. Some participants exhibited unease with the recording device when certain political topics were discussed, which sheds light on the feelings of the participants regarding certain issues. Hatch

(2002) notes that discerning and interpreting such behavior can inform research interests, and this is reflected in the findings and discussion sections which follow.

3.6 Data Analysis

Upon returning to Canada, I listened to the interview recordings and transcribed the interviews to begin the process of analyzing and interpreting data to draw patterns and implications from the research (McMillan, 2004). I had my participants member check the transcripts to ensure the reliability of the data collected. I then followed Creswell's (2014) suggestion that a researcher builds "patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information" (p.234). I began by reading through all data, noting down broad themes, or codes. My choice of codes included context, event and perception codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Context codes included any comments regarding Turkey and the setting, like '*What the teacher knows about Turkey.'* Event codes included information volunteered by participants about their changing surroundings, including '*Ongoing Events before or during the Research.'* Most codes were perception codes, like '*Teachers' understanding of students'* and '*Teachers' view of their role in the setting.'* I numerated these codes and finished with a complete coding system of 29 different codes (Appendix B).

From here, I read through all data again, applying the numeric code I had developed. Then, I manually sorted data into each respective code so that I could analyze each participants' responses within themes. Certain themes were broad, for instance, '*Teacher's understanding of the institution,'* so I generated additional smaller numerated lists of sub-codes for each of these broader areas. In this case, '*neoliberal'* and '*academic*' were coded. The common patterns, as

well as notable deviations, were then scrutinized to highlight the most important findings. Thus, the codes and sub-codes that I generated have become headings in the analysis that follows.

3.7 Timing

I collected data in Turkey during October 2017. Returning to Canada, I completed the transcriptions of interviews, and some initial analysis (coding and sorting), in November and December 2017. Further analysis and interpretation and the writing process occurred from December 2017 through to March 2018.

3.8 Quality of Research - Validity & Reliability

Multiple methods of data collection, outlined above, evidence my effort to ensure triangulation in my study. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods to increase the validity of the data through corroboration. Patton (1999) notes that in qualitative research, triangulation of sources "will seldom lead to a single, totally consistent picture. The point is to study and understand when and why there are differences" (p. 1195). By having participants complete both a questionnaire and interview, each participant had the opportunity to express themselves in a different medium and at a different time. This means participants had multiple opportunities to express or clarify perceptions, which created some consistency in data results, and allowed me to see emerging patterns, and identify and interpret deviations.

Another way that I have aimed for quality in my research is through transparency in my role as a researcher (Patton, 1999). I have outlined my assumptions regarding the role that international teachers in Turkey might play. I have also clearly stated my previous role in the research setting and my existing relationship with some participants. That being said, I sought to conduct my analysis and interpretation free of bias, and with an open mind to the ideas

expressed by participants in interviews.

Furthermore, I have aimed to frame my study within a discourse of critical pedagogy and border crossing theory. Wiersma and Jurs (2009) highlight the importance of clearly delineating the "theoretical constructs and research procedures… used so that other researchers can understand the results" (p. 247). Although this is my first major research project, I attempted to complete a high-quality project. I am excited about this study, I was well-prepared for the fieldwork, and I have applied creative insight in analyzing and interpreting the results in a rigorous and analytical manner. Ultimately, I believe the results of this study contribute to the academic discussion of border pedagogy and EFL critical pedagogy, and that the study evidences my commitment to the value of qualitative inquiry.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

In this study, my main ethical consideration was the consent, confidentiality, and anonymity of my research participants throughout the research and writing process (McNamee, 2002). I remained committed to respecting participants' decisions to participate, I obtained written consent, and I ensured they were always aware of their right to discontinue their involvement and withdraw their data. I received ethics approval from Concordia University to complete this study as outlined above.

Chapter 4: Results

The interviews conducted were fruitful, offering ample insight into my research questions. The following chapter presents the results of the study by highlighting key data about the research questions. I begin by recounting the overarching atmosphere in Turkey, from both researcher and participant perspective. Following this, I will describe the participant profile, including participants' reasons for being in Turkey, their developing understanding of their surroundings, and their sense of identity as outsiders. From there, I will provide an overview of topics that are used or avoided in participants' classrooms. I will conclude by analyzing participant responses to their perceptions of their role as related to critical pedagogy and their impression of politics in education.

In some cases, several or all participants express a similar response to a question, and in other cases, a participant presents a view that deviates from the other voices. In the findings reported, I highlight the emerging patterns by evidencing their collective response, and I also call to attention when one particular opinion conflicts with the general response. What emerges is a sense of the complexity arising from the context as well as the personal backgrounds and philosophies of participants. The similarities and discrepancies in participant responses documented in this chapter will be followed up on in further detail in the discussion that follows (chapter 5). For ease of reading, and to clearly link the results to the relevant portions of the discussion, I will refer to the discussion throughout this chapter to highlight how the results shared here are significant.

4.1 The Reality of the Current Context in Turkey

4.1.1 All Appears Calm

I must first acknowledge that the political and social situation in Turkey during my fieldwork in October 2017 differed from the Turkey that I left behind in August 2016. As outlined above, my last year in Turkey (August 2015 – August 2016) was marked by constant news provoking ideological clashes, and a sense of growing fear and confusion aside the occurrence of frequent terrorist attacks. The climax was the attempted coup in July 2016, and the subsequent declared state of emergency. Over the fifteen months since then, the state of emergency has been extended six times, until the present, giving the government continued free reign and unprecedented power. This power lurks and grows beneath the façade of the government's intention to guard ongoing national security threats (Fraser, 2018; "Turkey extends post-coup state of emergency," *The Associated Press,* 2018).

Fraser (2018) cites the *Freedom House* organization's conclusion that Turkey is no longer a 'partly free' country, but one that is 'not free,' including evidence like increased journalist prosecution and growing commonality of "arrests based on messages shared via social media" (Freedom House, 2018). This has had the cumulative effect of "widespread self-censorship and a general chilling effect on political discourse" (Freedom House, 2018). When I was there in October, this 'chilling effect' was ubiquitous: the feeling on the streets of Istanbul and Ankara is one of apparent calmness. A Turkish friend in Istanbul candidly told me, "*No one is afraid anymore – things are calmer."* I felt there was validity to this opinion as I could sense that much of the hype and hysteria from 2016 had subsided. It seems to have been replaced with a sense

of 'business as usual,' and no one seemed eager to talk about the political issues. These issues now seem to hide in plain sight, the proverbial elephant in the nation.

Participants supported this contextual development, saying that students monitor and filter their contributions to class discussions. Katie noted, "*Sometimes, students will say 'well, I want to say this, but it's political so I shouldn't.'"* David and Jane, both previous colleagues of mine, said that things have changed since I left and that students are not as vocal as they once were about issues that may be important to them. Jane said certain topics have become more sensitive. When I asked her if this was due to a sense of hopelessness, she observed, "*Yes – and sadness".* I asked whether this was a new feeling since the referendum in May, and she indicated that it had been ongoing since before that time.

4.1.2 Ongoing events

Despite this overarching stillness of political discourse in daily life, certain newsworthy items have continued to surface in the lives of participants and their students. Events occurring in weeks leading up to the interviews did come up in the interviews. They are worth reporting here as they influence the way teachers feel in their surroundings.

The most notable event, mentioned by each American participant, was that the Turkish government had suspended all visa services for US citizens as of October 8, 2017 (U.S. Embassy & Consulates, 2017). This decision was the cause of a lengthy ongoing period of diplomatic tension between the two nations following the coup attempt. A U.S. diplomat of Turkish nationality was arrested for his alleged involvement in the Fethullah Gülen saga. Gülen, a Turkish citizen currently residing in the U.S. is the source of much contention in Turkey. Turkish authorities claim Gülen remotely orchestrated and executed the coup, and have repeatedly

demanded that he be extradited from the U.S (Roberts, 2017). The subjects of Turkey's headlines of countless individuals being removed from positions of power and facing incarceration are potential Gülen-supporters, like the U.S. diplomat mentioned above. This particular arrest caused the U.S. to limit visa services for Turkish citizens to the U.S, which in turn, resulted in the Turkish government doing the same.

For the American participants in my study, this has several implications. Katie notes that she is now uncertain as to when her family, who had been planning to visit her in Turkey, would be able to come; Curtis observes that the visa complications caused him to feel like he is not really welcome in his host country; and Jane commented that in the research setting, a staff member was terminated the previous year, and rumors linked his dismissal to his potential alliance with Gülenist principles. She said, "*they're rounding those people up."* Thus, for the American teachers, their feelings of security and sense of belonging were affected by these recent diplomatic level developments.

4.1.3 An Unsettled Feeling

Participants also revealed their feelings in Turkey through body language and reactions to my questions throughout interviews. Interviews were recorded, and two participants explicitly exhibited discomfort in addressing certain topics when the device was recording. One participant nervously and conspicuously eyed the recording device as she broached the prickly political topic of Gülen and his supporters. Another participant stopped me before I began the recording and asked if he could have a list of questions that I was planning to ask. I told him that he was welcome to see my list of guiding questions, but that it would be my preference to have as authentic a dialogue as possible, rather than approaching the interview as a list of

questions to which we would rigidly adhere. I assured him that it was alright if he wanted to skip any questions he did not feel comfortable answering, and he replied, "*Ok, it's just that in Turkey, it's illegal to talk negatively about the government*." Seeing his concern, I reassured him that I was not planning to ask any questions explicitly about the Turkish government, and that if he ever felt uncomfortably, he could choose not to answer. With this arrangement in mind, we began the recording and the interview. A third participant reiterated the importance of his name remaining anonymous in the reporting of the interview. He was, of course, assured that this would be the case. These instances evidence an unease regarding political topics, and the discomfort certainly sheds light on some of the constraints imposed by the context.

4.2 What brings Teachers to Teach EFL in Turkey

To ultimately understand the extent to which the international EFL teachers in my study consider themselves critical pedagogues, I first needed to understand the extent to which my participants were involved in, or informed about, their environment. To begin exploring this, I asked my teacher participants very general questions about how they ended up living and working in Turkey.

Participants expressed largely varying reasons for choosing Turkey as a place to live and work. Findings were largely consistent with what was outlined in the literature review. Participants cited professional reasons, including the appealing job package and career path, and personal reasons, like a desire to move abroad and seek adventure. Prior to their arrival, five of the seven participants had received recommendation or encouragement from a contact familiar with the institution and/or with Turkey. Reasons for teachers staying in Turkey included romantic connections or a sense of comfort in the setting.

None of the participants claimed that they knew much about the political or social climate of Turkey prior to arrival. That is, these EFL teachers were not drawn to Turkey particularly for the sake of Turkey. In the discussion that follows, I will link this finding to a current trend: EFL teachers' tendency to go '*TEFLing'* around the world' (5.1.2). This is a phenomenon that I will suggest is responsible for setting the parameters for EFL teachers unlikeliness to use critical pedagogy.

4.3 Teachers Understanding of their Environment

My first research question involved exploring political and social issues participants encounter in the research setting. This involved exploring their understanding of the current and historical political situation in Turkey as well as their understanding of the institutional and student profile. Knowing about teachers' background knowledge was foundational for my analysis of how teachers respond to students and ongoing events.

4.3.1 What Teachers Know about Turkey

Few participants seemed confident in their understanding of Turkey's political situation. Some participants said they are exposed to political discourse, but that they do not feel they genuinely understand what is going on in detail. Some understand broad strokes but do not feel much connection to the subject. Participants generally indicated that while they try to keep abreast of the overarching plot, but it is often convoluted, especially by an uncertainty as to the degree of honesty and conflicting viewpoints. This is best exemplified by David, who outlined his understanding of the political climate as follows:

> *I'm still very confused about the coup attempt last year. I know the reason was because of this Fethullah Gülenist group – they were allegedly trying to overtake the country, but*

I don't know what is fact and what is fiction. I don't even really understand a lot about this group. Like, I know they were really close to the AKP and Erdoğan, and then they had some kind of rift – I don't know what it was about – and now they're enemies. Really, you could make a movie about it, I guess. I do know enough to know that with the climate right now, if you get involved, you can get in trouble. I've learned enough to know that you just keep your mouth shut.

While most participants recounted similar understanding with similar gaps, an exception to this sort of vague-understanding was Zoe. As mentioned, Zoe has some Turkish in her family background, and she plans to be in Turkey long-term, having married a politically-minded Turkish man. This has given her the motivation and resources to examine her home in further detail. She says, "*As a foreigner, I'm interested in the history of the country, the current events of the country, the politics of the country… I try to keep myself educated."* She felt she had developed a much better picture of what is going on compared to when she first arrived.

No matter how clear each participant's image is of their surroundings, all participants were unanimous in explicitly stating or implicitly signaling their discontent with Turkey's political situation, and their lack of support for the current Turkish government.

4.3.2 What Teachers Know about the Institution

Teachers' language used to describe the institution casts it in a neoliberal and academic light, confirming what was outlined in the literature review. Lena states that the institution's "*goal for students is to pass the exam. They don't promote the person or how to enjoy education or be a good person. They want exam results and to feed students into the university."* Other participants similarly felt that their role, as defined by the institution, was to

make the institution money and spend the required number of hours in the classroom teaching what was asked.

Politically, teachers viewed the institutional policy as apolitical. Two participants even noted that in their induction training, and again in professional development training, they were told not to bring political or religious topics into the classroom. One participant said she had a feeling that most Turkish colleagues held liberal views, and another pointed out that the rector of the institution harbored conservative political beliefs as a loyal subscriber to the AKP party. In sum, participants' understanding of the political orientation of the institution is mixed and uncertain, with an overriding feeling of the need to stick to the curriculum.

4.3.3 What Teachers know about the Students

Interview data indicated that each teacher was fully cognizant that their students are politically aware, at times politically active and most important, politically divided. Further to this, some teachers pointed out that students may have powerful connections outside of class. Jane, after recounting a story about a student who would engage in very heated debate to defend his conservative political views, said of that student, "*I don't know whose kid he was – somebody important form the way he acted*." David also told a story about a student whose father was part of the reigning political party who had been offended by a disparaging comment made by a Turkish teacher regarding his father's party. Evidently, teachers are very aware that they must tread lightly if at all when political topics are broached.

Data also indicates teachers could sense that many students remain unhappy, or even angry, with Turkey's situation. In some cases, students expressed dissatisfaction but appeared not to want to act on it. The following participant comments illustrate this:

- *"Some of them are very apathetic. They're just kind of like 'this is what we live, and this is what's going to happen, and there's nothing we can do.'"* – Zoe
- *"I do think there are a lot who are unhappy, but there are a lot who just don't talk about it."* – Katie

To contrast, Lena and Zoe point to a minority group of several very active students: one who campaigned for the more-secular political party, CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)*; some who participate in protests or who want to actively understand and discuss ongoing events they find upsetting. However, Lena points out that these students may not have the means or motivation to follow through on their convictions.

4.3.4 Summary

In answer to my first research question, teachers face a large variety of conflicting views in the classroom, but their willingness to respond is low. The above results indicate that teachers perceive their context as inhibitory, challenging, tense and confusing. Based on this understanding of Turkey, the institution, and the students, teachers feel inhibited from freely involving themselves in student discussions pertaining to ongoing events, and many remain uninvolved. In the discussion chapter, I will further delineate how these environmental constraints impact teachers' likelihood of engaging in border crossing and critical pedagogy (5.2).

4.4 Outsider Identity

Participants frequently made comments reflective of their feelings as outsiders. I was interested to gauge how teachers define themselves in relation to, or perhaps in opposition to, their relatively unfamiliar context. Further, I explored topics that allowed me to determine behavioral tendencies linked to their feelings of being outsiders. In this section, I overview

challenges arising for 'outsiders' in the classroom and work context, and then I illustrate two very different participant responses hinging on these internalized outsider feelings.

4.4.1 Challenges

Differing cultural backgrounds, views or approaches are the root of most challenges faced by international teachers as outsiders. Most participants expressed instances in which differing worldviews affected their feelings, or student feelings, and consequently impacted the class environment. Four quotations are particularly illustrative of this:

- "*I remember one lesson in particular, we were discussing 'Hopes for the Future'. One guy said he wanted to graduate and find an obedient wife… That's strange to me. And I think I showed a bit too much shock on my face. I felt I had clearly cast judgement on him, and I certainly questioned his goal… I found it hard to avoid judging him."* – Lena
- "*This one student – and it kind of stressed me out a little – said that I had a lot of American propaganda in my classes. And I was like, '…What!?'*" – Jane
- *"Students thought it was ok to just stand up and go charge their phone whenever they wanted, regardless of what was happening in the classroom… I would just have to explain, "I don't know what it's like in Turkey, but I see that as rude."* - Ben
- *"I can't connect with them [students] on nationality or cultural levels because those are different."* – Curtis

In the first two quotations, both Lena and Jane experienced cultural misunderstandings that prompted strong, and partly emotional, reactions. For Lena, encountering an opposing world view caused her to react in such a way that her student felt disinclined to participate in following classes. Jane felt similarly stunned by her student feeling that she was touting American propaganda into the class. She reflected that the comment was likely directed at her

lesson on different types of advertising, including a recruitment ad for the American military. She noted that for students, it might have seemed that she was boasting about the power of her home country. Since military service in Turkey is compulsory and widely disliked, students had no equivalent as the basis for comparison. Being unable to fathom 'recruitment' into the military, students interpreted the video as a display of American power. In Ben's quotation above, the cultural misunderstanding is not ideological, but behavioral, and relatively easy to resolve. Curtis' quotation is a bit more general and certainly indicative of his feelings in the classroom. It shows a sense of absolute resolve at the incompatibility of his approach with his students. Curtis stands apart from the other participants in his intensity of this feeling, and that will be further explored below. Regardless, whether minute or significant, these culturally-based issues that surface require patience and maturity to address.

Another daily work place challenge for international teachers is the language barrier. Although all participants are learning Turkish with varying levels of motivation, only Zoe's Turkish is advanced, and even she was hesitant to call herself fluent. David said, "*I can't say I know Turkish culture through and through because it's just my fifth year and I don't know the language fluently*." We can see that he links cultural understanding to language. Katie also pointed out that she cannot understand what the Turkish teachers in her office are saying most of the time. Such frustrations with the language barrier breed misunderstanding and feelings of being 'left out.'

A third challenge is articulated by Jane. She explains that if she ever did feel inclined to engage in dialogue about the Turkish system, any critique of its shortcomings would be poorly received:

Even if they are also against their system, I think they would feel defensive just because I'm a foreigner. "Who is she to talk about our system?" … If there was a professor in the U.S. who was from another country, students in the U.S. would feel defensive because it's their country. It's the same situation. As an outsider, it's like, "You don't know about our system, you don't have the right to talk about it."

Jane's comments here comprise a belief about how human nature impacts interactions that occur 'at the border.' In the discussion chapter, I address how conflicting world views create resistance to outsider critique (5.2.1), outline how this and other factors have ultimately damaged the likelihood of 'border crossings' (5.2.4), and explore ways that the tense and defensive sort of interactions observed in the border space could be rectified (5.3).

4.4.2 Identity Shift

Despite the challenges, several participants expressed feeling a change in perspective during their time in Turkey. David said he would not trade his time working abroad for a comfortable life back in America. He said, "*I am having very different experiences. It's changed my world view – and it's probably changed my identity in some ways. It's affected me*." Katie also claimed that working with people from different cultures, and having new experiences had caused her to develop personally.

Zoe said that her time in Turkey had made her grateful for her own upbringing and background. She said, "*I think as a Canadian, you don't really understand how good you have it in Canada… like, I really feel more privileged to be a Canadian. Just luck of the draw, right? But, I feel, 'wow, I'm so lucky that I had that opportunity, and I could have had <u>this</u> opportunity.*'" Zoe has some Turkish family, and I asked her if she felt any sense of having awakened some Turkish

component of her identity since moving there. She hesitated a bit, and said, "*No… I feel very… my students today told me that I was very 'Turkish' today. But, when I'm here I feel very foreign still*."

These results indicate that participants value *new cultures* and *different experiences* from that with which they are familiar. These values enable participants to benefit from a rich, if sometimes disorienting, cultural exchange. Participants identified changes to their conception of themselves, and could more concretely define themselves through their new experiences. In the discussion section, I explore whether participants' perceived changes in identity are truly indicative of the transformation that occurs in border pedagogy, or whether they are more superficial (5.2.4).

4.4.3 "It's not mine"

It is important to point out that although some participants mentioned identity change, none of the participants expressed any sense of 'becoming more Turkish' or even adopting Turkish customs and ideas. Quite the opposite, each remained firmly certain of their own nationalities and the differences this entailed. By far and away the best example of this sentiment is Curtis, who remained assuredly and rigidly distant from any sense of ownership in Turkish lifestyle and culture. Throughout his interview, he would continually come back to the phrase '*It's not mine.'*

> *My language level is definitely going to improve, the number of people I know will go up – my connection to it will definitely become more… but it's never going to come close to somebody who… even someone living in the US who has a Turkish parent. I may know more about the country than they do, but it's more their country than mine. It's just -*

and I really have a strong sense of this: It is not mine. I am just a guest, right? I'm still in every little way asking if I should take my shoes off before I come in. It's just not mine.

I asked Curtis if he could think of anything that would change his opinion, and he struggled to think of something. I probed, "You're just not interested?" He replied,

"*Yeah – and that's not an insult. It's just that I have my country and other people have theirs. And I'm not the most patriotic American… But at least when something goes wrong there, I'm like 'that is mine and it's because of this'. But, when something goes wrong here, it's not mine. It's comforting. If I see something that really disgusts me, or that I don't particularly care for – not mine. If I see somebody running a red light – not mine. If I see somebody littering – not mine.*"

Curtis said he viewed Turkey's suspension of U.S. visa services on October 8 as "*a firm reminder that it's not my country*." His profound chorus of disconnection from the context is an attitude that pervades his approach to work and life in Turkey. He does not engage in ideological discussions with colleagues or students, and even said he dissociates himself from discussions about Turkey with other foreigners when he goes on holidays. He chooses to take no ownership whatsoever for his current home.

Although his viewpoint is on the extreme side, other participants shared in his sentiment to varying degrees:

- *"I live in Turkey but I'm not Turkish. I don't vote, I don't have a family or personal connections to a family here, I'm not married to Turkish person. It's not my country. I make a choice to live here… if I'm so pissed off about something, I leave. There's no point in me sitting here and complaining, I might as well leave."* – Lena
- "*I've never felt it's my place to get involved… like, I'm not Turkish*." – David

In the discussion chapter, I will aim to evaluate this sort of disassociation further (5.2.2). I will suggest that this detachment is symptomatic of international teachers feeling limited in their role as EFL teachers.

4.5 Teaching Topics – from Tame to Taboo

A portion of the interview was dedicated to discussing topics that teachers felt they could safely use in their class (the tame ones), as well as topics that were to be avoided as much as possible (taboo). In what follows, I will report the results of which topics fall in each category. The data below answers the second part of my first research question, pertaining to how teachers respond in class to varying topics and arising events.

4.5.1 Tame

Topics that teachers deemed tame are those that inspire little controversy, which topically include most topics in the course books. These contain what Curtis called '*trite topics',* like the environment or culture. While most teachers acknowledge that students are terribly bored with these topics, many stick to them in the interests of following the curriculum, ensuring students complete tasks at the correct level, and with exposure to the pre-selected vocabulary.

Since these topics can be quite boring, teachers mentioned their efforts to draw in current events that were relevant to the course book topics to make the content more interesting for learners. Katie exemplified with a lesson from the day of her interview. The course book topic was 'environment,' so she invited a discussion about current events pertaining to the environment. Students were interested to discuss how the government was cutting down trees near the campus to build roadways. The conversation bordered on political,

and as a new teacher, Katie began to feel a bit uncomfortable. However, she felt she could manage the discussion to keep it within her comfort level. To that end, some teachers also livened up course book topics by personalizing them and hearing students' own experiences and perspectives. Zoe said she asked her students about their previous language learning experiences to begin a course book unit on language learning. She reported that in the Turkish education system, students are not typically asked to share personal experiences. She said, "*This is the first time that [a teacher] is saying, "What do you think, and why do you think that?" And I think they're like, '…me?!'"*

Teachers felt comfortable using cultural differences as a theme, and several participants indicated they would use *Turkish Stereotypes* or *Travel in Eastern Turkey* as class topics. Zoe said she often brings in benign topics that still create small controversies, like 'which city in Turkey has the best kebabs?' or 'what is the most important site in Turkey?' These topics keep discussion light and playful while offering students a hiatus from the repetition of the course book. It also allows them to share their culture authentically with an international teacher.

4.5.2 Taboo

Other topics are considered strictly off limits for the international teachers I interviewed. Participants unanimously agreed that religion and politics, including anything Erdoğan-related, were examples of such topics. David pointed out that many writing prompts include wording like, "What should the government do to…" David said, "*I try to stay away from <u>anything</u> related to the government."*

Teachers also noted the risk of addressing topics of moral or ethical nature. I broadly label these as 'borderline' topics. Borderline topics call into question the values systems of

students, which are deeply rooted in family, background and religious principles. Participants recounted times where, quite unexpectedly, one of these topics would surface in class and cause tension or controversy. Three such examples are as follows:

- After stating that he would avoid religion and politics, David said, "*I wouldn't broach other topics in the classroom too, like **homosexuality** or **human sexuality**… **Abortion** has been brought up in my classroom, but again, I feel like, based on what I know about the culture, that's a pretty taboo topic. I think a lot of people here are pro-choice."*
- Zoe recounted a discussion about **wealth inequality in Turkey** getting out of hand. She said, "*In my summer school class, two students got into a shouting match, and I was really uncomfortable, and I was like, 'I don't know how to stop this right now.'"*
- Jane shared the following anecdote: "*One time a student asked me, "Do you eat pork?" And I said, "yeah." And they said, "Is it good?" And I said, "To me, it's good – or else I wouldn't eat it." And this one girl was like "**I don't eat pork**, I don't like it." And I was like "ok then!" – I just didn't want to go there, you know? In another setting, maybe I would have asked more follow-up questions because she was so passionate about it. I find that generally when people are passionate, it can be a good language opportunity. But… it's a sensitive issue because it's a mostly-Muslim country – and I don't want them to think I'm pushing them to eat pork. So, I just left it at that. "OK. Fair enough… Back to the to the grammar!"*

The above results indicate that a smattering of topics can create tension that could escalate, even to shouting in the class room. It is no wonder then that teachers tend to avoid these topics. The following section explores reasons teachers articulated for staying away from taboo topics.

4.5.3 Why Taboo Topics are Avoided

From the data, I identified four basic categories of factors that cause teachers to stray away from the above-mentioned taboo topics. These categories are contextual, strategic, affective and external.

Contextual Factors. Contextual factors are those imposed by the broader context, beyond the institution. Participants stated that tension in the classroom is why topics tend to be avoided. Several participants told stories of instances when heated emotional arguments ensued from addressing political, religious or 'borderline' topics. David said, *"When it comes to these topics, I feel that it's just so polarizing because of the times we are living in. People feel very strongly about their beliefs."* Another contextual factor is the social connections that students, or their families, might have to various political ideologies or parties. Jane stated, "*Some of those politicians' kids go here. Their parents have a lot of power. That's a thing in Turkey, you know, like, it can affect you, ultimately."* David also mentioned this worry about wider contextual repercussions: "*…it could come back to me and there could be some reprisal institutionally or, because of the times, even from the government. It seems unlikely, but you never know who's in your class."* The above findings show how tension and fear of reprisal are a result of the broad contextual factors that pervade the classroom environment of international teachers.

Strategic Factors. Teachers' avoidance of taboo topics is also strategic in the interests of serving their contractual requirements and enabling students to achieve their language goals:

- *"If [a topic] is going to cause problems – problems that devolve into speaking Turkish only – then you've lost the goal, which is learning English."* - Jane

- Curtis said giving taboo topics "too *much attention would kind of deprive the other students of the education that they're paying for."* He conclusively added, "*My opinions aren't what I was brought here to do."*
- "*In the scope of the class, [these topics] would just distract from whatever we're trying to accomplish.* – Ben
- "*I can just think of so many other topics that are non-threatening and non-polarizing that will serve the same purpose."* - David

This data points to the finding that participants wanted to remain professional and focused, completing their jobs as required by the institution. Furthermore, Jane pointed out that the tension created by taboo topics is not conducive to an English language classroom setting. She said, "*You don't need that kind of negativity."* Furthermore, a couple of participants pointed out that student level may not be adequate to discuss advanced moral and ethical topics, to begin with. Evidently, strategic avoidance of these topics weighs heavily in teachers' decisions on which topics are worthy of class time.

Affective factors. A significant reason that teachers resist taboo topics is their own personal feelings about students and the topic. Specifically, uncertainty about topics or student backgrounds is the prime reason for teachers to avoid the unknown. Many teachers expressed sentiments supporting this finding:

- *"My belief is that [a teacher] needs to be, not the only one in the room that knows 100 percent more than [the students], but you should have some knowledge about the topic."* - Katie
- *"Talking about politics with someone who is not from the same country as you – it's just going to be one person lecturing. So, it's not a conversation."* - Curtis

Most participants attributed their avoidance of these topics to their comfort zone. Results indicate that the participants value feeling safe and comfortable with the topics. Of all the

participants, Zoe seemed the most confident in creating space for some political conversation. In our interview, she mentioned that when anti-government opinions arise, such as a complaint about the Turkish system, she addresses it and opens a platform for discussion. However, when a student expresses satisfaction with the current system, she avoids the topic and refocuses the lesson elsewhere. I asked her whether this was a conscious decision and whether her aim was to have students discuss political opinions with which she agreed. She reflected,

> *I think it's a topic that I feel comfortable with. Because if it's something that I maybe don't agree with – or that I might have a very opposing opinion to - I think it could be problematic. And then I think that not everyone is going to think like that particular student... so, I don't know. I've never consciously thought about it in that way…. I'm mainly trying to just protect myself.*

Although she is more open to touchy topics, her comment is still indicative of a tendency for participants to teach within the realm of their comfort.

External Factors. A final and relatively simple reason that teachers avoid taboo topics is an institutional constraint. Several participants were told in their induction not to bring up political topics. One teacher mentioned that she was also cautioned about bringing up these topics through professional development courses offered by the institution.

These four categories of factors (contextual, strategic, affective and external) evidence how teachers' tendencies seem to conflict with the critical pedagogy and border crossing frameworks within which this research is located. This will be followed up on in the discussion chapter, where I will distinguish border crossing in 'closed' countries from the types of border crossing currently studied in the literature (5.3). Considering the uniqueness of this research setting and the dissimilarity to those previously studied, I will describe a localized contextual

form of critical pedagogy that may ameliorate the current and emerging oppressive obligation for EFL teachers to avoid controversial topics at all costs (5.4).

4.5.4 Strategies when Topics Inevitably Surface

Until now, I have used 'taboo topics' and 'avoided topics' nearly synonymously. However, findings show that it is not always possible for taboo topics to be avoided. Some surface regardless, no matter how carefully a teacher plans a lesson or tries to keep focus. Lena noted, "*Lots of things surface in the classroom. Especially last year - The coup and the bombings… declining tourism in the news… the laptop ban… things have been in the news a lot, and students are interested in how it's being shown."* Zoe made a similar comment: "*I think some events happen that they want to talk about. You remember when, like, every month there was a different bombing? So, I think they were really scared by that and disturbed by that, and I think they wanted to talk about that."* In these cases, teachers deployed of certain strategies, and they differed from participant to participant. I have categorized these into three groups: Avoiding, coping and allowing.

Avoiding. Avoiding strategies include simply moving on from a topic, or saying, 'I don't know' to stifle it. Some teachers allow brief discussion prior to moving on.

- *"I simply say, 'I don't know enough to comment.' And then sometimes I just move on to the next point. You can't make a big fuss about it."* - Lena
- *"It wasn't the purpose of the lesson, so I just stopped it."* - David
- *"I tell them, 'This conversation is out of topic. Can we stop talking about it and focus on the lesson.'"* - Ben
- "*I think it's good to let them talk about it, and then move on to the lesson*." - Zoe
- *"I've had students send me text messages criticizing the government, and I just do <u>not</u> respond to that at all."* – Curtis

As can be seen from the data above, most teachers have used this strategy as a way of quickly moving past a taboo topic.

Coping. Coping strategies are a bit more interesting in that they harbor a greater variety of ways that teachers handle controversial topics while addressing them to some extent, rather than completely deflecting them.

The first way that teachers cope is by ***changing the lens***. Jane prepared a lesson on 'torture,' and she says, "*I do it from a US perspective. I talk about how, for example, the US is always talking about defending democracy and defending human rights, but then they're torturing people. So, is that hypocritical? I ask those kinds of questions, and I think that's ok, as long as I stick to the US. If I had the same topic about Turkey, I think it would be a big problem."* David also carefully formulates questions for his students to encourage a more distant perspective, not an exclusively Turkish one. He gave the example that rather than asking, 'What should Turkey do about the Syrian refugee crisis?', he can more safely frame this question as, 'What can be done about the worldwide refugee crisis?' This reduces the risk of students taking the topic personally. Ben also mentioned using 'fabricated political contexts' for students to discuss ideology safely, steering them away from Turkey-specific content, but allowing them to think politically. Ben used another coping strategy to challenge students on their way of thinking: "*I frame it in the context of research and it seems like I'm drawing information from a neutral party and just directing their research focus. So, that's not me saying that their ideas are bad, that's me informing them that they should look up some information so that they shouldn't seem ignorant."* Changing the lens to that of a neutral third party – be it another country's

perspective, a fabricated perspective, or a neutral perspective - is one way that teachers can re-frame a topic so that it can be safely discussed.

Building new habits is a second coping strategy. Katie astutely pointed out, "*They're not taught how to talk about those things. You can't just bring controversial topics in one day, you have to teach them how… you can't just drop these topics into a conversation with twenty-two 18-year-old kids who are still building their ideas."* Jane, Ben, and Curtis also mentioned that part of their role as a language teacher is to inform students about how to discuss delicate topics sensitively, respecting each other's opinions and listening carefully.

A final coping strategy is ***playing devil's advocate***. Zoe noted that, especially with higher level classes, it could be beneficial to draw out a range of opinions. At the same time, she models for learners how to express and consider multiple perspectives.

Allowing. A third and less used strategy is to embrace the topic and allow students to discuss. Regarding political discussions, Ben stated:

> *I don't feel comfortable giving my <u>own</u> political opinion on things in Turkey, but I would never censor a student. I would cut it short, if need be, to get back to the topic at hand, but I would never say, 'Don't say that.' It's their choice, and it's their country. I'm not going to tell them what they can and cannot say about their own country.*

And regarding the ongoing events in the community that affect students personally, Zoe said:

> *I think it's natural to want to talk about it. And they're talking about it anyways, so why don't we practice in English while we're talking about it. I know that it's going to be a distraction for them if it doesn't sort of 'get out.'*

These results show that these two participants have a philosophy of teaching that values hearing student voices and addressing student's affective needs. It has been seen that it is not a popular philosophy to have in Turkey, but one that has, no less, worked for these two teachers.

In the discussion chapter, I suggest that the above are types of 'neutralizing' strategies, which are used by teachers in this study to create a safe classroom space to discuss varying topics (5.4.1), and I address what conditions need to exist for teachers to feel comfortable leaning towards coping and allowing strategies rather than avoiding ones (5.4.2).

4.6 Not Quite Critical Pedagogues

The results reported so far have outlined the answer to my second research question regarding the extent to which teachers consider themselves critical pedagogues. In the end, data from the interviews points to teachers distancing themselves this label, but embracing what several of them called 'critical education.' The final section of this chapter is dedicated to describing how teachers view their role and the way they view 'politics' fitting into education.

4.6.1 Teacher Agency and Self-Efficacy

Teachers did not feel that they had autonomy bound within the constraints of the institution. They felt that since levels were laid out into quick 8-week courses, their time available to build rapport with students was limited, and their time to cover the required curricular content was limited. They felt eight weeks was not enough time to build a relationship with students to the point that they could understand student background and opinions. Besides, even if they could be more certain of the classroom as a safe space, if they wanted to produce original materials that were relevant and pertaining to the students' interests, they would not have enough time to create quality plans and materials. Katie speculated that it would be much more fun to approach course design in this way, but she added that the institution would likely not be supportive. This is reflective of teachers' perspectives on the institution, mentioned above (4.3.2). In summary, teachers don't feel they

are in any position to even begin to address issues beyond the curriculum, even if they desire to. This must be taken into consideration in understanding why teachers do not see themselves as critical pedagogues.

As mentioned above, the teachers in this study also lack confidence in their ability to contribute to unfamiliar topics and dialogues. A few teachers evidently felt they needed to be the 'authority' figure on classroom subjects, being able to guide the discussion from a perspective of 'knowing the correct answer.' If teachers feel a topic is outside of their realm of knowledge, they tend to dismiss it. From the certain comments in the interview, it appears that teachers stick to topics that keep them 'safe' and 'comfortable.' This is understandable considering the unique context and constraints but requires further interpretation in light of the critical pedagogy, and more specifically border pedagogy, the framework within which I aim to work.

4.6.2 Educator versus English Teacher

A question I asked each participant was, "*Do you see yourself as an 'educator,' as a 'language teacher,' or both?"* Teachers were nearly unanimous in saying that they viewed themselves solely as language teachers, and decidedly *not* educators. This was further compounded by their use of past modal verbs when they talked about education. They described an educational setting as a hypothetical one that did not exist in their current classroom. Examples follow:

- "*I think university is the place to have those deeper conversations. I think it **would** be more interesting – it **would** make it very lively*." - Katie
- In university, "*you **should** be able to talk, you **should** be able to debate*." - Jane

- "*Education **should** be a safe environment, where people **could** give their opinion without any worry of anything happening to them because of that opinion*." – Zoe

In these excerpts, participants talked about education as some unmet ideal - a far off notion of a sort of education that did not happen in their own classrooms. It comes back to agency. Ben described how his views of what education should differ from what it actually ends up being in the research context. He said, "*I feel like if I **could**, I would change education in a profound way."* However, as mentioned above, teachers did not feel it fell within their role to work towards this type of educational setting. They saw it as their role to teach English in as unbiased a way as possible so as not to incite tension in the classroom.

4.6.3 Education as Critical, Not Political

Ultimately, when asked if they would consider trying to encourage students towards political activism, towards democracy, towards changing the status quo, teachers were largely inflexible in their views that their role was to teach English. Overall, teachers were reluctant or unwilling to share their own opinions or to engage students in discussing and exchanging their opinions. All but one teacher maintained that it was not within their job description or duty to inspire any kind of dialogue or action beyond the language curriculum at hand.

For Ben, this decision was rooted in a teaching belief that the teacher holds power in the classroom. He said,

> *It is not your job as a teacher to tell a student what to care about. Some people take it too far and think that it's their job to lead these people in every aspect of their lives. You have power over the class. Even unconsciously, if you espouse a certain view, you can influence students. And you can believe it, sure - everyone has a belief - but you don't have license to just affect 18-20 lives based on your own personal bias. Whether your bias is correct or not, it doesn't matter – that's an abuse of power, in my opinion.*

It is interesting that of all participants, only Ben voiced an awareness of how his position of power could affect students. In so doing, he articulated an understanding of a formative responsibility a teacher plays, which is understanding their own position, background, and biases. This understanding must precede guiding learners to vocalize and take ownership of their own opinions.

Two other participants stated that education should be 'critical,' but their use of the word critical was vague, and I got the sense that teachers were saying this to parrot what is commonly said in educational contexts to give a sense of importance to the field. Lena stated, *"There should be critical education… it should be balanced, and students should be given information in an unbiased context."* Similarly, David said we should "*encourage critical thinking and diverse ways of thinking,"* later adding, "*Both sides should be presented, and students should become critical thinkers that make decisions for themselves."* To these teachers, criticality meant impartiality, which is a long way from the transformative nature that defines critical theory.

The one teacher whose willingness to share some of her personal opinions, talk to students about politics during break times and selectively provide a platform for students to share their opinions in class was Zoe. Hers was the last interview, and at the end of the conversation we had, I told her that I appreciated her perspective since her threshold for tolerance of political discussion in class seemed much higher than other participants had indicated. She queried, "*Oh really? What have you found*?" And told her that quite a few participants felt it is not their place to express opinions and discuss taboo topics in the ESL

classroom, and that a few had said 'educational settings' are better places for that. She replied, *"Why not though? What's the difference between an ESL setting and an education one?"*

4.7 Summary

Zoe's concluding question delighted me, and it is something I further explore it in the discussion chapter that follows. I analyze why she, and not others, felt more comfortable engaging in complex discourses with students (5.4.3). This will involve layering in contextual factors, as well as agency, self-efficacy, and confidence in teaching topics. I also explore how the terminology used fast and loose, like 'critical education,' has pervaded the vocabulary and teaching philosophies of international teachers, which is harmful to the education of students passing through the research setting as it clouds the true meaning of a genuinely critical educational setting.

In the discussion section, I suggest that the space for border closing in Turkey is limited, but that teachers like Zoe show that there is room for a localized critical pedagogy in Turkish EFL classrooms that accounts for the complexity of the environment. I will propose that through localized critical pedagogy, the border space could be re-opened.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

This final chapter examines the findings considering the conceptual frameworks and theories in which this study is rooted. I will suggest that contextual constraints have distanced EFL teaching in Turkey from the critical pedagogy necessary to combat neoliberal influences in educational settings. I am assuming that without the contextual constraints, teachers would generally be likely to participate in critical pedagogical approaches, given that most teachers highlighted their desire for 'critical' education, and all participants articulated a high degree of care for their students. I will suggest that space for border crossing is repressed in the research setting to the point of near non-existence, but I will point to a more tangible form of localized critical pedagogy to recover space for border crossing and to revive and reimagine roles of EFL teachers in this context.

5.1 Neoliberalism

5.1.1 Silencing Ideological Debate

Results indicated that teachers increasingly feel the ideological debate is being silenced within the capitalist neoliberal paradigm. Teachers perceptions of the institution and their students' goals indicate moving in a direction that manifests and reproduces power imbalance (Riasti & Mollaei, 2012). McLaren's (2004) analysis of the current state of affairs in the USA is sobering and reflective of the apparent mindset of international teachers in Turkey. He states:

> The educational left is finding itself without a revolutionary agenda for challenging in the classrooms of the nation the effects and consequences of the new capitalism. As a result, we are witnessing the progressive and unchecked merging of pedagogy to the

> productive processes within advanced capitalism. Education has been reduced to a sub-sector of the economy... Capitalism has been naturalized as commonsense reality. (p. 5)

This research setting exemplifies the educational agenda of neoliberalism in its commodification of education, and its focus on developing passive citizens fit to be workers and consumers (Singh, 2016). The 'passive citizen' is evidenced in the aforementioned recent self-censorship and chilling effect throughout Turkey (Freedom House, 2017). Students monitor themselves and filter ideological comments, stopping themselves even when they have the urge. This evidences how the power systems at play in Turkey have sought "to repress critical thought and to develop docile and conformist citizens" (Singh, 2016, p. 264). What results is "surface democracy," where the majority of citizens comprise what Chomsky called a "bewildered herd" with a select few in decision-making positions. Indeed, many students in the institution were confused, disoriented and passively accepting of ongoing events.

Within this society of the 'bewildered herd,' education constitutes a space where debating societal issues from diverse perspectives is contained. Pedagogical approaches emphasise "rote learning, memorization and standardized testing oriented towards imparting skills considered necessary for the smooth functioning of a market-based economy" (Singh, 2016, p. 263). To that end, many teachers commented on the pressure they feel to adhere to a curriculum, have their students learn what is required to pass a test, and move on to the next level.

In addition to changing the purpose and expected outcomes of education, neoliberalism has shifted the role of both learner and teacher. Singh (2016) notes that students are no longer actively involved in knowledge construction, but rather have internalized the need to reach a

series of performance targets. In this study, this is evidenced by teachers' comments about student behavioral issues resulting from them having to be present 25 hours per week, working diligently towards exam after exam. Teachers for their part, feel they have no way to break this system, seeing themselves as service providers, with their principle priority being helping students achieve their predetermined learning outcomes (McLaren, 2004; Singh, 2016), and when possible, avoiding any and all controversial topics that may obstruct learning goals.

5.1.2 Teachers Self-Serving Interest

Of course, radical educators can work to break neoliberal influences in their own classrooms, but in this study, it appeared the desire to do so did not exist. Rather, teachers served desires more convenient to them. Within the neoliberal global paradigm, capitalism endorses and hinges on individual self-aggrandizement. This is evidenced in social media platforms, where, individuals highlight their accomplishments, from daily exercise to job promotions, and boast a full lifestyle of fine dining and holidays. People wish to portray themselves as successful and happy by their own accord. In turn, the capitalist cycle repeats itself: The reward for working hard is the outward appearance of success and happiness, and appearing this way requires hard work within the capitalist system. In other words, the individual serves the system, which serves the individual – a paradigm as familiar as it is harmful.

A trend emerging from the results of this study indicates that participants' reasons for working in Turkey align with this global trajectory of self-promotion: Teachers overwhelmingly expressed selfish reasons for taking up a post in Turkey, whether personal or professional. While it would be unfair to overgeneralize in saying teachers do not care about Turkey's

political and economic situation and the social atmosphere in the country, it should be noted that only one participant was premeditatedly searching for work specifically in Turkey due to an interest in the country. The remaining six participants had applied to several international job postings and did marginal research prior to arriving. Most ultimately chose Turkey for its superior job package or cultural offerings.

This type of EFL teaching has become known as *TEFLing* online (Baliwala, 2016; 'TEFL-ing in Buenos Aires,' 2011). *TEFLing* is defined by David Catterick, professor of TESOL at Briercrest College in Saskatchewan, as "a motivation for English language teaching that focuses more on the perceived benefits to the social life or sense of adventure… than on meeting the academic needs of the English language learner" (personal communication, January 29, 2018). While Catterick's definition underlines teacher training and the needs of the language learner, I would add that *TEFLing* also includes little prior consideration or understanding of the culture or people in the teaching location. Participants in this study admitted knowing very little about Turkey prior to arriving, apart from basic facts and tourist destinations. Having little understanding of the context into which international teachers are catapulting, *TEFLing* in Turkey becomes primarily about the teacher experience, not the student.

These contextual factors – neoliberalism in education and serving self-interests through *TEFLing* – shed light on why teachers are hesitant to engage in political dialogues, let alone action. Regardless of whether participants intended to engage or not, from the time they set foot in the country, each was submerged in the shifting and complex cultural and political landscape of Turkey. Their presence necessitated learning about the dynamic background to operate within their new surroundings. Each participant gained greater understanding, and

each had the potential opportunity to create a small space for border crossing in their classrooms. Yet, as the results indicated, many did not take this opportunity. The following section explores why border crossing in Turkey is becoming increasingly challenging given the broader context described.

5.2 Border Crossing S.O.S.

5.2.1 Resistance from Within: Resisting Outsider Critique

When conflicting worldviews arise in class that are not carefully addressed and acknowledged, the result is an atmosphere rife with tension and misunderstanding. In the research setting, insiders - the Turkish learners in the EFL classroom – were immediately defensive, feeling under attack or as though their system was being critiqued. Regardless of their own views, and even if these views aligned with the outsider opinion, there was a tendency for teachers to feel their opinions were unwelcome and quickly disregarded. Worse yet, their opinions could cause some personal backlash. Teachers sensed this resistance, felt the space was unsafe, and thus were highly hesitant to make any subjective comments pertaining to matters unrelated to the class, and thus went on with teaching English objectively. Even in cases when teachers were asked their opinion as outsiders, they detected risk involved in sharing their opinions, and most chose to evade such conversations.

Participants felt unable to create a classroom atmosphere where engaging in dialogue on certain topics was deemed safe. For such controversial topics, teachers felt their opinions were irrelevant. This causes teachers to reconsider what opinions they share, with whom, and how they are shared. The resistance from inside significantly decreases the likelihood of teachers attempting to cross borders - that is, to invite students to view situations from

different perspectives and to do so themselves - since the predominant feeling is that they have no right to talk about a system that is not theirs.

5.2.2 Resistance from the Outside: Resisting what is within

In response to the resistance felt by the students, teachers also tended to put their guard up and take no ownership of the situation. Simply saying, '*it's not mine,'* as Curtis did, constitutes an easy way to deny accountability for challenging ideas and questions that cannot be easily answered or that are uncomfortable to address. It can further be understood through a contextual understanding of teachers *TEFLing*. Responding to issues of axiological and ethical nature was likely not something they anticipated when they moved to Turkey to experience a new culture and visit historical sites during in their time off work. Thus, the resistance goes both ways: Teachers are closed to what is not theirs.

I want to emphasize that I am not suggesting that those teachers refuse to learn about their context, or completely refuse to care. Most do gradually piece together a better understanding, but even they *do* decide to involve themselves, the resistance from within obstructs these attempts.

5.2.3 Institutional Resistance

Results of the study indicated that participants felt the institution was actively advocating against the discussion of topics that would in any way distract from language goals or cause controversy. Work by Sahragard, Ramzoo, and Baharloo (2014) on critical pedagogy in EFL concluded that while teachers may have a sense that critical pedagogy has its benefits, too many barriers limit their ability to explore their options for this approach in any depth. They observed that "the top down educational system, teaching burn out, limited class time and

teacher's insufficient information about the learners' background and learning style" (p. 189) were the main institutional barriers. These findings are resoundingly echoed in my study, where teachers mentioned similar inhibitors. Thus, the practicality of the pedagogical approach will determine the extent to which teachers are likely to use it. Having no resources or training means teachers shy away from critical pedagogy.

5.2.4 The Border is Closed

At this point, I return to Giroux's concept of border crossing. Giroux viewed border crossing *conceptually* as a pedagogical practice where social, cultural and linguistic shifts occur on the part of both teacher and student so that each party can view the world through a new lens - from the perspective of the Other. Giroux evidently did not intend that his concept of border crossing be taken *literally*, as crossing a physical border dividing two people by nationality, ethnicity or any other factor. However, the image of a border is helpful in visualizing how a 'border crossing' would look allegorically.

An 'open border' symbolically divides two nations or groups with an imaginary line. Crossing from one side to the other requires a structurally pre-determined amount of work: perhaps lining up the correct paperwork and paying a fee, or maybe just packing whatever is needed for the journey. Such may be the case with Giroux's border crossing in the US context. When a teacher arrives in the classroom (the border space), he/she must actively engage in the work of shifting lenses. This can be challenging at times - it requires a marginal, or perhaps significant, amount of work (taking time to intentionally value student voices, creating a particular classroom atmosphere), but it could be considered routine, once the pattern is

established. This is because the environment makes crossing possible, as long as the motivation to do so is present.

In Turkey's context, on the other hand, it would be more realistic to visualize this process taking place at a 'closed border'. The people on either side of the border may have no qualms or major differences, but beyond their decision-making powers, their governments have decided to close borders. Between the two peoples is a fence with barbed wire, some guards, and perhaps even a camera to survey border-type activities. If the classroom in Turkey is to be taken as a 'border space,' it is a closed border space. The 'government' imposing the closure may be 'neoliberalism,' the guards and surveillance can be represented by the institutional constraints, and the barbed wire fence itself acts as a deterrent to both people groups who try to pass, symbolizing the resistance from the inside and the outside.

From a critical perspective, *any* border crossing requires that two borders be crossed in the classroom: the personal border and the border of the 'other'. Both borders are heavily guarded if not completely closed. However, I made the distinction above between an open and closed border to illustrate how many more challenges impede a crossing in a closed-border context like Turkey's. What my study indicates is that teachers in this context feel unable to create a border space, let alone begin the process of crossing – and I liken it to a closed border to illustrate the perceived impossibility of the endeavor from the perspective of the teachers in this study. While I believe that it may be possible over time to cross a closed border, it is not the tidy and ritualized process that constitutes crossing an open border. Crossing a closed border requires strategy, will power, and hard work to overcome obstacles actively in place to *prevent* crossings. Comparatively, in an open-border classroom context, the main obstacle is

crossing one's own border and that of the other, while outside forces working against this action are minimal. In a closed-border space, it becomes considerably more difficult to cross. Potential crossers may easily be dissuaded, especially if they lack the motivation to cross in the first place. Those who lack a genuine interest in what is on the other side of the fence - as is the case with the *TEFLing* participants - are unlikely to make a break for it. And so, the allegory of a closed border accurately conveys the highly rigid system of tension and resistance that underlies EFL classrooms in Turkey, preventing most attempts of border crossing, and thus, limiting space for critical pedagogy.

Participants did mention having felt a change in their identity. This kind of comment hinting at transformation was the type of comment that interested me in terms of detecting evidence of border crossing. However, in discerning whether teachers felt they had really viewed the world through a different lens, I concluded that only one participant had experienced a genuine change in perspective (Zoe). The rest talked about a personal identity shift or personal growth. While this may be a positive change for the teachers themselves, is not representative of Giroux's border pedagogy. To evidence this further, the outsider challenges mentioned by participants were related to behavioral issues, rather than a deeper struggle to understand one another across cultural barriers.

5.3 Reclaiming Critical Pedagogy at Closed Borders

As I suggested earlier, this study views border crossings within a border space as prerequisite to critical pedagogy to take place. If border crossings are becoming increasingly restricted, so too is critical pedagogy. The results supported this line of reasoning, with no teachers identifying themselves as critical pedagogues, and only one (Zoe) having given any

indication of a critical pedagogy approach to teaching. This was a surprising finding, considering my interest in the study began with a suspicion that this teaching context *would* bear witness to a greater amount of critical pedagogy due to the general sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo. Thus, I am compelled to revisit critical pedagogy, and suggest ways that it could be reclaimed as a teaching approach in this type of context.

Critical pedagogy involves reflection on individual experience, development of a voice that views society critically, and transforming society to a more democratic and equal place (Riasti & Mollaei, 2012, p. 224). The ultimate goal is the transformation of society through action. Unfortunately, this goal is lofty in Turkey's context and critical pedagogy goes largely unutilized because of contextual constraints. To that end, critical feminist Jennifer Gore (1992) critiques the original parameters of critical pedagogy, saying it is predominantly theoretical, reflecting a dearth of actual tangible practices. She says critical pedagogy fails to "acknowledge the realities of educational contexts" and rather "dwells in the rarified terrain of the theoretical" (p. 226). Her censure extended to include the observation that critical pedagogy is US-centric. Critical pedagogy in diverse international contexts needs to consider the "particular, practical, political concerns" and to do so, "we need to engage with regional, local and community-specific uptakes and contestations, transformation and transliterations of the educational discourse and practices that now traverse borders" (Kim & Pollard, 2017, p. 11). McLaren (2004) echoes this: "critical pedagogy has become so completely psychologized, so liberally humanized, so technologized, and so conceptually postmodernized, that its current relationship to broader liberation struggles seems severely attenuated" (p. 8).

In this quotation, McLaren may be correct in suggesting that critical pedagogy has become popularized and over-used in many liberal educational contexts. However, this does not necessitate that critical pedagogy be abandoned altogether. Rather, what is required is careful reconsideration of critical pedagogy considering Gore and McLaren's critiques of its shortcomings. Specifically, in closed-border spaces, homogenizing categories of analysis cannot be effectively used as basis for fueling critical pedagogical approaches. Ellsworth (1989) observes a major disconnect between practice and theory: those who call themselves critical pedagogues advocate for empowerment, student voice and 'critical' education, and are quick to define these terms, but no concrete evidence is presented of their plausibility in the classroom.

The above shows how voices in the critical pedagogy discussion over the last decade have been advocating for a new sort of critical pedagogy. Especially in EFL contexts, Shin & Crooke (2004) call for research to explore and define local and contextualized forms of critical pedagogy in unique contexts. Kim & Pollard's (2017) study analyzed EFL teachers' views on critical pedagogy and found that since it is so widely accepted as a successful approach to teaching, research needs to concentrate on why resistance arises when it comes to actually implementing the approach. Further, Kim and Pollard say that this resistance needs to be addressed on the basis of localized settings (p. 2). Given that the findings of this study indicate that critical pedagogy is not realized in the Turkish context, the remainder of this chapter turns to exploring a localized version of critical pedagogy for Turkish classrooms.

To do so, I will suggest that classrooms that characterize closed-border spaces need to become sites of a *counter-culture*. I am using Bayer's (1993) term as described in Duenas

Macias (2003): “where oppositional values, attitudes, and behaviors are promoted” (p.88). In such a space of counter culture, individualism is downplayed, participatory structures are valued, and a counter hegemony is developed that challenges existing dominant ideologies (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Few have gone to expand the definition of counter-culture beyond this. I want to propose a more thorough explanation that may provide a helpful basis for viewing EFL classrooms in Turkey. First, *counter* as a prefix adds the meaning of *against* or the *opposite.* Thus, in overly reductionist terms, if there are two ‘cultures’ present in the classroom, that of the international teacher and that of the students, then a *counter*-culture in this context would be one positioned as opposite, or against, *both* cultures. (The reason I add that this is reductionist is that there may be great variance in ‘culture’ present in the classroom. The term itself here is used vaguely to refer to the worldviews, backgrounds, and biases that a person embodies). In other words, developing a counter-culture in a classroom would deliberately suppress each culture within the classroom, and promote a safe space for a balanced multiplicity of viewpoints. Ellsworth describes the sort of classroom I am envisioning as

> the site of dispersed, shifting, and contradictory contexts of knowing that coalesced differently in different moments of student/professor speech, action, and emotion. This situation meant that individuals… constantly had to change strategies and priorities of resistance against oppressive ways of knowing and being known. (p. 322)

In such a classroom, neither culture has the opportunity to be the dominant one, and a space is created for safely sharing ideas distanced from one’s self.

In attempting to localize critical pedagogy, counter-culture in this capacity is problematic. After all, removing the voice of the student is antithesis to the heart of critical and border pedagogy, in which this study remains rooted. It is important, therefore, to clarify that the creation of a counter-culture must not happen at the expense of the student's voice. I am in no way suggesting that the worldviews embodied by either teacher or students are not valid. Saying this would mean moving away from critical pedagogy all together. However, considering the fragile environment of resistance and tension, having ideologically-based discussions requires that the classroom be perceived as a safe ground. In such a space, ideology could be discussed objectively 'outside of the self.' Ideas arising in this space can be representative of the actual opinions of the voices of those expressing them, but they can be masked by a façade of neutrality. As observed in this study, without this façade, the student's voice disappears altogether. Currently, students do not feel comfortable sharing their own ideas, and teachers would not feel comfortable if they did. The creation of a safe counter-culture aims to resolve this, allowing students to express ideas outwardly as valid contributions to a discussion, and to process and internalize concepts safely, without fear of being attacked or marginalized.

The goal of the language classroom would thus be to provide students with a multiplicity of ways of thinking about topics that arise through lesson plans or what students bring into the class. The teacher would aim to get students outside of themselves to analyze a problem or concept. This may offer a means of bridging the roles of 'language teacher' and 'educator,' which most participants considered distinct from one another. Encouraging students to engage in this type of thinking from diverse 'other' perspectives would extend to manifest in student's personal analysis of their own ideas as well, and would enable them to

analyze their own experiences (both past and present) in light of the counter-culture discussions that take place in the classroom space. Developing a counter-culture means no perspective is judged as more or less valuable, making the classroom space 'safe' to explore deeper topics that would otherwise be entirely avoided, as seen in this study.

Development of this concept emerged from the results of the study, based on tactics teachers were already using. Returning to these tactics in the results will help to illustrate how counter-culture could work as a localized form of critical pedagogy.

5.4 Counter-Culture as Localized Critical Pedagogy

5.4.1 Neutralizing

The results of the study indicated that when taboo topics arose, participants in this study were inclined to avoid them altogether. However, at times some coping or allowing strategies were used to handle the classroom conversation. The coping strategy included three tactics: changing the lens, building new habits and playing devil's advocate. These tactics are what I would call teachers attempts at 'neutralizing' the classroom, and they lay the foundation for the development of counter-culture in the classroom. These are cases where teachers have found safe ways to have conversations about borderline topics, rather than sidestep them entirely. These neutralizing tactics show teachers creating counter-culture space, which is, for this research setting, a form of localized critical pedagogy. Without these strategies, no conversation would occur in classrooms apart from the mundane topics found in the curriculum and in the course books.

5.4.2 Recommendations to Create Conditions for Neutralizing

From here, I analyzed results carefully to deduce which conditions would incline teachers to opt towards neutralizing strategies. It can safely be concluded that experience is a factor here. The two participants with the least experience in Turkey were the least willing to address topics not appearing in the curriculum. This is likely linked to the degree of understanding of learner background. More experienced teachers can better predict how conversations will evolve in the classroom, and through trial and error, have discovered when to push and when to pull back.

Other studies in EFL critical pedagogy have outlined conditions that also surfaced in my analysis: developing a teaching community, re-visiting terminology used in the teaching community, re-examining roles through self-reflection, and recognizing the validity of varying voices and experiences to encourage participation and ultimately celebrate difference in the classroom. These must be worked towards as the basis of a classroom counter-culture.

Teaching Community. Support structures for teachers are a critical aspect of critical pedagogy. In this study, teachers felt largely unsupported by the institution. A resounding conclusion from this study is that participants do not recognize the value of their work regarding critical education. Teachers felt that their role was merely to teach language and avoid all else. However, given the inevitability of non-language related topics surfacing, for better or worse, teachers found ways of handling such topics. Even without consciously realizing it, I believe teachers *are* impacting students' ways of thinking beyond the language curriculum. However, without a community of teachers to validate this crucial element of their jobs, teachers felt critical pedagogy was not in their job description.

Ooiwa-Yoshizawa (2012) notes that critical pedagogy in EFL remains a little acknowledged concept to date. However, she adds:

> When the theory of EFL critical pedagogy becomes more widely known by like-minded teachers, this powerful theory could unite those educators as critical pedagogues. When more educators report and share their classroom ideas, materials, and syllabi as examples of practical EFL critical pedagogy, the power of a supportive community can, as a result, empower the teachers as well. (p.27)

This resonates for the participants in this study. Community would create greater awareness of the value of teachers' ongoing work. In this research setting, the community could turn *TEFLing* into critical pedagogy, which over time, would improve the teaching setting overall. Thus, I would recommend a teacher's community of practice in which teachers could give mutual feedback to one another on these issues. Singh (2016) astutely notes, "the only way out is to build collective resistance to the neoliberal restructuring of education" (p. 272). A teaching community might be one way to elevate critical teaching, to raise awareness of creating a safe space and developing counter-culture so that the institution itself could eventually revisit its goals in educating students.

Reconsidering Terminology and Roles. It is interesting to note that participants freely and proudly boast the vague use of 'critical' education in their classes, yet they distance this from critical pedagogy. Teachers in this study seemed to use 'critical thinking' to mean 'thinking deeply' or impartially, yet paradoxically, I got the impression that teachers themselves did not really know what they actually meant by this. Criticality has become a buzz word in education due to its perceived benefits. Amidst teaching communities, there is a growing need for

clarification of terminology used regarding teaching approaches (Ellsworth, 1989). EFL teachers should carefully reconsider the meaning of critical thinking in education and understand that critical theory necessitates change at the heart of the approach. If EFL teachers could admit criticality in its true form is part of their teaching role, this would eliminate some vagueness and may bolster a sense of intentionality in the profession.

Along with this, teachers must reflect on their teaching and on the environmental constraints and the factors that cause resistance to border crossings, as outlined above. Perhaps participants shy away from critical pedagogy from the beginning, inherently accepting that the obstacles standing in the way of critical pedagogy are paralyzing. In this case, recognizing the need for an amended localized critical pedagogy might come as a relief. Accepting that critical pedagogy in this context does not involve preaching change and revolution from a pulpit may comfort and validate teachers. Daunting as critical pedagogy may seem at first, a re-imagined local critical pedagogy that focuses on neutralizing and creating counter-culture would come as a more realistic and welcome approach.

Openness to Experience and Student Voices. Even within a counter-culture classroom space, valuing student voices is central to any local critical pedagogy. As results of this study demonstrate, demanding that students share their experience and opinions individually is not popular given the constraints of the setting. However, through dialogue, teachers and students can work towards sharing ideas. Duenas Macias (2013) says dialogues are a form of communication that "creates and recreates multiple understandings. It moves its participants along the learning curve to that uncomfortable place of relearning and unlearning" (p. 86). Particularly through use of neutralizing strategies in dialogue, knowledge, and relations can be

addressed and changed. Dialogue is a staple of critical pedagogy, and is considered by hooks (1994) as "one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences" (p. 130).

Teachers play a key role in instigating, facilitating and guiding neutralizing dialogue with transformative potential. The teacher must pose problems and focus the field of discussion on issues that can be addressed from a multiplicity of perspectives. The teacher must value all contributions in the dialogical process (Duenas Macias, 2013, p.89). The teacher can create such an atmosphere by modelling the expression of diverse perspectives from third party research, by playing devil's advocate, or perhaps deliberately asking students to debate on the side of an argument they do not agree with. In this way, students will begin to learn how to safely to share experiences and opinions, knowing that each will be accepted as a valid contribution to solving a problem or viewing an issue. In Shin and Crookes' (2009) study in Korea, they found that dialogue also balanced student and teacher voices. They state, "There was no perceived gap between the teacher and the students, and the students perceived it as more meaningful" (p. 120).

5.4.3 Summary – Some Room for Positivity

The 'closed border' in this research setting has left limited space for critical pedagogy in its original form. Thus, the need emerges for the creation of a revised critical pedagogy that is localized. This localized critical pedagogy must be sensitive to the unique cultural, political, institutional and environmental constraints that lead to both teacher and student resistance to one another. The recommended localized critical pedagogy I have detailed above depends on

the teacher's creation of a space for counter-culture, where neutralizing strategies are deployed to create a safe space for ideological discussions. It is through this process that the space for border crossing, on individual classroom basis, may gradually be re-opened.

I wish to conclude this section by reconciling Giroux's border crossing pedagogy with the current study. Although teachers in Turkey tend not to be border crossers, the concept is still fundamental to critical pedagogy, even in Turkey's EFL classrooms. Giroux (1992) emphasizes…

> …the need to create opportunities for teachers and students to be border crossers in order to understand otherness on its own terms, and the need to create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within the existing configurations of power. (p. 245)

This quotation offers hope to settings like the one in this study because it suggests that despite the closed border, motivated individuals could still cross. Creating a counter-culture lends itself to 'fashioning of new identities,' and the process of engaging in dialogue through neutralizing voices can lead to understanding 'otherness on its own terms.' It is certainly a multi-step process, but a localized critical pedagogy, as suggested above, elevates a *politics of difference* that Giroux (1992) deeply values, and which is fundamental for students and teachers to cross over into diverse cultural zones.

Proof of the possibility for this to occur in Turkey can be seen in Zoe's approach to teaching. Of all the participants, Zoe's comments bore the strongest evidence of border crossing and critical pedagogy. She recounted how her understanding of Turkey had changed since arriving and reflected openly on her feelings as a Canadian in Turkey. She regarded her role as that of an English teacher but questioned whether an EFL setting differed from an

educational one. She admitted to engaging students in political discussions during the breaks and sharing her own opinion. Shin & Crookes (2009) state, “The language class is a place where people learn new ways of communication and understanding of the world through a particular lens” (p.115). Perhaps through dialogue, and through her own intentional interest, Zoe had undergone some transformation in understanding her students’ cultural opinions. This constitutes a positive ray of hope to contrast the somewhat bleak findings of this study. She evidences that border crossing can be a part of EFL classes and that this can lead to passionate critical pedagogy, localized versions of questioning and could change society.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

This study allowed me to explore my research questions and understand the extent to which participants considered themselves critical pedagogues. I proposed a localized critical pedagogy to suggest how transformation could be introduced in this research setting and to articulate how border crossing might become more possible through the use of this contextualized critical pedagogy. When I started the study, I believed that border crossing was prerequisite to critical pedagogy, but I have concluded by positing that border crossings can be realized through a localized critical pedagogy. It would be very interesting to follow up on this possibility. Perhaps implementing the proposed local critical pedagogy and then conducting a study to explore its effectiveness would enable better analysis of how it lends itself to border pedagogy. Developing a tangible set of teaching resources, including lesson plans that utilize neutralizing strategies, and then observing the delivery of such classes would certainly illuminate whether the proposed strategies are possible and/or effective.

Furthermore, the study is limited in its source of data. I only collected data from international teachers. A fuller picture could be acquired through classroom observation of student-teacher interactions. Interviewing Turkish teachers in the same research setting would also reveal a local teacher's experience. Turkish teachers would offer immensely useful insight into the 'localized critical pedagogy' suggested here.

As a qualitative study, my research weaves together an image representative of the intricacies that affect EFL teachers' willingness to engage in critical pedagogy. The truth is that it is not possible for me to generalize about which factors and characteristics predispose teachers to be more inclined to this type of teaching approach. Other studies have explored specific factors, concluding it may be teacher level of education or teaching experience (Mahmoodarabi & Khodabaksh, 2015), or professional seniority (Sahragard, Razmjoo & Baharloo, 2014). Making such claims from this study would be unfair given I only had seven participants, and their individual approaches to teaching could be caused by any of these factors, or a range of others, like previous learning experience, previous jobs, personal beliefs or teaching philosophies. To better understand the proposed localized critical pedagogy would require raised awareness of the *factors* that affect teaching approach. This study did not have enough participants to generalize in that way.

Finally, the question of teacher authority and power is one that would be very interesting to explore in future research. Only one participant (Ben) mentioned his position of power as a teacher in the classroom. I would have liked to explore this awareness in interviews with the other six teachers as well. Teachers recognizing their own position of power in the classroom and the way that their worldviews may be 'dominant' is the basis of a teacher

engaging in an honest form of critical pedagogy. Existing research (Ooiwa-Yoshizawa, 2012; Riasti & Mollaei, 2012) notes that not only teachers but also students in EFL contexts comprise the elite members of society. These studies suggest that students who have access to EFL classes hold a position of power in society, and thus, the EFL classroom is a place where they can learn to share their power and exercise their influence correctly. To that end, EFL classrooms are a space for a "pedagogy of possibility." While I find this notion interesting, it is beyond the scope of this study. The notion itself is problematic, given it poses a sweeping generalization of what type of person attends EFL classes. For this research setting, some students absolutely constitute 'elite,' while others have arrived to their EFL classroom by determination and the sweat of their brow. Regardless, this facet of EFL critical pedagogy would be fascinating to explore further in this research setting.

5.6 Impact of the Study

This study outlines a localized border pedagogy applicable in this research setting. Suggestions made here would apply to other similar academically-oriented EFL educational settings throughout Turkey and in other countries that comprised similar constricting environmental factors. This study adds richly to the limited research in EFL critical theory framework by following Gore's (1992) suggestion that EFL critical pedagogy needs to be analyzed contextually and made tangible for specific settings. The findings of this study also contribute to the understanding of border pedagogy in the field, particularly in international contexts with restricted freedoms.

Most importantly, this study adds modestly to the growing body of educational research that remains committed to opposing the neoliberal paradigm and its harmful effects. One

classroom and one relationship at a time, studies like this raise awareness of how neoliberal structures work and suggest ways to overcome them through critical means. This is essential in slowly beginning to dismantle unequal relations of power, wealth and knowledge in our time.

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Appendix 1

Dear Participant

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. I have a few questions for you to reflect on in your own time. Please note down any responses that comes to mind. You do not need to be too detailed – I plan to follow up on your reflections and comments in the coming interview.

Please email your questionnaire back to me (mariannebar@shaw.ca) as soon as you are finished with it.

*Just a reminder that all the answers/information you provide **will be kept confidential** in the study. You may leave questions blank if you would rather not answer.*

The Basics:

My Question	Your Answer
Where are you from?	
How old are you?	
How long have you been working at Bilkent?	
How long have you been in Turkey?	
Have you taught anywhere else? If so, Where?	
What level(s) have you taught so far?	

Some Reflection on Teaching Topics:

1. Have you ever used a current event or news story as a material/topic for a lesson? Note down any times you can think of that you have done this.

2. **a)** Think of the following as possible topics/titles for an upper-intermediate speaking lesson. Would you create/teach a lesson using these topics in your Bilkent classes? Put an 'X' in the yes or no column to identify which you would feel comfortable using.

	Yes, I would use this topic for a speaking lesson.	No, I would not use this topic for a speaking lesson.
i. Turkey's response to the Syrian refugee crisis		
ii. Erdogan's Turkey versus Ataturk's Turkey		
iii. The July 2016 coup: Conspiracy or not?		
iv. What should foreigners know about Turkey?		
v. Turkish lifestyle: Urban vs. Rural living		
vi. What Westerners should know about the real Islam		
vii. Travel recommendations for Eastern Turkey		
viii. Stereotypes of Turkish Culture		

b) If you want, you can use the space below to make some brief notes about the reason(s) you would or would not choose one of the topics above.

Agree or Disagree:

For each statement, indicate whether you agree or disagree using the appropriate number. You may add comments/notes if you want, but it is not necessary as I will have you further elaborate in the interview.

1- Completely disagree
2- Somewhat disagree
3- Neither agree nor disagree
4- Somewhat agree
5- Somewhat disagree

Number	Statement
	I think it is important for teachers to understand where their students are coming from (including student background, beliefs, moods, reasons for studying at Bilkent, likes and dislikes, etc.) *Comments*:
	As a teacher at Bilkent, I feel that I DO understand where my students are coming from (their background, beliefs, moods, reasons for studying at Bilkent, likes and dislikes, etc.) *Comments*:
	In my time working at Bilkent, I feel that I have developed professionally. *Comments*:
	In my time working at Bilkent, I feel that I have developed personally. *Comments*:
	I feel that I can make a difference in my student's lives. *Comments*:

Thank you very much for taking time to answer these questions. Your responses are very valuable and interesting to me. I am excited to meet with you and discuss further.

Appendix 2

	Code	Category	Key Words/Description
Background information for context	**1**	Why teacher is in Turkey	
	2	Why teacher chose an ELT career	
Broad concepts – Values and beliefs	**3**	Teacher view of the purpose of education	Education, the University
	4	Teacher beliefs about Teaching	Classroom atmosphere, teacher-student relationship Needing to know more than sts do… Understanding diversity among sts
Awareness of Turkey and Turkish politics	**5**	What teacher knew before arriving about Turkey(‘s political situation)	
	6	Impressions of the country upon arrival	Good and bad impressions, expectations vs reality
	7	What teacher knows now	How much, growth of knowledge over time, shifted/increased awareness since arriving.
	8	How teacher acquired information	Gauging the student responses (trial and error), TU chats, Reading articles,
Teacher as ‘outsider’	**9**	How teacher feels in Turkey (sense of belonging)	- Identity (shift overtime) - Sense of ‘having a stake’ in what happens
	10	Teacher as an outsider – Benefits	
	11	Teacher as an outsider - Challenges	
Teacher’s views of their work	**12**	Teacher view of their role at Bilkent *for students	Educator, Language teacher, Mentor, etc…
	13	Teacher’s sense of autonomy	Within the institution, course content, handling issues
	14	Teacher’s understanding of the institution	- Institutional goals - Institutional politics - Institutional approach to addressing political/contentious topics.
	15	Teacher’s understanding of students	- political views/beliefs - personality (as learners) - backgrounds (educational or personal) - autonomy
Materials and Topics t	**16**	Materials/Topics that are ‘safe’ and intentionally used.	

	17	Materials/Topics that are known to be 'touchy'/contentious OR that surface unintentionally	To further code: unintentionally surfaces // avoided at all costs (and how are each of these dealt with)
	18	Why teacher avoids these contentious topics (or is forced to avoid) - Affective vs. Logistic	Classroom, personal, language barriers, materials are inhibiting
	19	Strategies for handling contentious topics that arise	Avoidance Navigating differing opinions. Guiding to the correct way of thinking.
	20	Teacher impressions of how Turkish teachers' classes may differ	
	21	Teacher effort to incorporate student opinion and lived experiences	
Politics in education	**22**	Teacher's political views	
	23	Teacher's willingness to share /discuss political & controversial views	Both their own… and to hear students.
	24	Teacher's desire to inspire students to political activism	
	25	Teacher's view of 'education as political'	
	25A	Teacher mentions 'critical education'	
Events	**26**	Ongoing events before/during the interviews	- US/Turkey relations (visa ban) - METU deforestation/construction - Relating to the coup (culling of teachers) - The referendum
Observer Comments	**27**	Comments made by observer about the interviewee/interview.	
Recording	**28**	Evidence of hesitation or unwillingness to be candid on recording	