Unsettling Colonial Relations in Experiential Education: Maya *Ixil* Perspectives on Decolonizing International Service Learning

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ABSTRACT

International Service Learning (ISL) is a relatively young field of education research. Designed to be short-term experiential education programs, the traditional ISL curriculum harnesses direct interaction and cross- or inter-cultural exchanges between the Global North and Global South to provide opportunities for reflection and learning to occur. The field has focused on the impact of such programs for the Global North participants, primarily students, who participate. The existing literature highlights the benefits of this engaged form of learning citing academic, political, and moral growth. There are few studies that are critical of this approach to experiential education and fewer still that examine the impact of ISL on Global South host communities that receive these visitors. It is also the case that in the last decades the growth of ethical tourism has impacted educational programs such as ISL and, for host communities, the perceivable differences and impact are negligible.

This study focuses on the community experience of ISL, narrowing the focus of the inquiry on one community in Guatemala that is home of the Maya *Ixil* people. The research design incorporates a theoretical framework that seeks to confront the colonial history that is deeply embedded in the practice of ISL and provide a lens through which to examine the transnational encounters that take place between people as Global North participants cross borders and bring with them historical and political identities in their visiting of Indigenous communities. For this reason this study also incorporates values and ideas from an Indigenous approach to research that emerged as the research team built relationships with the *Ixil* community. Over the course of four years several data gathering trips were made to the city of Nebaj, Guatemala where interviews and focus groups informed the bulk of the data. An important validation and feedback event that was called the *Encuentro* (gathering), took place in August 2017 and is a centerpiece of the research design and of this study. Recommendations were formed during this event, meant to be shared with host communities across Guatemala and Central America.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of ISL on the Maya *Ixil* and tell the story of research that revealed the importance of identifying the colonial relations that have upheld both research practices in the Global South as well as the practice of ISL. The

findings reveal that the impact of ISL on the *Ixil* community is misunderstood by Global North advocates and stakeholders. The necessity of unsettling colonial relations is recommended as an important step forward for the practice of ISL that seeks to facilitate experiential education in a good way.

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Contents

Key Terms and Acronyms

For the sake of clarity this list intends to define how the following terms are used throughout this dissertation.

Colonialism – and *settler colonialism* are not one-dimensional terms. They refer to both the history of colonization and settlement as well as speak to structural forces that shape relations of "coloniality, racism, gender, class, sexuality and desire, capitalism, and ableism" (Snelgrove et al., 2015). Settler colonialism is distinct from colonialism in that it refers to a kind of colonization that aimed to remove or eliminate Indigenous people from their lands.

Experiential Education (EE) – refers to a field of education that emphasizes learning through experience. This may be philosophical and methodological. For this dissertation I use EE broadly and situate ISL as a specific incarnation of EE.

Global North – refers to a grouping of nations located primarily, but not exclusively, in the Northern hemisphere, although geography is not the distinguishing feature. Historically this group of nations has been referred to as "the West" or the "first world", however, the term Global North is used to denote political and economic similarities rather than notions of developed or undeveloped.

Global South – refers to a grouping of nations located primarily, but not exclusively, in the Southern hemisphere, although geography is not the distinguishing feature. Historically, this group of nations has been referred to as the "developing world" or the "third world," terms that are problematic in signaling dependency and poverty. Global South is used to denote political and economic similarities.

Indigenous – refers to First Nations and First peoples. In this dissertation it also refers to Indigenous people who have been adversely affected by colonialism.

International Experiential Education (IEE) – refers to EE with a specific focus on transnational connections and contexts. In Chapter Six in this dissertation co-author O'Sullivan and I use IEE instead of ISL due, in part, to the term being more accurately representative of the case study.

International Service Learning (ISL) – "refers to a structured academic experience in another country in which the students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from the direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline and an enhanced sense of their own responsibility as citizens, locally and globally" (Bringle and Hatcher, 2011, p. 19). This dissertation does not distinguish between Global Service Learning (GSL), or International Service-Learning with a hyphen, which is included in some literature meant de-emphasize the 'service' aspects of this approach. The approach taken

here is not to wade into the semantics of whether the hyphen makes such a difference, instead using the terms interchangeably.

Service Learning (SL) – refers to an engaged learning pedagogy that focuses on critical reflection, political engagement, and social awareness. This dissertation does not differentiate between sources that use service learning or service-learning with the hyphen. In all cases when referring to SL it refers to programs that operate domestically.

Settler – refers to people who have participated in and/or benefited from settler colonialism. I identify as a settler because of my ancestry and ongoing benefits of white privilege associated with this history.

Western – used mainly to speak about a worldview grounded in colonialism and eurocentrism.

Chapter 1 – Weaving Together of Stories of Settlers, Mayans, and Colonial Resistance

This study examines the impact of International Service Learning (ISL) on Global South participants by inviting members of these *host communities[1]* to respond to and assess ISL programs from their perspectives. As these projects emanate from Global North institutions, I wondered about the role they play in supporting or dismantling colonialism? Is there a need for a decolonization of ISL? While there is evidence of a recent emphasis to look more critically at and problematize ISL as it impacts host communities, as seen in Larsen's (2016) edited volume, there are few, if any, studies which intentionally recognize the unique dynamics of doing ISL research in Indigenous contexts. The sub-purpose of this research, then, is to focus on methodology, paying attention to the contextual dynamics of communities, how the participants' voices are interpreted and represented, and how the knowledge gained from this study is given back to communities. The research *process* should aim to harmonize with the research *goals*, or as Mayan scholar Estrada (2005) remarks, "research that shows respect and values life and cultural diversity is not merely an intellectual pursuit – it is a necessity" (p. 48).

Throughout this study I use the terminology *Service Learning* (SL) and *International Service Learning* (ISL). The reader may understand SL to be generally representative of both SL and ISL, except when otherwise noted. My use of ISL is always specifically addressing international variations of SL. When reflecting on the literature in this field I

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[1] I use the term *host communities* to denote the group of *Global South participants* within each of the three proposed sites of this study who have had ongoing experiences hosting northern participants in their homes, work spaces, and geographic communities.

have endeavored to use the same terms particular authors employ in their own work, adding specificity and clarity if needed for my own arguments. To begin, I think it necessary to present Bringle and Hatcher's (2011) widely accepted definition of ISL, which reads as follows

> A structured academic experience in another country in which the students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from the direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline and an enhanced sense of their own responsibility as citizens, locally and globally. (p. 19)

From their explanation one can see the three essential activities of (a) *service,* (b) *learning,* and (c) *reflection*. An important observation, which is made much more explicit in Bringle and Hatcher's (1995) definition of SL (p. 112), is their articulation of the embeddedness of the activities of service and learning in real-world contexts and the value added to these activities when participants are given time for intentional reflection. The aims of these activities are meant to inspire or increase participants' involvements in civic and/or global responsibilities; goals that emerge from experiential education theories (Dewey, 1938), and that are often contrasted with traditional classroom activities and goals, which are seen as trapped within a kind of static space that promotes directional/transactional learning. There is much more to be said of this later as I explore the theoretical foundations of SL in the literature review. For now, it is important to know, as Dan Butin (2010) says, that ISL is generally perceived of as being "an active pedagogy committed to connecting

theory and practice, schools and community, the cognitive and the ethical" (p. 3). Central within this experiential, active, and supposedly subversive pedagogy exists one of the most notable and often heralded goals of ISL, which is its "transformative potential" (Jones et al., 2005, p. 3).

Research as Subjective and Particular

In my experience, I have learned that research is riddled with subjectivities. Points of view, perspectives, and biases are inherent to being a person who occupies space, time, and a social milieu and these therefore color and shape all components of research. It is because of this recognition that the task of writing an autobiographical inquiry (Clandinin, 2013, p. 55) becomes an essential first step as one begins to attend to their own stories of experience in research. Beginning with self-location signifies a relational research process (Peltier et al., 2019) and the telling of stories about who we are, how we have come to our research wonders, and why we have developed certain research puzzles, becomes clearer as we compose our "narrative beginnings" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 44). The autobiographical (re)focus helps us gaze upon past experiences as a source for understanding who we are and who we are becoming. This approach exposes the sometimes-buried subjectivities of the research process and in doing so demonstrates that there is much to be gained from this disclosure.

In my experience, I am also learning about the role of research that emphasizes the particularities of the context in which it took place. I resist the temptation to find generalizations and make claims that the findings may have a broad impact. Instead, I align with the notion of the transferability (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) of findings and that whoever approaches a research text may find inspiration and insights to interpret and

apply within their own particular settings. Transferability, much like the process of translation, emphasizes process rather than outcome. This project relied heavily on translation through the data collection and transcription stages, where stories were captured in both a different language and medium than what is written. Translation into English and the written medium was a choice-filled process made by the translator, transcriber, and ultimately in my own renderings here. I have grown to embrace transferability of research findings as an honest and open approach in knowledge translation that invites readers to enter into the story of what was done, hoping for immersion, connection, and resonance. It is, I think, a very anti-consumption approach to rendering and reading research findings and one that aligns well with the theoretical framework that underlies this project.

By framing this research as particular and subjective, what I am conveying is not to rush or skip ahead to the analysis and conclusions. Doing so decontextualizes the study. In the case of qualitative research approaching a research text in this way also de-stories people. Central to this research are the *Ixil* people who offered their gifts of stories (Kovach, 2009). Without their contributions this project would not exist. Honoring those stories and the story of the *Ixil* as a people is of utmost importance. Taking the time to consider the historical elements and enter into the relationships that inform this research helps avoid the extractive tendency in research, where what is produced is the measure of its worth. I am convinced that the journey itself is of value and so I invite the reader to come along and enter into the circle of relationships that have been formed and have informed this project.

Weaving a Basket

To imagine what 'entering into this circle of relationships' looks like I suggest considering the image of weaving a basket as a conceptual framework for this dissertation. Many Indigenous cultures around the world are familiar with weaving baskets, using different materials depending on what is available in the region. The Mayan peoples wove with pine needles, agave, and *jippi jappa*, which is a type of palm tree. The process of weaving begins with gathering and preparing the materials. These activities are more than the sum of their parts. When gathering materials from the land one must be aware of the seasons and know which trees are ready for harvest. Métis Two-Spirit Knowledge Keeper Sandy Leo Laframboise shared with me about Coast Salish, who gathered cedar bark to weave baskets. There is a short two-week window in which to collect the bark and gatherers must do this in a sacred way. Then, while preparing the bark to weave, it is a time for the community to gather and to learn together from the Elders who share stories and songs while they work. This dissertation represents the finished product, the basket if you will, but the activities of gathering and preparing, unseen to the reader, are the most critical components. Writing is, for me, the activity of weaving stories. It is also an activity best done in community with others. Whether a chapter includes a co-author or not, it is important for me to note that each piece of this writing was shaped by many relationships and the stories and songs we shared with one another in the gathering and preparing of the data.

Now, weaving baskets typically includes two material components in order to make the structure. The warps – *varas* – are the bones of the basket, held together in parallel as the wefts – *venas* – are drawn over and under each warp. Conceptualizing this dissertation

as a basket then, the warps are the stories of the *Ixil* people, some historical while others current with this project, shared by those who participated in this study. Several warps that create the structure of this introduction are the stories of the *Ixil* experience of colonization, the long period of foreign land ownership post-Spanish conquest, and finally the Guatemalan genocide. The wefts, my stories, will be woven over and under these warps as I work to self-locate (Peltier et al., 2019) as a researcher within this larger context. By weaving these stories together my hope is that something new is formed that is neither an attempted history of the *Ixil* experience nor my autobiographical account of doing research. Instead, in the weaving of the basket, I hope to be able to demonstrate how the research was accomplished, and once complete, the reader may perceive a container, a basket, in which the chapters are held. The introductory chapters show the formation of the basket so that the reader will be better able to understand the broader context of the research and its purposes. This basket, then, holds chapters four, five, and six. Nevertheless, each of these later chapters are also meant to stand on their own with enough contextual detail to support the arguments therein.

The purpose of employing the image of the basket is to draw strong connections between the context of the study, its theoretical framework, and the methodology used in the research design. Foundational, and as a starting point, is personal theory, which is at the heart of the motivation for the researcher. Alignment between the component parts in a research design is essential in supporting the arguments and findings, as well as making clear the transferrable applications to be found within. A study that is misaligned, much like a basket, may look wonky, lacking verisimilitude; a criteria for defending and evaluating research (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990), which implies that the writer who

ventures into the territory of stories as data must be able to represent in their writing their subjective lens as well as the particulars of the study in order for others to assess the "invitational quality of a manuscript" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 8). Alignment between the component parts of the research design provides clarity for the readers, inviting them to step into my shoes as the writer, to see things from my perspective, whether they agree with it or not, so that they may understand the process of research as much as the results. The image of basket weaving offers a way of conceptualizing the sometimes-unseen components of research.

Varas, Venas, and What the Basket Contains

The *varas* and *venas*, or the warps and wefts of the basket, are woven together throughout the first three chapters. As already mentioned, this introduction encompasses details related to the context of the research as well as my self-locating and explanation of my personal theory. Chapter two consists of a literature review, where I explore, not only the history that situates ISL as a sub-genre of Experiential Education (EE), but also the apparent gap in studies that focus on the impact of ISL on communities in the Global South. With these elements now woven together we will begin to see how the basket is taking shape. Chapter three concludes the weaving process as I discuss, in light of the first two chapters, the theoretical framework that provides a lens through which the methodology and particular methods of data gathering and analysis were performed. Once this basket is complete, we may then consider what it contains. Chapters four, five, and six are held by the basket and each chapter offers a key part of the story of this research project. Chapter four examines in more detail the stories gathered with the *Ixil* community members who participated in the project. These stories were gathered over three trips to Nebaj,

Guatemala and the findings were instrumental for the overall project. It was due in part to the stories shared by the *Ixil* community that two subsequent data gathering visits were planned as well as a consultation visit where a member of our extended research team relied on their input in designing a final gathering for all the communities who participated. This was to be a key validation and feedback event. Chapter five is the story of this event called the *Encuentro*, which took place in Managua, Nicaragua and included participants from eight communities from Guatemala and Nicaragua, including delegates from Nebaj. These delegates were instrumental in providing critical and insightful responses to our team's analysis as well as offering recommendations for future ISL research and practice. Chapter six picks up the story post-*Encuentro*, following Michael O'Sullivan, a co-investigator in the project, who worked to apply the findings, feedback, and recommendations made at the *Encuentro* in two subsequent experiential education trips facilitated by O'Sullivan and run as a credit course through Brock University. This chapter examines O'Sullivan's stories of this application, including field journal entries he composed as a backdrop that frames a discussion about partnerships and relationships between institutions and host communities. The dissertation concludes with a critical assessment of education partnerships with host communities in ISL, examining the ways that settler-colonialism creates white spaces for settler collectives, a subconscious methodology that becomes embedded in ISL encounters between the Global North and Global South. This argument is juxtaposed by Maya *Ixil* conceptualizations of partnerships as relationships and suggests that unsettling colonial relations in education partnerships is an essential task in decolonizing ISL.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will oscillate between the *varas* and *venas* as I begin to weave the basket. However, before I begin, I wanted to speak about storytelling as testimony. Thinking back to ISL programs I have participated in, both as a student and as a leader, testimony was an important pedagogic tool. To be clear, I am not speaking about testimony as in the formal written account one gives in the court of law or the kind of storytelling that is filled with the trappings of colonized religious practice. Instead, I employ testimony in the way that Boler (1999) does, which is to say that testimony is a response to the "crisis of truth" (p. 166) and that its medium is "in the process" (p. 167). Testimony, or *testimonios* in Maya literature, is an important autobiographical genre that grew out of the history of colonization and the oppression of the voices of Indigenous people. Popularized by Rigoberta Menchu (1983) and Victor Montejo (1987), the aims of *testimonios* are to invite participation into an experience of suffering or to draw connections between Maya and other Indigenous peoples (Arias, 2009). *Testimonios* are often uncomfortable and demand the reader to embrace their own discomfort in the face of new revelations of another human's experience as a teacher. Testimony, as Boler (1999) suggests, "is trauma's genre" (p. 167). Although *testimonios* are not limited to the expression of trauma, the style or medium provides a critical tool for self-reflection in the context of a learning community, such as those that participate in experiential education programs like ISL. Experiential education is, by nature of displacing learners from their familiar settings, prone to harness emotions. As I noted, throughout the many ISL programs I have participated in, testimony, though rarely identified, played a role in the daily debriefs and reflections for learners. Sitting in a circle, sharing stories based on the experiences of the day, whether informally, or through facilitation is a common practice. Similarly, in this

writing I will attempt to embrace testimony as a medium that will aid in explaining my personal theory.

Following, are three *varas* and three *venas*. The *varas* are stories based on *Ixil* history. These are not attempts to render a complete picture of the *Ixil* experience, since this dissertation does not claim to be focused on history. They are rather stories that offer some broader context and background to the Indigenous people who, for the context of this dissertation, have hosted visiting Global North learners. There are innumerable stories about the *Ixil* and I can only hope that the three cursory ones I have chosen to tell are able to provide enough structure to the weaving of this basket so that it may stand on its own and hold the rest of the chapters. It would be an injustice not to render some of this history at the outset as I think it is important to consider where we come from and what we bring when we create opportunities for encounters and visits between people. The *venas* are my stories; particular *testimonios* I have chosen to speak of my experiences with ISL and learning through experience (Dewey, 1938). They may be trite in comparison to the larger stories told of the *Ixil* but it is equally important that as you read this dissertation that you are able to know who this author is, where I come from and what lenses I bring to examine this field of study.

Varas: Spanish Colonization

The region in which the *Ixil* live is located in the *Altos Cuchumatanes*, a range of mountains that extends from Mexico, in the state of *Chiapas*, through central Guatemala, finally descending into the Caribbean (Colbie & den Berge, 1969). Nebaj, the central town within the region is in the Quiche department, a political division of land that sweeps north to the border and south, nearly touching *Lago Atitlan*. Two other towns, Cotzal and Chajul,

help form the *Ixil* triangle. The terrain in this region is mountainous and rugged and the roads do little to distil the landscape into a tidy package, choosing rather to meander through the elevation, sometimes precariously alongside cliffs. To help imagine these roads, the distance between Guatemala City and Nebaj is just over two hundred kilometers, yet the drive will likely take anywhere between six to nine hours depending on traffic along certain chokepoints. Long valleys cut through the *Cuchumatanes*, one in which the town of Nebaj is nestled, embracing the slopes of the mountains that surround it. I remember driving these dusty roads winding around the hips of the peaks, sometimes encountering switchbacks and potholes that were made nearly permanent by the rattle of mining trucks that ran these routes daily. I truly could not imagine how inaccessible the region must have been prior to the development of these roads.

The *Ixil* suffered the same fate as the other Mayan people living in Guatemala who were invaded by Spanish conquests through the 1520s (Colbie & van den Berge, 1969). Unlike some of the other Indigenous groups, however, the *Ixil* remained isolated, buffered to some of the events of the initial conquest due to the naturally protective arms of the *Cuchumatanes*. As the decade wore on, in December 1530, a battalion of Spanish soldiers and cavalry marched on the *Ixil* lands forcing many to flee their scattered homes amongst the valley to protect themselves in the town of Nebaj (Stoll, 1993), which was "isolated by a very deep ravine and defended from all sides" (Colbie & van den Berge, 1969, p. 42). During the invasion, while many of the defenders held the road into the town, the Spanish sent troops around to the back of the town to set fire to the houses, forcing the defenders to give up their positions to squelch the blazes and protect their families.

The aftermath of the conquest was significant as an entire way of life was reformed and structurally manipulated to benefit the new Colonial government. Indigenous people were used as slaves, set to work their stolen lands for little to no benefit, leading to centuries of food scarcity and an imposed system of colonial economics that included a system of annual and forced tribute from families (Colbie & Van Den Berge, 1969). The political and relational atmosphere at the time was characterized by a culture of "general abuse and particular atrocities" (Colbie & van den Berge, 1969, p. 46). Central to the Colonial scheme was land ownership and population control. Through the 1700s, the imposition of the Spanish was concretized through the re-organization of the physical spaces of the towns. Churches were erected in the center along with colonial-style architecture and sensibilities; roads were arranged in grids and stone was used in construction (Colbie & van den Berge, 1969). Christianizing efforts were undertaken as a further form of ideological manipulation and control, now backed by the physical structures and those in power who could wield their authority locally. The Indigenous experience in Guatemala was colored first by the ongoing presence of the Spanish military, which gradually forced communities to dissipate and retreat into the mountains (Peláez, 2009). With this dispersion the Spanish conquest shifted from a military occupation to encompass the ideological and economic dimensions.

Two policies upheld this approach to colonization. First, the Colonial government formalized population transfer policies, which were internally justified efforts to centralize people and therefore centralize control. In the *Ixil* region people were rounded up throughout the mountains and forced into four communities, which today are known as Nebaj, Cotzal, Chajul, and Ilom (Colbie & van nen Berge, 1969). The second policy that then

bound the Indigenous to these communities was *repartimiento*. Peláez (2009) explained

that this was "the economic linchpin of the colonial system, the heart of the regime. Indians

were obliged to furnish labor and were dispatched to that end to work on haciendas and

farms belonging to Spanish conquerors and colonists, who then handed these properties

down to their heirs" (p. 58). The *ecomiendas* government employing these policies was

sustained by a system of Colonial magistrates, or *Corregidores*, who were locate despots,

oppressing the people and siphoning the tribute funds. This system of local government

was in place up until the late 1800s. These component parts created the structure of

Colonialism in Guatemala that worked through the generations to normalize this system of

landownership and that paved the way for the plantation empires that arose. The

Indigenous peoples, while not officially named as slaves, were treated just the same,

justified by the Spanish by the *repartimiento* system. Peláez (2009) was again quick to

point out that the conquest of Guatemala differed from the settlement of other colonized

lands in that the people who left Spain came to enjoy a "parasitic existence in the colonies,

the cornerstone of which was slavery" (p. 49). This form of colonialism was inherited

generation after generation so that in the minds of the non-Indigenous peoples of

Guatemala the idea of slavery found a scapegoat through the inherited prejudices and

ideologies of the new politic and centuries-long policies.

It has been argued that the ownership and control of land was and is a critical

component of the history of colonization in Guatemala (Peláez, 2009). The ongoing

struggles plaguing Guatemala have been its uneven and unethical distribution of its

"primary resource of wealth: land" (Peláez, 2009, p. 83). For the *Ixil* it is also the land that

buffered them, to an extent, from the national life and politics of Guatemala through the

1800s (Colbie & van den Berge, 1969). While the magistrate despots governed in the towns, the isolation of the region promoted survivance of culture and resistance amongst the *Ixil,* many who were able to find seclusion in the vast Altos *Cuchumatanes* (Stoll, 1993). In fact, Catholic priests were aware that the *Ixil* were practicing their ancestral faith in caves (Stoll, 1993). The *repartimiento* system was maintained by colonial authority for generations, entrapping Indigenous people in a perpetual system of survival, which robbed them of their time and energy to resist in more collaborative ways, and instead forced them into servitude for their landowners (Peláez, 2009). However, the seeds of Agrarian reform, focused on redistribution of stolen lands, runs deep in Mayan history and political plans for change were conceived of and documented as early as 1810 (Peláez, 2009).

Venas: Settler-colonial Identities and Travelling

It was already past dark when my friend Jason and I decided to go for a walk. It may have been a subconscious decision that enabled us to bask in the highly romanticized vision of the place we were in[2], or it may have simply felt like an opportunity to reflect on the week we had spent together. It was 2003 and I was a participant on an ISL trip in Nicaragua. Having landed only two days earlier, I wrote in my journal at the time, "*I think I can honestly call this the best day of my life.*" I remember being absorbed in the wonder of encountering people whom I could not communicate with. I remember romanticizing the construction project of a small one-room cinder-block house in the town of Veracruz that we helped build. I remember, more than anything, the emotional impact of these new

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[2] Michael Woolf (2017) talks about a condition he calls "love at first sight/site" (p. xi); an emotional reaction akin to a "blind date" that study abroad participants often express. It is a common response, for participants who cross national borders and encounter new experiences to engage in a dreamed landscape populated by *iconic images*, formed by our curiosities, imagination and passion. This is an apt summary of my experience and helps frame the story.

experiences. In the same journal from this trip in 2003, I take note of a scene that seemed to have stuck with me.

> *Today Antonio and I went to a huge mango tree and he climbed all the way to the top*
>
> *to get us the best mangos. They were so good and we ate them together on the swing*
>
> *set. Awesome moment.*

The romance associated with these new-to-me experiences is evident. It was also, unknown to me at the time, manufactured. This weeklong ISL trip, as I remember, had been marketed to me as a chance to 'leave my comfort zone,' which was something that appealed to my seventeen-year-old self, who like many other young people who participate in different forms of study abroad or experiential learning programs find in these experiences contemporary expressions of a quest and rites of passage (Taieb & Doerr, 2017).[3] Tellingly, in a number of entries in the journal I reflected on my appreciation of being removed from my access to "*entertainment,*" a realization of a growing sense of discontent with a habit I hoped to confront, now revealed in my week in Nicaragua that removed me from my daily rhythms. This revelation prompted me to reflect on my new reality, which I articulated as awe-inspired scenes of life in this new context.

> *Nicaragua was the most amazing experience I've ever had. One can learn so much*
>
> *from just living in and enjoying another culture… our cultures are almost a complete*
>
> *contrast from one another.*

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[3] Taieb and Doerr (2017) suggested there are connections between contemporary study abroad programs, which are foreshadowed by "vision quests and journeys of initiation and discovery," wherein young people followed in the footsteps of those who travelled to "change themselves" (p. 36). These were journeys of self-discovery and self-expression. Furthermore, one cannot dismiss the connections of study abroad to the movement of people in "colonial travel" and the "European Grand Tour" (p. 36), which emerged as particular colonial forms of *rites of passage* that promoted intellectual, cultural, and artistic development. The idea of the European Grand Tour is wrapped up in certain motivations for travel, which in turn suggest certain emotions at play.

The impulse to compare was, seemingly, the most accessible way of reflecting on the experience and framed the conversation that Jason and I had one evening. It is true that experience, especially new experiences, are incredibly informative in aiding us in our learning journeys (Dewey, 1938) and programs such as ISL, which displace learners from their familiar settings, rely on this pedagogic assumption. Now, Jason and I were new friends bonding in this setting because of this shared learning experience and as I recount in a journal entry, we wanted to drink in on our last night there together and so,

> *After supper me and Jason decided to walk around the block. Feeling Veracruz is quite safe and the people know and respect what we are doing*.

On that walk, feeling caught up in the excitement of it all, we unfortunately had a violent encounter with a group of young men. Approaching an intersection on a quiet street, looking ahead, we noticed several people gathered under a lone streetlight. It seemed odd to turn around despite how quiet the streets were that evening and so in our ignorance we continued toward the intersection. As the dim yellow light of the street lamps caught our faces, we were approached by an individual who, using his body to block our path, preceded to yell at us in Spanish, which neither of us could understand or respond to. I recall feeling frozen, both physically and in time. Attempting to circumvent this encounter by continuing to walk around in a wide circle his yelling escalated and his body language became increasingly antagonistic. As we made a move to leave the scene, the man now physically barring our way lashed out at my friend Jason, striking him in the face and knocking him to the ground. I still remember this moment quite vividly: several in his group immediately jumped in to restrain their friend while others ushered Jason and me down the road. Upon returning to the residence where we were staying that night, we

shared in a range of emotions with one another as we attempted to calm ourselves; disbelief, fear, laughter, and crying punctuated this debrief. On the flight home to Canada I wrote in my journal.

> *The lessons that I've learned in Nicaragua will stay with me forever and the friends I've made with the team and with Jason I never want to lose. Looking back on this I can now see that it had a purpose to bring me closer to him and to bring us into the reality of the world. Nicaragua is amazing and I would not degrade its value just because of one unfortunate incident.* (A memory reconstruction based on excerpts from collected artifacts, 2003)[4]

I have a complicated relationship with the above story; it represents a conflicting narrative for me, a narrative that makes me feel uncomfortable to expose for what some might judge the naiveté of youth. It also exposes a part of me, which from a critical perspective, seems parochial. In re-telling this story, I perceive of my past self as a young boy captivated by the differences and distinctions that he saw, focused on the novelty of the juxtapositions as he crossed borders. I have discovered that volunteer and study abroad programs such as that which I participated in are fueled by romanticized notions of travel (Doerr & Taieb, 2017), and while I don't believe this romance is wholly problematic, I also want to recognize the way romance tends to "distort" and leave us "delusional" in the ways we navigate these experiences for learning (Woolf, 2017). I know that my past-self bought into the notion that my political and social positioning could be utilized for the benefit of those who I perceived were disadvantaged. That way of understanding my place in the

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[4] I borrow Clandinin's (2013) use of the term *memory reconstruction*, which she suggests is a form of a field text that is written about earlier events or situations (p. 78). The artifact I was able to find was a journal I kept, which included several photos, from an ISL experience in Nicaragua, February 14-21, 2003.

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world and the uncritical commitment to the idea that doing good is good was a part of the appeal of such an ISL experience. This intensive investment in me as a participant in the ISL experience, as is the focus of so many international learning programs emerging from the Global North, affirmed that posturing while failing to address the ways these types of programs perpetuate and uphold the illusion of Eurocentric understandings of development and social justice (Hammersley, 2014, p. 855).

The colonial gaze (Coburn, 2013) is a by-product of uncritical approaches to ISL (Mitchell, 2008) where the dynamics of power and privilege and the histories of colonialism are not addressed in the meetings of peoples from across borders. Of course, I did not have the language for decolonization or anti-colonialism at the time of this experience. Looking back, however, it is striking how curated the learning space is for Global North participants. The privilege of safety is a paramount concern for many ISL programs. The concept of safety is, of course, contextually constructed and what is considered unsafe for visitors is often a way of life for those living in the communities they visit. This is something I will explore in more detail in chapter six. I wonder about the ways that ISL programs harness a pedagogy of whiteness, which as Mitchell et al. (2012) explained are "strategies of instruction that consciously or unconsciously reinforce norms and privileges developed by, and for the benefit of, white people" (p. 613).

From another perspective, however, I recognize that this experience also formed me in ways that have influenced both the person and the researcher I am becoming today, which is something I also wish to explore further. The telling and re-telling of this story is something I am learning to practice as a researcher, recognizing the value of attending to uncomfortable stories (Clandinin, 2013). In doing so, especially with those stories

connected to our narrative beginnings as researchers, such as I've illustrated above, I hope

to cultivate a space where I might see "disruptions, fragmentations, or silences" (Clandinin

& Caine, 2013, p. 173). These rips in the fabric are like holes that expose the underside of

the tapestry of this project; the way my motivations and interests in ISL research have been

woven together. I do believe that if we are willing to risk being vulnerable then there is the

potential of incredible "educative promise" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 76). As an example, in Ruth

Behar's (1997) seminal work, *The Vulnerable Observer*, she posits that in the discipline of

anthropology the researcher is called upon to consider their feelings in the process, such as

> the desire to enter into the world around you and having no idea how to do it, the
>
> fear of observing too coldly or too distractedly or too raggedly, the rage of
>
> cowardice, the insight that is always arriving late, a defiant hindsight, a sense of
>
> uselessness or writing anything and yet the burning desire to write something. (p.
>
> 3)

I resonate with her sentiment to write vulnerably, which she says "takes as much skill,

nuance, and willingness to follow through on all the ramifications of complicated ideas as

does writing invulnerably and distantly" "(Behar, 1997, p. 13). It is for this reason that I

consider this above story an important starting point for this proposal. I approach the

study of ISL not as someone wholly critical and disinterested in the practice, but as one

who has been shaped by it and grown because of my experiences made possible by my

participation in it. This story demonstrates how my past self and my present self are in

tension with one another. This tension is something I hope to hold openly, admitting that I

oscillate often between feelings of frustration and feelings of hope with the state of ISL. I

am learning to be playfully uncomfortable[5] with this tension and I invite my readers to do the same.

Varas: Coffee Dictatorships and Revolutionary Hopes

As time passed, direct Colonial rule through Spanish magistrates began to fade. The power-gap left in this transition was filled by the settlers who were quick to assert control over the lands. This period of plantation-based politics dominated the *Ixil* experience through the 1900s (Stoll, 1993) when their economic life "fluctuated with coffee prices and exports" (Colby & van den Berge, 1969, p. 72). It was the time of the Banana Republic, a state of politics so intertwined with foreign investment and private corporate gain that the Indigenous people of Guatemala suffered once again. Dictator Jorge Ubico Casteneda was the driving force behind the concessions given to the United Fruit Company and the rise to power of wealthy landowners (Grandin, 2004) in the early 1900s. As the plantation empires expanded into the *Ixil* region, development of the roads and a rapid immersion of the *Ixil* in the political economy of the nation led to further land-grabbing and the re-establishing a new form of compulsory labor and debt (Colby & van ven Berge, 1969, p. 72). The settlers were re-writing Guatemalan history in their efforts to create for themselves a narrative of the *patria* – homeland (Peláez, 2009). Seventy-two percent of the arable land in the country was in the hands of only two percent of its people, all of whom were of European or North American origin (McAllister & Nelson, 2013, p. 12).

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[5] I credit Shaun Murphy, who coined this term. I find it a helpful way of articulating my posture in a critical research project, especially one that explores a topic, ISL, that has formed me as a person. It is impossible for me to distance myself from the impact this pedagogy has had on me as a learner and it would be disingenuous to distance myself from that fact and engage in only critical and deconstructive work. Instead, I like the idea of being playfully uncomfortable with this reality.

Ubico was elected as president in 1931 as the only candidate in what was a democratic façade. During his thirteen-year rule Ubico increasingly employed subterfuge and force, focusing on control over the sovereignty of Indigenous people and the manipulation of the personal and social lives of Guatemalan citizens (Grandin, 2004). His ability to hold on to power rested on "a far-flung network of spies, regular use of torture, arbitrary imprisonment, and public executions" (Grandin, 2004, p. 48-49) as well as an expansion of the army and an education system that was militarized, embedding a culture of violence into the fabric of Guatemalan society for the next generations. It was in this political climate that arose the decade of hope from 1944-1954 (Grandin, 2004) and central during this time of revolutionary government was Jacobo Arbenz who, while no radical or ally of Indigenous causes, was a realist whose policies were focused on agrarian reform.

Indigenous people in Guatemala were able to participate in national elections beginning in 1879 (Grandin, 2004). However, throughout the long era of Estrada Cabrera's dictatorship (1898-1920) the casting of ballots was a ceremonial affair. The October Revolution in 1944 was foreshadowed by the unfulfilled promises of the past and by the decade of surveillance and suffering experienced under the Ubico government. Jacobo Arbenz led an insurgency, rallying Guatemala to the cause of a truly democratic election. In the following years this revolutionary spirit guided the government's policy-making, which began implementing land reforms.

It is difficult navigating this complex web of history that defines this decade and this is not the particular focus of this dissertation. However, I wanted to draw attention to the counter-revolution that was nurtured throughout this time by foreign investors. Guatemalan elites and international interest in the success of the United Fruit Company

began to smear the communist label on the Arbenz government and enlist help from the United States in the form of support for the organization of a coup. Guatemala became a testbed for early CIA operations, culminating in a yearlong campaign to create dissention in the military, thus forcing Arbenz to crack down internally, which fueled the cause of the opposition (Grandin, 2004). Anti-communist sentiments were further cultivated throughout the countryside by the network of Catholic churches who worked as CIA puppets, drawing on Colonial racism as fuel. Archbishop Rossell y Arellano, so enraged by the potential disruption of the agrarian reforms to the church's power, proclaimed that socialism was merely communism's "ridiculous, shameful puppet" (Grandin, 2004, p. 79). Between the sway of the churches in the communities, radical anti-communist groups such as the *Comite de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas* (CEUA) and the *Movemento de Liberacion Nacional* (MLN), and the US interventions aimed to disrupt the fragile unity of only decade-old government – the history of pre-meditated counter-insurgency was revealed. A CIA sponsored Colonel, Carsol Castillo Armas, forcibly replaced Arbenz in 1954, a US appointee who aligned with capitalist and nationalistic interests.

There is a long history of foreign interests manipulating the political situation of Guatemala to suit their needs. The legacy of Colonial violence and control is not easily expunged. The *Ixil* people during this period were caught between political machinations revolving around their stolen lands, and being in the middle, played a critical role in the decade of hope as did so many of the Mayan people who fought to reclaim their lands. For this dissertation it is critical to consider the encounters that the *Ixil* had with foreigners, clandestine and visible. All their experiences and learned wisdom reverberate in their

encounters with young Global North learners in contemporary educational programs such as ISL.

Venas: Vulnerable Research

I look back fondly at the trips I made to Prague, Czech Republic at various points throughout 2010-2015. The city is a historical monument, remaining relatively untouched from World War II bombings. Standing in the *Staroměstské náměstí,* the oldest square in the historic town center, you can see the architecture of the different centuries unfolding like a canvas wherever you set your gaze. Punctuating the façade of the old city hall is the *Pražský orloj*, the Astronomical clock, an ornate design that has been in operation since 1410. On the hour, figures representing the twelve disciples of Jesus are revealed in small windows above the face, culminating with a macabre skeleton, death, which strikes the bell. I was told a story that in centuries past it was a tradition that if the people were unsatisfied with civic leaders, they would toss them out a third-story window as the bell rang. Time, apparently, haunts those in power. Hidden beneath the streets in and around this square are old wine cellars in the basements of some buildings. They are cavernous halls with arched ceilings that were now converted into clandestine jazz clubs emerging first in the era of the communist surveillance state, which the Czechoslovakians endured for four decades. These clubs, which have only grown in number since that time, have thrived in a post-communist Czech Republic and in my experience, they demonstrate something of a religious-like gathering space in which emotions are expressed and received, albeit without words. An image that depicts the social milieu of the time, and that is equally disturbing as it is striking, is an installation of scattered sculptures that adorn the Žižkov TV tower. Large statues of oversized babies whose faces have been replaced by barcodes crawl up and

down, representing the stifling totalitarian culture that repressed public expression. Despite, or perhaps in spite of this experience, the trumpets and saxophones of the Prague jazz clubs reverberate upon the brick enclosures underground. It was in Prague where I also found a community with which I resonated. I attended an international seminary located in the outskirts North West of the city where I completed my master's degree in theology and found myself digging into my religious past.

I inherited an *Anabaptist* approach to faith growing up in a Mennonite family who were committed members of a church in rural Saskatchewan. The opportunity and decision to pursue a degree in theology was motivated by my desire to think intentionally about an aspect of my life that was, for better or for worse, taken for granted. I appreciated taking time to explore this *Anabaptist* heritage within a community of learners who were culturally proximal to the origins of the movement in Europe. As a particular branch within reformation history, *Anabaptism* emphasizes certain key convictions (McClendon, 1988): peaceable relationships, non-violence, social justice, and the importance of community over individuality. These values emerged from the historic *Anabaptists'* shared experience living in the midst of the violent and divisive European religious Reformation in the 16th century.[6] The *Anabaptists* were a people oppressed by both the Roman Catholics, who saw them simply as Protestants, as well as by the emerging Protestants for their resistance to align with state-imposed orthodoxy. Their confrontation of the hierarchical power structures so inherent to Christendom paved the way for an openness toward differences of belief and practice (Rutschman, 1989, p. 58). Their resistance to proclaimed religiosity and belief-

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[6] For a historical perspective of the Anabaptist movement see Klaasen, 2001. See Finger, 2004 for a robust Anabaptist theology and Reimer, 2010, which explores an Anabaptist theo-poltical vision.

centric orthodoxy, led to a theology that centered on practices as determinants of spiritual commitment, or orthopraxy. The *Mennonites*, which is the tradition I was born into, are a people who were deeply affected by the historic events of violence and conflict and because of their history, have been committed to being in right and just relationships with other vulnerable people.[7] From this heritage I have adopted a concern for social justice, which from an *Anabaptist* perspective "amounts to a *form of being* more than a *strategy for doing*" (Driver, 1989, p. 109); social justice is understood relationally, not transactionally.

In Prague I discovered conversation partners with which to explore my growing understanding of *Anabaptist* values and practices. My supervisor at the time, Tim Noble, introduced me to his Jesuit tradition and the voices of Latin American Liberation theologians who, like the historic *Anabaptists*, had been motivated by their faith commitments to grapple directly with the political and economic issues of the time that affected the poor (Noble, 2014). According to one of the first scholars of this movement, Gutiérrez (1973), *liberation* "expresses the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspect of the economic, social, and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes" (p. 36).

This was, I realized, a modern theological expression that parallels the *Anabaptists'* experience. Liberation Theology shares the conviction that it is what we do that matters,

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[7] I want to highlight here that Mennonites have been invested in efforts of *restorative justice*. MCC, a Mennonite organization, works in various ways towards these efforts at the local level in all provincial/state/country offices; it is a primary aspect of their organizational culture. For an overview of restorative justice see Johnstone, 2011; Redekop, 2008; Zehr, 2014. At the same time, I do not want to gloss over a history, specifically in Canada that was at times complicit in participating in injustices towards the First Nations people during the period of settlement and the institution of Residential Schools (Rempel-Petkau, 2010). Thankfully, there are examples of restorative justice working to prompt some Mennonite communities to work towards reconciliation (Polachic, 2017). I have also written about the importance for Mennonites to be present for the truth and reconciliation events in Canada when they were taking place in 2012 (Heidebrecht, 2014).

not simply what we think or believe; therefore, the epistemologies inherent in one's faith experience were naturally politicized and impacted the way people interacted with authorities (Noble, 2014). Both traditions de-emphasize theorizing in favor of new ways of *living* (Gutiérrez, 1991) finding resonance with *critical pedagogies* (Segundo,1976)[8] that focus on the experiences of the oppressed (Mesters, 1989; Rowland & Corner, 1990). The concern for the poor is not simply a contemplative concern but "effective action for liberation" (Boff & Boff, 1986, p. 4) from the systems that have unjustly created and forced poverty upon them. The poor, from the perspective of this more contemporary theology, are "the workers exploited by the capitalist system; the underemployed, those pushed aside by the production process – a reserve army always at hand to take the place of the employed; they are the laborers of the countryside, and migrant workers with only seasonal work" (Boff & Boff, 1986, p. 4). A nuance in an understanding of the poor that I have grown to appreciate in Liberation Theology is that their situation is defined not only by their relationship to oppressions and oppressors but also by the way "they react to oppression, resist it, and fight to set themselves free from it" (Boff & Boff, 1986, p. 27). The poor must be recognized as social and political agents, although in many cases, silenced ones.

Liberation Theology, unlike its historic *Anabaptist* counterpart, takes a much more engaged political stand against the violence that has shaped and problematized the history of the colonized world (Noble, 2009). The anti-colonial lens is more acute, and this is due in part to positionality. The Anabaptists were pre-colonial people, and their experience was of a Christendom state, which they stood against. However, in their resistance many

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[8] Critical theorists such as Paulo Freire were contemporaries of the Liberation Theology movement.

Anabaptists chose to remove themselves from the oppressions they were surrounded by and were conditioned over centuries of migrations from place to place seeking peace, to the idea of settling. The emergence of one of these Anabaptist groups, the Mennonites, begin in what is presently the Netherlands and northern Germany. Their first migration to Prussia (modern Poland), starting in 1540, was motivated by the religious freedoms granted. From there, upon the invitation of the Russian government, many Mennonites later settled in southern Russia (modern Ukraine) between 1789 and 1806 (Heidebrecht, 2015). These "Russian" Mennonites quickly established colonies and were very successful agriculturalists and businesspeople. However, this was a short-lived home as a shift in government policy, including forced military conscription, caused the first wave of settlers to immigrate to North America between 1874-1880. Following the Communist revolution, a second wave of immigrants fled the colonies they had built up to find safety elsewhere. Mennonites landed in various places at this time including Canada where many were sent across the vast lands to carve out a life in the Prairies. My story emerges from this story of settlement and re-settlement. In my experience growing up in this tradition these stories defined the Mennonite experience while the stories of the resistance of *Mistahimaskwa*/Big Bear and the signing of Treaty 6[9], which took place a mere fifty kilometers north of where I grew up, were notably absent in my childhood other than the curriculum's fixation of the specific conflicts that took place during the North-West Rebellion. The story of place-making for Settlers often obscures the stories of displacement of the people who lived before them. Inviting these new-old stories to a place of prominence is a part of the process of my own self-locating, a responsibility (Peltier et al., 2019) for researchers who

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[9] See, Tobias, J.L. (1983).

undertake complex projects and, as is the case with this project, where the context of

research has a deep history of settler-colonial and Indigenous relationships.

I have been influenced by the ontologies of *Anabaptist* and Liberation traditions.

Through the eyes of these people whose theory has always been nested within practice, I

have learned about a dialogic way of being in the world. Their approach is to live and

reflect on that living. This brings to mind again Boler's (1999) ideas of a pedagogy of

discomfort that calls for action and, as she says, an "action hopefully catalyzed as a result of

learning to bear witness" (p. 179). I am convinced that the role of education, and, by

extension education research, is to help us become *awake* (Dewey, 1938) to the personal,

social, and political contexts that shape our understandings of things. In this way I see the

role of the researcher as that of a witness to things seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and

touched. And, if I may adapt a specifically religious nuance to convey what I believe to be

the responsibility of being a witness, is the necessity of giving testimony. The way I employ

this term is to actively locate oneself, reporting on one's experiences for the sake of moving

others to action. Behar (1997) similarly suggest that research texts should aim to take the

spectator (reader) "somewhere we couldn't otherwise get" (p.14). I am using words, such

as *testimony* and *reporting*, to highlight the role of the researcher because, as I said at the

very beginning of this chapter, research is riddled with subjectivities. I do not see

subjectivity as a limitation but as a rich and necessary feature, so long as the positionality

of the researcher is divulged. The point of naming specific ontological and epistemological

commitments is so that we might notice the ways they shape the basket that is the research

project; contributing to which theories are applied, in what ways the methodology is

developed, and which audiences are considered (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

Varas: Mayan Decolonization

There is a history of authorities in Guatemala using their power to manipulate the people. A prominent religious figure in Guatemala, Archbishop Rossell y Arellano, employed the scapegoat mechanism (Girard, 1986), entrenching the settler interpretation of the Indigenous when he said,

> The disorganized tribes that inhabited our America, would have disappeared had not the Spanish conquest arrived to providentially unite them and give them their triple gifts of religion, blood, and language. (Grandin, 2004, 81)

This epistemology, cultivated through generations of colonial thinking, paved the way for the atrocities of what was then called the Guatemalan civil war. It has since been recognized for what it was. At the *Memory of Silence*, an event of the peace accords hosted on February 23, 1999, the findings of the United Nations Commission for Historical Clarification were disclosed amidst an audience of human rights activists, politicians, military officers, and diplomats (McAllister & Nelson, 2013, p. 5). Mayan delegates were also present in a room that must have been filled with tension. The critical finding presented was the naming of the acts of terror committed against the Mayan communities as genocide. There was a moment of clarity and relief as the public acknowledgement for the treatment of the Indigenous peoples of Guatemala was finally revealed to the world.

During the years of this Mayan genocide the military deemed the *Ixil* triangle a "red" area. This designation meant that from 1978-1983 the *Ixil* were targeted by military incursions, bombings, and massacres (REMHI, 1999). The valleys in the *Cuchumatanes* were perpetually caught up in a climate of terror that has had a long-term impact on communities. The loss of traditional authorities, elders, and the memory of their ancestors'

experience of the Mayan approaches to life and language were effects of this colonial-inspired violence. People in these communities at the time lived in a constant state of tension, exhausted by the generalized violence and the horror of the massacres, which were used for effect as public displays of power and an instrument of manipulating fear – strategies of social control (REMHI, 1999, p. 9).

The *Ixil* experience since colonization has been punctuated by invasions. At times, such as with the Spanish conquest, the invasions were direct and confrontational. In other instances, the invasion was subtle and full of subterfuge. This was the case when the Army of the Poor, a Guerilla group, began organizing in the *Ixil* region through the 1970s leading up to the genocide. This group was composed of a small band of radicals who were survivors of insurgencies in the eastern part of the country in the *Chiapas* and were bent on militarizing others, finding in this remote region a place to start a liberation army (Stoll, 1993). After years of methodical recruitment tactics, they gained ground in local elections by tapping into generations of oppression, touting economic gains and political freedom for votes cast in their favor (Stoll, 1993). The *Ixil* voices that were recruited to their efforts were trained to stoke the fires of resistance. The military campaign was swift to follow, designed as a way of "integrating indigenous communities into the state," and was touted as a "stabilization project" (Grandin, 2004, p. 129). The *Ixil* were literally caught between two armies.

In the approximate aftermath of the genocide in 1986 the U.S. State Department, representative of the colonizing world, said in a statement,

Guatemala's high violence levels cannot be accounted for by economic or political variables. Equally poor nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have lower

violence levels. The explanation for Guatemala's high level of violence probably is

rooted in cultural and sociological factors unique to Guatemala. Guatemala is

distinguished from other Central American nations by the duality of its culture

where a wealthy ladino[10] minority lives side by side with an impoverished Indian

majority largely marginalized from national political and economic life… The use of

violence to settle disputes of almost any nature is accepted in Guatemala's

indigenous culture. (Grandin, 2004, 100)

What an example of the colonial imagination at work. The United States conveniently

"expunged from the narrative" (Grandin, 2004, p. 101) their involvement through anti-

communist rhetoric, ultimately turning the gaze of accountability on the Mayans. Yet it was

the Mayan people who, throughout the 1990s, were instrumental in forcing the signing of

the peace accords referenced above. The power they demonstrated in this post-genocide

period led to the dismantling of "rural paramilitaries and army garrisons" and their voices

"cut through army propaganda and silence about the causes, extent, and perpetrators of the

violence, and they wove a new narrative of Guatemalan history (Copeland, 2019, p. 2). Even

the common framing of this era as *post-genocide* insists that events of the genocide linger

and that the people live in its shadow (McAllister & Nelson, 2013). Insofar that the Maya

were literally caught between two armies it should also be said that they understood the

"historical opportunity offered them to undermine the pillars that sustained the system

that oppressed them" (Arias, 2009, p. 1876). Decolonizing the colonial narrative of

Indigenous subjects as pre-modern and incapable victims and refusing to be defined by the

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[10] The term Ladino that emerged during the colonial era in Central America to denote people of mixed
Spanish ancestry and in the case of Guatemala, commonly refers to non-Indigenous Guatemalans.

post-genocide framing, the Mayans demonstrated how to bring together traditional wisdom and practice to wield the tools of modernity in transforming their centuries of colonized experience. Their Indigenous, Southern Epistemologies (Santos, 2014) were the source of power in confronting the ongoing colonization of their lands and communities.

Venas: Neo-Colonial Contusions

My story is interconnected with the story of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), which is a global, not for profit organization (NGO) that focuses on three areas: disaster relief, sustainable community development, and justice and peacebuilding (MCC Principles and Practices). This organization began as an agency developed by North American Mennonites to provide assistance to the Russian Mennonites suffering in the Ukraine (Epp-Thiessen, 2013). It originated as a resettlement agency for Mennonite refugees. This organization also plays an important role in this study as one of the ways that MCC invests in their three areas of focus to create "opportunities for young people to serve in Canada, the U.S. and around the world" (MCC Vision and Mission). ISL, or what MCC calls *Learning Tours,* emerged as a way of engaging young people in MCC projects in various contexts. Part of the mission of these learning tours, according to their memorandum of understanding presented to each participant, is "to be a channel for interchange between churches and community groups," which is exemplified in tours that "permit conversation with people with whom MCC works" (MCC Memorandum of Understanding). *Learning Tours*, then, focus on learning about contextual issues that pertain to the partnerships which MCC has developed for the purpose of building knowledge about and advocacy around these issues.

MCC work in Guatemala began in 1978 following a devastating earthquake that displaced 1.25 million people (Balzer & Heidebrecht, 2017). Short-term relief shifted into long-term development and peace building initiatives (Balzer & Heidebrecht, 2017) as MCC responded to ongoing needs created by Guatemala's precarious geography and the political turmoil at the time. In the coming years MCC built relationships with three communities resulting in partnerships that sought to develop economic stability, food security, the empowerment of women and children, and advocacy for local Mayan groups. These partnerships included the Catholic diocese of San Marcos, a women's cooperative in Santiago, and the youth of the *Ixil* in Nebaj. In both San Marcos and Nebaj, advocacy has focused on educating North Americans about the exploitative practices of multinational corporations involved in mono-cropping, resource extraction, and hydroelectric production (MCC Mining Justice). In Nebaj, MCC also worked with the FUNDAMAYA network, developing a project call "Land access for a dignified rural life" (Sabas, 2016). Their involvement with this project aligned with the pre-existing work of the *Ixil* University, a local institution focusing on territorial development, management of resources and environment preservation, and *Ixil* history and culture (Batz, 2019). It is a fundamentally Mayan conception and is an example of an Indigenous approach to education. This University is not recognized by the Guatemala state but by the ancestral authorities. The *Ixil* in Nebaj have hosted MCC learning tours as well as other ISL programs.

The relationship between Indigenous communities and the resource extraction industry in the last decades is complicated. Global demand for natural resources is exacerbated by democratic capitalism and its inherent bid for growth and scale. Post-conflict democracy in Guatemala has been met with disappointments for Guatemalan

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progressives as Right-wing parties have pursued free market policies of "free trade, deregulation, austerity, privatization, and resource extraction" (Copeland, 2019, p. 3). Development, a word that is bandied about by so-called developed democratic nations is, as Way (2012) says "synonymous with economic growth, rebuilding communities riven by war and natural disaster, and improvement in general" (p. 5). Development is a high value in societies that have subscribed to market values. In Guatemala, the new democracy posits that development is necessary and inevitable; a narrative that does its best to train those who listen that to participate in democracy one must also participate in free market capitalism. Some have exposed this mentality as "trojan horse aid" (Walsh, 2014), the "democracy development machine" (Copeland, 2019), or what I would suggest is something of a colonial reverberation.

As a specific example of a colonial reverberation we can look to the ways that the marketplaces in Mayan towns have changed. Little (2004) examined the cultural and economic dynamics of markets in central and western highlands towns in Guatemala. Typically, each community will have one big market day during the week, with one or two smaller market days interspersed, which is composed of vendors who travel a circuit, collecting and selling goods from town to town. This system links towns together and to the larger centers and is a microcosmic socioeconomic system. Many of the travelling merchants have adapted and grown to incorporate tourists in the post-conflict years, changing their vending routines and cliental depending on the political situation (Little, 2004, p. 96). They exhibit an inherent resilience in their adaptability. Little (2004) also argued that "marketplaces in Guatemala have become more capitalistic, principally organized around products" and marketplace relations have become "less personal than

they used to be" (p. 98). He is referring to the Mayan approach to the marketplace prior to the 1970s when the Ladino government initiated the construction of new marketplace structures, imposing euro-centric visions of architecture and purpose. These new structures were built away from the center of the towns to benefit the Ladinos and, from their perspective, were to be a "closed, clean, ordered place – free from dust, air, and foreigners" (Little, 2004, p. 99). This approach clashed with the Mayan conceptualization of markets as important busy structures to be located in the heart of the town, the beating centre of commerce and community. Of course, the move of the markets to the outskirts also skirted the issue of economic sustainability, which was becoming more centered on tourism and tourists. This initiative was socioeconomic subjugation and, as Little (2004) revealed, the tourist industry in the eyes of the Guatemalan government was so powerful so as to reconstruct places and spaces in Guatemala once again into colonial spaces and to reconstruct the people to fit this new conception (p. 74).

In 2017, I visited the city of Antigua during *Semana Santa* – Holy Week - to reflect and write after having spent time in Nebaj on a data gathering trip. The experience was unlike anything I had encountered. The city is a monument to colonialism, magnified during Holy Week as half a million tourists, both Guatemalan and foreign descend upon its cobblestone streets, overpopulating the small shops. There is also incredible beauty to be found in Antigua. The volcanic landscapes that define the horizon in all directions stand as a reminder of the city's unfortunate history. The once-proud colonial capital of Guatemala was devastated by volcanic eruptions and earthquakes through the centuries. As it stands now the city displays its history for those who wish to visit. Old Colonial architecture, cracked and crumbling, remains pockmarked throughout the city. Some structures have

been rebuilt with facades to maintain the guise of the city that once was and to act as set-dressing for the thousands of tourists each year. I was taken by the vibrant "carpets" that adorn the streets. These temporary art-installations, infused with religious symbolism and appropriated Mayan design, are created by first leveling the cobblestones with sand and then, painstakingly crafted with colored sawdust to create mandala-like images that stretch for kilometers. These carpets are then trampled by the dazzling *procesiones* that are staged in the days leading up to Easter, where floats are paraded, accompanied by the intensity of burning incense and haunting chants. It was captivating and therefore distracting for the work I had planned!

I think that *Semana Santa* encapsulates the neo-colonial experience of Guatemala. Tourists are the new temporary settlers whose collective economic power has reshaped an entire city. Similarly, I argue that ISL ensconces the colonial wick with Global Citizenship and development language. Schultz (2015) drew on Mignolo's (2011) "framework of global coloniality," highlighting the "intersectionality of economic imperialism, political exclusion and the control of authority, sexism, and epistemicide or the destruction of knowledge that was not Western" (p. 109). She noted that the Western University, installed by colonialism in its many contexts, is an institution from which epistemicide emanates. It is also an institution shaped by government policy-making. Take, for example, Canada's International Education Strategy (2014). Shultz (2015) pointed out "the links to industry and economy are clear" (p. 111), given the location of this policy within the jurisdiction of the *International Trade and Development* portfolio. The co-optation of education into industrial and economic agendas is troubling. Who is defining educational goals in this new scheme? Due to the fact that this policy document suggests that education is about "harnessing our

knowledge advantage to drive innovation and prosperity" (Canada's International Education Strategy, 2014, p.1) it seems as though education is a means to a very particular market-oriented end. The potential manipulation of curriculum design for these goals is a concern and ISL has struggled to define itself apart from this gravity as can be seen in examples such as the "Me to We" programs (Jefferess, 2012). Schultz called this a "shift toward the marketization of higher education" (p. 112). ISL programs ascribing to market logic focus on branding the experience, seeking patrons in the form of paying students, and instead of creating space for meaningful encounters with Indigenous communities such as those in Nebaj, they become *procesiones*.

The link the between the extractive industries and education is clear. ISL is politically framed as primarily an economic opportunity and while international mining extracts resources from the land, creating environmental, social, and economic impacts for its people, ISL extracts knowledge from the land and people for the growth of a Global North intellectual community. The learner from the Global North, unaware of this history is often motivated by the branding and marketing and, being trained as the consummate consumer, they purchase the experiential product for their benefit. Guatemalan democracy and a push for development sustains experiential education. It is equally interesting to see the links between *Ixil* resistance to mining mega-projects (Binks-Collier, 2020) and their resistance to uncritical ISL. In fact, the community in Nebaj requested that MCC, among other NGOs, cease sending groups of young learners on projects that do not align with the community's goals. The *Ixil* resistance to ISL situates them as experts in decolonizing ISL.

Weaving Baskets with Others

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter in the example of the Coast Salish basket weaving practice, an important part of the weaving is that it provides an opportunity for a community to do the activity together. Weaving with others provided the opportunity to share space, knowledge, humor, stories, and songs; and it is impossible to unravel this process from the product. Looking ahead to the following chapter, I will examine the history of ISL and its situatedness within experiential education and education in general. Before moving on, however, I wanted to circle back to Bringle and Hatcher's (2011) popular definition of ISL:

> A structured academic experience in another country in which the students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from the direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline and an enhanced sense of their own responsibility as citizens, locally and globally. (p. 19)

I wonder, after having spent some time weaving the *varas* and *venas* of this basket whether it is problematic to simply *define* ISL? Perhaps, in searching for a clear definition, one may too easily obfuscate the inherent complexity and diversity of what is an ever-evolving practice. Butin (2010) similarly said, "there is no one thing called service-learning" (p. xiii). His approach, like several other authors (Chambers, 2009; Jones & Kiser, 2014; Mitchell, 2008), is to *conceptualize* ISL rather than *define* it. In this regard, Butin (2010) outlined four perspectives to consider: technical, cultural, political, and

antifoundational (p. 8-14). In short, his explorations of these four perspectives demonstrate the diverse ways that ISL is put into practice rather than focusing on what kinds of practices constitute ISL. Depending upon one's perspective, self-location, personal theory, and personal experiences with ISL, the definition is, really, elusive. What is uncovered here and what I find most helpful is that there seems to exist a "latent teleology," which informs "implicit goals" (Butin, 2010, p. 6) in ISL programs. As an example, Larsen (2016) pointed out that one of the problems with Bringle and Hatcher's definition is that while it is "valuable in pointing to the academic nature of ISL, as well as the aims associated with cross-cultural and global understanding," it "focuses entirely upon what the student desires, does and learns" (p. 14). Jefferess (2012) further exposed the participant-centric teleological commitments of ISL, which he says may prevent participants from recognizing

> how we might connect ourselves to the ideals and strategies of social movements
> around the world that seek not aid but the transformation of these structures of
> inequality and the worldviews that normalize them. (p. 19)

Growing trends such as "voluntourism" (Biddle, 2014) and "cause marketing" (Jordan, 2016) that aim to transform young people's consumer habits for "social good" (Sylvestre-Williams, 2015), are driving the design of many current ISL experiences. The language that permeates this field such as volunteerism, service, development, aid and other such socially conscious branding reaffirm for participants that they are politically and socially poised to address the global inequalities they encounter by utilizing the inherent power they possess. In order to discover a decolonizing agenda for ISL, then, it is important to consider what MacDonald (2013) suggested, which is to "cultivate citizens who, rather than simply claiming their globality, recognize their rootedness and citizenship and the

legacies they inherit" (p. 218).

One of the goals I set out for myself in this introduction was to tell stories of my own experience rather than state with technical precision my personal theory. I am reminded of something that Margaret Kovach said during a lecture, which I'll paraphrase; "don't make research exotic. It's not magical. It is simply pragmatic and practical." In the same breath she also spoke about organic knowledge. I take this to mean knowledge that is gained through relationship. Sharing knowledge, organic knowledge, in relationship is so often done through the medium of stories. While indirect and imprecise, they are important because they create emotional connections, revealing different meanings depending on who is listening. The power of story in research, as I see it here, is twofold. Stories invite diverse meanings based on readers' self-location and provide an opportunity to discover within and translate that meaning. Stories also invite a group of readers into a shared experience and way of seeing the world. I hope that both of these outcomes may be discovered.

Chapter Two - Situating and Conceptualizing International Service Learning

Every practice has a history and within that history are actors who have shaped it, moulded it, and even created standards by which it is measured. MacIntyre (1984) said, "we cannot be initiated into a practice without accepting the authority of the best standards realized so far" (p. 190). The goal at the outset of this second chapter, then, is to explore the 'standards' in SL and ISL and name several actors within this community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000) whose influence has had a lasting impact. First, I will look back, exploring the foundational theories that have informed and given shape to service-learning. Then, I examine several cultural, social, and institutional factors, which in the Canadian context, have contributed to what I will call a 'theoretical smorgasbord,' specifically for ISL.[11] Finally, I will examine several challenges and opportunities for ISL research that will then frame my evaluations of the existing body of literature, which attends to the impact of ISL on Global South and Indigenous communities.

Learning through Experience and Experiential Education

To situate ISL one must consider the theoretical influences of several key philosophers: John Dewey, David Kolb, Eric Erikson, and Donald Schon (Hernandez, 2018; Johnston et al. 2013). Each of these men[12] has contributed to the field of education by

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[11] These latter theoretical influences are, I think, in line with Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) ideas about "the *habitus*," which he defined as an "embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history" (p. 56).

[12] Hernandez (2018) rightly noted that this list is made up of "patriarchal, albeit liberal, philosophers" (p. 13), which I think is a point worth mentioning considering the rootedness of service learning in dominant Eurocentric epistemologies and educational structures.

exploring philosophies of *experience* (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984)*, human, social, and cognitive development* (Erikson, 1994) as well as *reflective practices* (Schon, 1983).[13]

John Dewey and the Reflective Learner

Chronologically, it is essential to look first at the work of John Dewey, whose ideas about experience have influenced entire fields of education and pedagogies such as outdoor and adventure education, environmental education, and service learning (Roberts, 2012). Inherent to Dewey's arguments is the role of experience as teacher. Johnson (1993) elaborated on Dewey by saying learners are "imaginative synthesizing animals" (p. 152), that is, they make sense of life by reflecting on their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Furthermore, experiences are intrinsically bound up in physical and social spaces and therefore, as Dewey (1938) suggested, *where* one learns and *who* one learns alongside, is so central to *what* one learns. This is an important point for situating ISL, which borrows from this notion of the role of place in learning and the displacement of learners from their familiar settings. In Dewey's (1938) estimation, "there is no such thing as educational value in the abstract" (p. 46). In fact, he argued that a learner's experiences are always educative, even when they are "*mis*-educative," sometimes leaving the learner in a "groove or a rut," which narrows the "field of further experience," rather than expanding it, creating centrifugal rather than centripetal habits (Dewey, 1938, p. 25-26).

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[13] There is much to explore in regards to the impact of *development theories* on SL and ISL practice and something that I can only make note of in this essay. The prominence given student *reflection* as an educational technique has long been employed within SL and study abroad programs and demonstrates an obvious extension of, in particular, Schon's (1983) work. Worth mentioning is the ways in which *student development theories* have subtlety influenced SL and ISL designs to emphasize *individual students* as the central figures in their programs.

A centerpiece of Dewey's (1938) theory of experience is reflective thinking, or what he calls the "inquiry into inquiry" (p. 20). This facilitates, as Quay (2013) noted, "a circular process," or a way of making the act of reflection into an *active* experience itself, which is distinguishable from simply *reacting* to an experience (p. 25-27). The significance of reflection is also echoed in Dewey's (1938) ideas about the "participation of the learner" (p. 67). It is clear to see these influences in SL and ISL programs, which feature participatory and reflective learning (Claus & Ogden, 1999b). In fact, SL and ISL often centralize the learner as the primary subject of the programs, sometimes as I will argue, to the detriment of other actors involved such as the communities they are serving and learning in. Dewey's ideas situate the learning of an active agent in what and how they learn. Furthermore, he emphasizes the role of a learning community in providing a social space in which to understand the impact of particular experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) build upon the ideas of Dewey that I have outlined and suggested that experiences do not exist as segmented and isolated events but are formed by past experiences and, for *reflective* learners, there is much educative potential in attending to the continuity of their experiences as they look forward. What Clandinin and Connelly are speaking about is the temporal aspects of learning through experience, creating connections between past experiences and present ones.

Dewey's (1938) insight that "perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies" is "the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time" (p. 48) has, I believe, informed the way SL design tends to (or attempts to) deconstruct compartmentalization in learning, thus creating a platform for finding relevance between what is learned and what is experienced in life (Rowe & Chapman, 1999). Dewey's critique

of traditional education, in part, was that it offers learners non-transferrable knowledge

and in some cases students must unlearn in order to work within different environments

(Johnston et al., 2013). It is easy to see the lines drawn between Dewey's theory of

experience and its influence on SL and ISL practice. In many cases the social context

created by the activities of *service* in these programs also facilitates a natural space for

reflection, which is the first step in creating connections for learners to consider not only

academic outcomes, but to explore new motivations, responsibilities, and skills (Farber,

2011). The activities within service learning – *serving, learning, reflecting* (Bringle &

Hatcher, 2011) are, in the best cases, powerful tools for making meaning from experiences

and for integrating and attending to the continuity of experience. Dewey's theories are

foundational for SL designs that are intentional about linking "classrooms with the real

world, the cognitive with the affective, and theory with practice" (Butin, 2010, p. 28).

David Kolb and Transformation as Outcome

While Dewey is credited as being one of the most influential educational theorists to

articulate the guiding principles of what can be called *experiential education,*[14] Kolb's

(1984) theoretical work and his use of the slightly different concept of *experiential*

learning[15] is equally important to consider as we look back at the history of ISL. Echoing

Dewey, he said that "ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed

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[14] This term is generally used to describe the *field* of *experiential education*, and while Dewey has provided foundational theoretical work in this field it has since been established and developed through the continuing theoretical work of the over 30 year old *Association for Experiential Education* (AEE) that regularly publish the *Journal of Experiential Education* (JEE) accessed at: www.aee.org/jee

[15] This term is generally used to denote the techniques or practices of learning. One can incorporate *experiential learning* into any pedagogy. Although, some authors suggest this term may simply be a redundancy since all learning is experiential (Smith et al., 2011). Bringle and Hatcher (1996) have noted that Kolb's ideas about experiential learning are a theoretical basis for SL programs.

and re-formed through experience" (p. 26). Kolb's (1984) understanding of learning is that

it is a "process grounded in experience," which challenges the traditional emphasis on

outcomes, a focus that he criticized as being the "definition of nonlearning" (p. 27-28).

Where Kolb (1984) diverges from Dewey is in his understanding of learning as a

transactional[16] process between people and environments. He emphasized the relational

nature of all learning and introduces an important concept that SL and ISL have latched

onto, which is that of *transformation* (p. 38).

Claus and Ogden (1999a) made this connection explicit, saying that SL is a

pedagogical practice rooted in the "principles of experiential education" that have the

potential to become a "transformative social movement" (p. 69) when students are

empowered to think critically and participate in actions to improve the communities where

they live. These authors suggested that the ideas found in transformative education are

particularly relevant in the historical development of SL, citing five concepts that have

made significant impacts: "*situated learning, dialogic discourse, teachers as problem posers,*

critical thought and consciousness, and *activist learning*" (p. 71). This emphasis on

transformation in SL policies and practices, some SL advocates suggest, extends to *all*

involved (Butin, 2006). This claim, which is difficult to ascertain given the noted dearth of

literature exploring the impact of these programs on communities (Larsen, 2016),

however, does point to the highly politicized contexts in which SL and ISL programs

operate. Some scholars see this apparent commitment as nothing more than "lip-service" to

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[16] Kolb (1984) is very clear of the difference between his use of this term and Dewey's (1938) term *interaction* (p. 36). The later he suggests is too mechanical, while the former conveys fluidity and, most importantly, that once a relationship has been formed, between peoples and/or their environments, "both are essentially changed" (p. 36).

an ideal (Hernandez, 2018), if not connected to critical and decolonizing theoretical work, of which I will say more later.

The Role of Critical Theories in Shaping SL and ISL Practices

While not ubiquitous in SL and ISL programs, I must include an analysis of the ways in which *critical theories* have shaped the practice. Freire (1972, 1985), who is often cited in SL literature (Cipolle, 2010; Jacoby, 1996; Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2015; Mitchell, 2008; Rosenberger, 2000; Stewart & Webster, 2011), is known for his work in developing critical pedagogy dialogues and as an advocate for the vulnerable and oppressed.[17] His ideas about critical theory in education, often contrasted with what he calls the *banking[18]* model of education (Freire, 1972), has been both adopted and appropriated by SL. For example, SL has been conceptualized as including a varying degree of *criticality* (Jones & Kiser, 2014; Peacock, 2013) and operating on a paradigmatic spectrum that centralizes either charity, project, or social change (Jones & Kiser, 2014). Critical SL efforts, or *criticality* in SL (Cipolle, 2010; Claus & Ogden, 1999a, 1999b; Mitchel, 2008; Peacock, 2013; Rosenberger, 2000; Stewart & Webster, 2011), regardless of where they fall within this spectrum, are claimed by both "traditional" and "critical" SL advocates in the literature (Mitchell, 2008). Freire's ideas are, seemingly, pervasive and influential.

The point that I am trying to tease out here is that there are varying interpretations

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[17] Rosenberger (2000), outlined four concepts in Freire's work that have shaped SL in ways that have led to the inclusion of criticality. They are as follows: "(1) praxis as cultural action for freedom; (2) the dynamic nature of reality; (3) balance of power; and (4) conscientization" (p. 30). These four concepts have had many pedagogical implications for SL, including but not limited to: a greater emphasis placed on the dialogical aspects of learning for students, recognizing real-world contexts as sites for integrative "problem-posing," and ultimately these concepts have also challenged the notion of *service* as simply "helping others" (p. 40-42).
[18] Similar to what Dewey (1938) would term as *traditional* education. Essentially, this is a model that is concerned with the deposit of information. It is known for its directional, transactional, and hierarchical forms of pedagogy.

and therefore, implementations of critical theories in SL. Traditional SL advocates, whose designs tend to include elements of charity or project-based work, tend to reduce Freire's ideas to little more than implementing *critical thinking* or emphasizing impacts on personal and cognitive development of student participants (See, for example: Eyler & Giles, 1999). Critical theories, when coopted into traditional learning models that focus on student outcomes may remain firmly committed to concentrating on the activities of *service* and *learning* themselves, without a critical examination of the impacts of these activities on those who live in the context that these programs operate in.

Alternatively, advocates of 'Freirian-inspired' SL include a high degree of criticality in their designs (Jones & Kiser, 2014) and tend to be more considerate of the structural and contextual elements (Pompa, 2002; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Verjee, 2012; Miller-Young et al., 2015). In this vein, critical theories have influenced SL and ISL by providing a helpful corrective for designs that emphasized the individual student's experiential learning to the exclusion of the structural, social, economic, and political contexts they inhabit. Critical SL and ISL efforts, such as those committed to social justice or social change outcomes (Jones & Kiser, 2014), tend to de-center students and focus on the relationships and partnerships between the institutions, organizations and communities involved. Freire's attending to the dynamics of power in educative practice has influenced these veins of SL to (re)focus on systems of inequality (Mitchell, 2008), the reality of oppression (Rosenberger, 2000), and learners' involvement in and sometimes perpetuation of these things.

Regardless of whether an SL program is considered a traditional or critical effort,[19] there is a trend to incorporate social justice concerns and outcomes that challenge learners to consider their position amidst these political, economic, and social realities they find themselves immersed in. The development of "critical consciousness" or "conscientization" (Chambers, 2009, p. 6) is now a central feature of many SL and ISL programs. SL literature, across the spectrum, points to the transformative potential arising from negotiating the complicated experiences students will encounter (Kiely, 2004; Pompa, 2005). Likely, the different ways in which critical theories are employed in SL and ISL practice can be observed in whether these programs help students internalize or externalize the learning goals. In some programs one will find a level of intentionality in designing learning goals that are "collaborative, active, community oriented, and grounded in the culture of the student" (Taylor, 2014, p. 97), and at the same time, aimed at helping students find ways to: (a) create social change, (b) redistribute power, and (c) develop authentic relationships (Jones & Kiser, 2014), all indicative of principles derived from *critical theories*.

The Theoretical Smorgasbord of the Canadian Context

It is helpful to recall MacIntyre's suggestion that we cannot understand a practice, such as SL/ISL, apart from being aware of the people who have constructed it. The history of practices matter and history is always particular to the places we inhabit. MacIntyre (1984) illustrated this point by explaining that practices are intimately connected with social structures, or what he terms *institutions*. For example, the practices of physics and medicine are realized within the universities and hospitals in which they are situated

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[19] I have borrowed these categories from Mitchell (2008).

(MacIntyre, 1984, p. 194). I hope to adapt MacIntyre's insight by examining the theoretical

impact on ISL of several, specifically (although not uniquely) *Canadian* institutions: *study*

abroad programs, *global development/volunteerism*, and *global citizenship education* (GCE).

This list is by no means exhaustive, but rather my interpretation of the most salient factors

that have influenced SL/ISL in the Canadian context. The theoretical impact on these

institutions is undeniable, and while not *foundational* in the same way as experiential and

critical theories, examining them may help explain the history of common contemporary

designs found in ISL. In exploring these institutions, I am also following the lead of Bringle

and Hatcher (2011) who have suggested that the roots of ISL exist between an intersection

of three educational domains: "(a) service learning, (b) study abroad, and (c) international

education" (p. 4). While my conceptualization overlaps with their own to a certain extent, I

have chosen to emphasize *development and volunteerism* as well as *global citizenship*

education instead of *service learning* and *international education* because of the impact

these (former) have had on ISL, specifically within the Canadian context.

Study Abroad Programs

First, I will examine the influence of study abroad programs on ISL. The concept of

study abroad, cites O'Sullivan and Smaller (2013), "has a long history, which in Canada and

the United States can be traced to the 19th and early 20th Century phenomenon of the *Grand*

Tour" (p. 3). These trips, generally speaking, were less than a semester long and aimed at

exposing students to the achievements of the Western World (p. 3). The destinations of

these trips were typically European and were sold to students from Canada and the U.S. as

a kind of return to the Old World, or what would become known as traditional destinations

(Taieb & Doerr, 2017). The Grand Tour was influenced by the ethos of colonial travelers

who were enamored by the newfound access to novel contexts and used travel as a tool for self-benefit. Ogden (2007) drew a line between colonial travel and what he calls the colonial student, who emerged in this age of study abroad programs; taking full advantage of their political situatedness as Global North people to navigate 'foreign' contexts within "the confines of a political and bureaucratic system of established protocols and practices" (p. 37). The legacy of colonialism is etched into the design of study abroad.

It was in the post World-War II world where the study abroad programs began to flourish due to the growth of international educational exchange (Crabtree, 1998; Plater, 2011). The goal of the new study abroad programs were to promote a sense of global citizenship, enhancing students' "understanding of global and international issues while also serving both the institution and other communities" (Crabtree, 1998, p. 185). As global transportation methods shifted to air travel, accessibility to 'non-traditional' destinations defined the next evolution of the study abroad programs; longer visits were replaced with shorter visits and the emphasis on language acquisition declined as students from Canada and the U.S. visited non-European countries. Ogden (2007) spoke of these programs as cultivating the colonial student. These learners were motivated by emotions, which were harnessed by the growing capitalist atmosphere to become fuel for selling the product of an experience. The romantic notion of the quest or a rite of passage was invoked to hook participants, and as Taieb and Doerr (2017) explained, this was marketed through a variety of methods: a drive for self-transformation in the move from youth to adulthood; the desire for wisdom and transformation through the voyage to a spiritual or intellectual center; the desire to free oneself from local concerns and ties; a drive for cultivation of the spirit and a mastery of the past; and equivocal passion, attraction to luxury and/or the exotic with their

threat of possible corruption; and the feeling of entitlement, a desire to know and master the world derived from perpetuating a sense of power (p. 38).

University-based study abroad programs were also influenced by institutions that increasingly responded to consumer demands for state-of-the-art facilities, smaller classes, broad academic supports, and exceptional accommodations and food, which became staples of university branding (Ogden, 2007). Caught up in a competitive market, study abroad programs became a form of advertising and easily fell prey to colonial thinking that obscured what were essentially programs perpetuating elitism and consumption.

Volunteerism and Voluntourism

Second, the growth of *volunteerism* in Canada functioned as an extension of study abroad programs. The idea of volunteering was often motivated by Western idealisms about altruism, charity and the harnessing of privilege. For example, Rennick (2013) argued that many Canadian volunteer initiatives were based on social justice and social welfare values that are tied to "nationalistic values growing out of a Christian heritage concerned with mutual responsibility and the interrelatedness of human and divine concerns" (p. 23). Like study abroad programs in post World-War II Canada, volunteer programs were also shaped by the growing awareness of human rights violations and political abuses around the world. However, Rennick (2013) insisted that the "values" that undergird many of our volunteer practices continue to be influenced by "Canadian concerns with solidarity and recognition of the Other" (p. 24), which is bound up in a Canadian sense of *peacemaking*; an image "cemented into the national consciousness" (p. 31).

Volunteerism has evolved to include such initiatives as volunteer tourism

(*voluntourism*), which is a marriage of the development and aid industries with the tourist

and volunteer industries (Benson, 2011; Butcher, 2007; Hall, 2011; Richards & Wilson,

2007). "Tourism for development," Hammersley (2014) suggested, "dates back to early

missionary movements and the commencement of long-term United States Peace Corp

projects in the 1960s" (p. 856). These programs, he explained, were "endowed with the

power to educate, transform and make a difference" (p. 855). Worth stating more clearly is

the level of cultural buy-in and idealism surrounding these programs in the Canadian

context, which has created the "myth" of "autonomous" and "altruistic" extensions of some

kind of idealized version of "Canadian" society (Barry-Shaw & Jay, 2012, p. 54) and an

idealized vision of the Canadian citizen as *peacemaker* and *volunteer.* The growth of

voluntourism through the 1990s and 2000s can be attributed to its packaging by for-profit

travel companies such as "Travelocity, Cheaptickets, First Choice Holidays, GAP Adventures

and Travel Cuts" (Vrasti, 2013, p. 2) that have capitalized on a domain previously

dominated by education and not-for-profit organizations. Further entrenchment in an

economics-first politics for volunteerism is the rise of celebrity humanitarianism

(Mostafanezhad, 2013) and socially-responsible tourism movements (Mahrouse, 2011).

The idea of "making a difference" (Wearing, 2001) found in various volunteer

programs is also a central feature of other more substantiated opportunities designed for

the "gap year" phenomenon (Simpson, 2004). Faced with a formative transition between

high school and higher education and/or vocational choices, young people increasingly

explored different opportunities that would give meaning, purpose, and guidance for their

futures. The gap year, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, has led to the idealization of a

"publicly accepted 'mythology' of development" (Simpson, 2004, p. 682) that has indelibly

left a mark on ISL. Everingham (2015) noted that this close association with development and aid reproduces colonial binaries where volunteers are constructed as 'active experts' helping 'passive beneficiaries' who are constructed as backward and needy. This reinforces an essentialist dualism (Simpson, 2004) that centers the individual as the primary beneficiary of these programs rather than focusing on social justice outcomes and the structural issues that underlie these problems. Furthermore, given the proximity of Canada and the United States, it is likely the influence of American national values, "which include neo-liberal economic policies affecting military, foreign affairs, and trade activities" (Rennick, 2013, p. 23), have also left their mark on Canadian forms of *volunteerism* such as ISL.

Global Citizenship Education

Finally, I will address the impact of the growing trend towards *global citizenship education* (GCE) in Canada. Foundational to GCE, said Abdi (2015), are Dewey's ideas of citizenship education, specifically its political and democratic aims. Broadly speaking, Abdi (2015) recognized that citizenship education is a type of learning that "helps people to both conceptually and concretely ascertain and appreciate their citizenship rights and responsibilities in a given national context" (p. 13). One can see how differing national values and ideas of responsibility might create differing visions of what good citizenship education looks like. Theoretically, global citizenship is both a desirable and attainable goal (MacDonald, 2013), yet in practice there remains an ambiguity about what the goals entail. In fact, as Cameron (2013) argued, many of the claims and assumptions of global citizenship outcomes in ISL programs fail to wrestle with the diverse theories and history of global citizenship and become complicit in perpetuating "soft" forms of global citizenship

that "perpetuate voluntaristic, charity-based, and neocolonial approaches to issues of global social and environmental injustice" (p. 37-38).

To further complicate things, the emphasis on *global* citizenship education is problematic in part because it continues to be constructed within Eurocentric frameworks (Abdi, 2015, p. 15). In many cases GCE advocates must adopt a compromised position, recognizing that the conversations happening exist primarily within academic and Western spaces, yet also acknowledging the importance of this new emphasis for education (Abdi et al., 2015, p. 3-4). Therefore, in an effort to create an approachable pedagogy, GCE concentrates on the accumulation of skills, such as cross-cultural communication, global political awareness, and introducing ethical questions (MacDonald, 2013). In practice, many GCE programs include ISL experiences as part of the curriculum, which provide an immersive reflective experience. However, the price paid by lodging ISL within these larger curriculums, argued MacDonald (2013), is that their extra-curricular nature and high financial cost for participation tend to exclude those who do not share a certain level of social and economic privilege. ISL, then, perpetuates elitist forms of education (Angod, 2015).

ISL has long included goals of citizenship education in its programming prior to its integration within GCE circles (Eyler & Giles, 1999), however, the growing interest in GCE dialogues in Canada have had a significant impact on ISL designs. One example may be found in the Canadian higher education policy and strategy. Schultz (2015) detailed the effects of Canada's higher education policy released in early 2014, which outlines a new vision and practice of internationalization in Canadian education. The title, she highlighted, is chock full of ideological language: *Canada's international education strategy* (*CIES*)*:*

Harnessing our knowledge advantage to drive innovation and prosperity (p. 107). This new

strategy enters the fray of Canada's struggle to keep education decentralized and

provincially controlled. Schultz noted, "the links to industry and economy are clear" given

that this policy is situated under the jurisdiction of *International Trade and Development* (p.

111).[20] She problematized this new direction wondering about the lack of social goals and

global citizenship that "framed international engagement in the last decade" (p. 107). One

of the boundaries being defined by this new policy for GCE, and by extension ISL, is the

"corporatized and privatized rewritings of citizenship" (Abdi et al., 2015, p. 2).[21] Rennick

rightly (2013) suggested that this muddled context is ripe for "neo-colonial practices of

exploitation and subjugation" to take place in the name of shaping "good global citizens" (p.

24). ISL theory and practice are implicated in this new scheme, caught between GCE efforts

that embrace policies such as the new higher education strategy and more concerted

efforts of certain GCE scholars who continue to argue for concepts like critical pedagogy to

transform GCE in ways that are more "dialogical, critical, emancipating, and social justice-

oriented" (Guimaraes-Iosif, 2011, p. 76-77).

Challenges in International SL Research

Transitioning from a brief overview of the historical and theoretical influences of

ISL, I want to draw attention to what I consider to be important conversations related to

ISL research. Eby's (1998) unpublished speech, "why service learning is bad," is an

important and provocative think piece. Interestingly, it is often cited in SL and ISL

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[20] See, Engel, 2000, for a treatise of *market ideology* versus *democratic values* of which this is a great example.
[21] See, Jefferess, (2012). His critique of the *Me to We* movement, which includes GCE aims and ISL elements, is that it is a for-profit enterprise that "promotes a way of being good in the world as a consumer identity" (p. 18).

literature that cast critical observations upon the practice. Eby (1998), in pointed form, offered readers six future directions for ISL design, which he calls "a beginning agenda." I will not elaborate on all six points but consider his first to be the most relevant for this proposal, which is the necessity of incorporating the perspectives of all stakeholders in ISL. These stakeholders he listed as "students, faculty, educational institutions, service recipients, community agencies, and communities" (p. 6). This insight made over twenty years ago remains a neglected area of study, in part due to the complications and challenges of research in international contexts (Tonkin, 2011). Eby's (1998) argument also pointed to the primary focus of this research, which investigates the impact of ISL on communities.

Logistics

The logistical challenges for conducting *International* SL research are myriad. Many communities where ISL programs bring Global North participants are located in remote regions due to the alignment of ISL and the development and NGO industries that often oversee or facilitate these exchanges. Gathering data is resource intensive, demanding a great deal of time to simply travel to and between sites. This is not to mention that Global North researchers must work into their research budget the costs for international travel. ISL research is costly. A further complication arises when organizing research within contexts where English-speaking researchers do not speak the language of those in the communities who are participating. Translation and translators are often a necessary component of ISL research and within Indigenous communities are an imperative. The language barriers that are frequently encountered may be a relevant reason for the shortfall of literature pertaining to ISL and "a critical aspect of questioning power and an

important element of ethical representation of the Third World" (Reynolds & Gasparini, 2016, p. 39).

National Interests

Furthermore, the logistical and ethical difficulties of doing research with human subjects in international contexts tends to dissuade qualitative projects. Relationships are critical in forming trust and gathering meaningful data in qualitative research designs. It comes as no surprise then that one will find a disparity in research literature that has examined the design and methodology of ISL rather than its impact on communities. What qualitative work has been done, said Kiely and Hartman (2011), has often centered on arguments such as credibility and the technical aspects of implementing ISL; a finding that points to the institutionalization of ISL. As noted above, the logistical difficulties of assessing the impacts of programs in international contexts leads to a tendency to default to assessing students, faculty, and institutional involvement (Kiely and Hartman, 2011); elements of a study that are more readily accessible to research. Of course, the focus on bettering programs often aligns with funding objectives that preference outcomes which give back to National institutions. Research projects with objectives that benefit other national contexts and communities in the Global South are likely dismissed due to misalignment with broad national research focus areas.

Reductionism

There is also a need to deconstruct the prevalent binaries that are found in ISL research (north/south, university/community, developed/undeveloped, participant/host, researcher/community partner) and move beyond *othering* the voices of community

members. Tellingly, studies demonstrate that Global North participants tend to use these binaries as imaginative fodder for their understanding of their positionality in ISL, showing consistent preference for a "charity orientation" and activities that involve "helping" rather than with activities that "attempt societal change" (Moely & Miron, 2005, p. 74). So, while Global North ISL designs remain tethered to study abroad programs and volunteerism, which stress the impact on students rather than communities (Moely & Miron, 2005, p. 193), the breadth of the literature remains limited to focusing on the experiences of Northern participants.

Domestic Focus

A further complication for ISL is that much of the existing literature that considers community impact does so from a domestic perspective. Critical studies that examine institutional and community relationships (Morten & Bergbauer, 2015), community outcomes (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009), and frameworks for developing ethical partnerships (Hartman, 2015) all represent non-international SL. Oftentimes, ISL programs operate with a "broker" such as an NGO development organization that has pre-existing relationships with communities. Within the scope of research with such communities the broker may have a vested interest in maintaining relationships and continuing existing programs, which may become a further complication to navigate.

Shifting the Locus from Global North to Global South Participants

An overview of the existing literature reveals an overwhelming representation of research efforts focusing on Global North and specifically student participants[22] of ISL programs. In contrast, there is relatively little literature that examines the experiences of those in the Global South. Here, I will outline some of the common claims found in the literature as it pertains to both Global North and Global South participants.

Global North

Three categorical claims surface with some consistency regarding the impact of SL and ISL on Global North participants: academic effects (intellectual), character and attitudinal effects (moral), and social or civic effects (political) (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Kahne & Westheimer, 1999).

Literature espousing the academic effects of SL/ISL claims that these experiences help students deconstruct compartmentalized approaches to learning, creating links between classrooms and the real-world (Angotti et al., 2011; Boyle-Baise & Binford, 2005; Butin, 2005; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Rowe & Chapman, 1999). The literature also claims that students return from these experiences with a greater desire to invest in the academy and academics (Billig et al., 2005; Brown, 2011; Eyler, 2002; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Farber, 2011; McKenna & Rizzo, 1999; Pederson et al., 2015; Rowe & Chapman, 1999; Warren, 2012), and that these experiences lead to cognitive and intellectual developments (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Gardner & Baron, 1999; Kahne & Westheimer, 1999; Lawson et al., 2011; Moely & Ilustre, 2014; Rios, 2011a; Steinke et al., 2002; Wurr, 2002).

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[22] I add this detail since it is relevant to note that the majority of literature studies institutionalized ISL programs such as those offered by Universities.

Literature claiming character and attitudinal effects of SL/ISL reveal that students develop soft relational skills (Brown, 2011; Crabtree, 1998; Moely & Ilustre, 2014; Parson, 1999; Primavera, 1999; Tiessen, 2013), grow in their understanding of self; learning about privilege and identify in relation to others (Cipolle, 2010; Claus & Ogden, 1999a; Eyler, 2000; Eyler, 2002; Steinke et al., 2002; Yates & Youniss, 1999; Young et al., 2015), and that these experiences challenge students' ontological, epistemological, and moral/ethical foundations (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Cipolle, 2010; Farber, 2011; Gardner & Baron, 1999; Green, 2001; Henry, 2005; Kiely, 2004; Neihaus & Crain, 2013; Peacock, 2013; Pompa, 2005; Rios, 2011b; Schaffer et al., 2002).

Finally, literature claiming social and civic effects suggest that SL/ISL experiences motivate an interest in volunteerism, development, and social change in students (Cipolle, 2010; Dearborn, 2011; Eyler, 2002; McKenna & Rizzo, 1999; McPherson, 2011; Tiessen, 2013), encourage social and political awareness by creating a context in which to develop an understanding of social justice, political, cross-cultural, and global issues (Battistoni, 2005; Brown, 2011; Crabtree, 1998; Eyler, 2000; Henry, 2005; Pedersen et al., 2015; Primavera, 1999; Rowe & Chapman, 1999), and inspire students to lifestyle shifts that tend toward social and political actions (Covitt, 2002; Longo & Saltmarsh; 2011; Neihaus & Crain, 2013; Pritzker & McBride, 2005).

Global South

While there is a wealth of literature attending to the impacts on Global North participants, there has been a recent shift to consider the impacts of SL and ISL programs on communities (Larsen, 2016). Cruz and Giles' (2000) *Where is the community in service-learning research?* was an important turning point in considering community impact that

started a movement towards all stakeholders, as Eby (1998) suggested. Cruz and Giles (2000) made an effort to explain the challenges that arise with shifting the locus of study. They cited complexities in doing international research, such as I have mentioned above and, more to the point, the complexity of defining *community*. Some identified community to mean the community organizations and agencies (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009), others saw community as a neighbourhood or geographic location (Larsen, 2016), and still others referred to community as an intentional or constructed community (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Varlotta, 1996).

In summarizing the literature that examines the impact on communities in SL and ISL, I will build upon the work done by Cruz and Giles' (2000) who presented a review of the literature regarding impact on communities up until 2000. Here, I will attempt to fill in the gap between then and now by reviewing literature from 2000-2017. Three categorical claims regarding SL or ISL emerge: contributions to community development, bridging the community and academy divide, and benefits for community partners.

The claim that SL/ISL experiences contribute to community development is filtered through institutional and community partnerships. Universities and other providers partner with NGOs and/or community organizations for the leveraging of resources (Larsen, 2016), offering encouragement and energy to existing projects (D'Alarch et al., 2009) for the sustainability of their work (Annette, 2002). The second claim found in the literature is that SL and ISL help bridge the community-academy divide and hint at the possibilities of such programs to create new connections and relationships (Reeb & Folger, 2013; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Foster, 2002), to build trust (Vernon & Foster, 2002), and provide encouragement for students to consider long-term investments in

NGOs and community organizations (Blouin & Perry, 2009). The claim that SL and ISL benefit community partners is supported by studies that point to the ways these programs grow social capital and promote future advocates for their work (Birdsall, 2005; Littlepage & Gazly, 2013; Morton & Bergbaur, 2015; Vernon & Foster, 2002), hopefully cultivating a long-term volunteer base from the pool of Global North participants (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Brown, 2011; Sandy & Holland, 2006), and providing immediate forms of labor and resources (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Larsen, 2016).

Anti-colonial and Decolonizing Perspectives

There is literature that interrogates the history and foundations of SL and ISL, however, these are few and far between, obscured by the verbose dialogues about the effectiveness and improvement of the practice. Much of the SL and ISL literature tends to either celebrate the possibility of the pedagogy or recommend technical adjustment (Vrasti, 2013). Hernandez (2018) is very pointed in her critique of this stilted focus that makes SL and ISL seem like a "means to an end" (p. 85). Likewise, Vrasti (2013) is not concerned with examining the effectiveness of volunteer programs for the sake of making recommendations to improvement. Instead, her work focused on how this phenomenon of volunteering in the Global South is affected by subjectivity, politics, and capitalism (p. 3). The philanthropic and altruistic visions of SL and ISL, specifically the emphasis on service as doing good, Vrasti (2013) said, "comes to occupy a (suspiciously) firm moral grounding that *demands* applause" (p. 4). It is exactly this kind of institutionalization and normalization of the colonial foundations that some scholars question, wondering about decolonial visions.

I have already alluded to the idea of critical SL as an alternative to traditional SL (Mitchell, 2008), with the latter espousing charity and service to the poor in its most blatant incarnation and the former approach harnessing the reflective pedagogy inherent to SL and ISL but refocusing the reflection on social justice questions. The goal of critical SL and ISL is to direct student learning to think about their positionality and power and the structural dimensions of injustice they witness (Morton & Bergbaur, 2015). It remains the case that even with these critical goals in mind, SL and ISL may simply raise political consciousness rather than inspire action. In one study, students expressed frustration with the limits of SL (Harker, 2016) noting that they were told to be politically conscious but never given the tools to engage politically. This is pedagogical gaslighting. The claim to be a politically charged pedagogy but settling for cognitive development is akin to the dialogue raised by Tuck and Yang (2012) who exclaimed that decolonization is not a metaphor. They critiqued claims of decolonization within the academy as reductionist and missing the point of decolonization altogether, which is the repatriation of stolen lands. While I do not ascribe to Tuck and Yang's claim as being the most accurate way of articulating decolonization, I do appreciate the re-focusing conversation they ignited that reminds those working toward decolonization in various ways to consider the physical (geographic) and social changes it demands. Hernandez (2018) suggested that the decolonizing lens is "rarely, if at all, found within service learning scholarship and literature" (p. xx) and that tackling questions of power, privilege, and colonialism should not simply "deodorize" these challenging conversations but should lead to political change.

MacDonald (2013), among others (Stoecker, 2016; Heidebrecht & Balzer, 2019), offered what I think is an important response to these critiques. Her analysis, in line with

Hernandez (2018) and Vrasti (2013), revealed the failure of SL and ISL to grapple with the

deep history of experiential education as rooted in colonialism. Claiming critical and

decolonizing goals in SL and ISL while focusing on effectiveness and improvement of the

programs is like a scaffolding that is erected around a crumbling structure. The promise of

something new is hidden behind the hustle and bustle of experts who claim to have critical

insights based on collected data that will reshape their practices. What is revealed when

the scaffolding is removed is nothing more than a new coat of paint that is slapped on year-

to-year, an experiment in rebranding rather than rebuilding. In SL and ISL McDonald

critiqued the tendency to reform practices and curriculum rather than address the root

causes that support a crumbling structure. Her suggestion is to dismantle or demolish the

old buildings that are the colonized theoretical frameworks in SL and ISL and start anew.

McDonald's (2013) argument points toward the value in thinking with theory from the

ground up within a practice. As a theoretical framework, anti-colonialism confronts this

intertwined history of colonialism head on but does not claim decolonization. Instead, an

anti-colonial approach avoids generalizing students' positionality as global citizens and

opts to help students recognize their "rootedness and citizenship and the legacies they

inherit" (MacDonald, 2013, p. 218).

Evaluating the Literature

A great strength to be found throughout the existing literature are the many studies

assessing the impact of SL and ISL on Global North participants, as well as research that

provokes curricular change, drawing on the reflective roots of the practice and harnessing

this pedagogy for personal, social, and political transformation. It appears that SL and ISL

programs have benefitted from these foci and studies point to the way that Global North

participants grow intellectually, morally, and politically. The trend in the literature toward considering the impact on the Global South has birthed studies that examine the nature of partnerships (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009, Larsen, 2016). This shift denotes a re-focusing of priorities in SL and ISL research and a concern for the inclusion of 'community voices,' albeit primarily in non-international SL contexts. There are also examples of research that examine the cost-benefit analysis of these programs for community organizations (Srinivas et al., 2015), as well as studies that reveal the need to include community partners and organizations as central to planning, assessing, and goal setting (Birdsall, 2005).

While these are important examples of centering on communities in research, it would be better yet to include the perspectives of the community members themselves who live in the context in which the studies take place. To neglect those voices is to perpetuate a myopia of outcomes-based research, which being tied to institutionalization, may be more easily influenced by colonial and capitalist paradigms (Blouin & Perry, 2009). This is glaringly obvious in studies such as Reeb and Folger's (2013), whose work analyzed case studies by type of service site. When referencing qualitative studies on community impact only community agency staff are involved as research participants. Community organization staff become proxy 'voices' for the community.[23] Tellingly, in her experiences working with ISL programs, Pisco (2015) observed that there is a general disregard for local community voices seen most clearly in designs that are constructed exclusively between Global North participants and Global North NGOs and other agencies. She wondered how ISL programs can stay committed to students, "while simultaneously

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[23] This is the case even in Larsen's (2016) edited volume that focused on host communities. In the chapter entitled "southern perspectives on ISL volunteers" we hear only the perspectives of staff members of an NGO.

becoming more dedicated to the needs and desire of communities and more nurturing of

relationships among individuals and communities around the world?" (p. 94). In my

evaluation, the shift towards the impact on Global South communities has generally been

situated within the shift toward *all involved*.[24] This focus obscures community impacts or,

at best, offer an interpretation of community impact from the perspective of the Global

North.

The claim that ISL develops engaged global citizens is also unsubstantiated. The

focus remains on Global North participants' growth into Global North visions of global

citizenship.[25] What about global citizenship from Global South perspectives? What of

outcomes for host communities' growth as global citizens? Although well-meaning, the

dialogues about civic and political engagement as outcomes of ISL programs provides a

protective shield that denies that this is a product made by and for Global North

participants (Butin, 2005). Jefferess (2012) illuminated the fact that global citizenship in

ISL programming is too often another form of commercialization and marketeering that

simply perpetuate capitalist variations of these values.[26] New outcomes for ISL need to be

considered based on principles of reciprocity (Heidebrecht & Balzer, 2019). Furthermore,

despite the positive outcomes for Global North participants associated with ISL as I have

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[24] Bringle et al., (2013) have been at the forefront of pushing to broaden the research agenda, suggesting that the examination of student learning outcomes needs to be include the parallel considers of faculty, community organization staff, residents, and administrators as learners in service learning.
[25] A growing number of voices raise concerns about SL experiences that reinforce the values and perspectives of neoliberal culture by emphasizing the individual over the collective elements of the learning process (Hartman et al., 2014; Mitchel, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2012; Morton & Bergbaur, 2015; Saltmarsh et al., 2009).
[26] Crabtree (1998) also warned of the marketization of service-learning as a point of concern. He suggested that as service-learning increasingly comes into "vogue" that the gravity of marketing strategies in the context of university providers will trivialize "service-learning components," and minimalize the "social justice/empowerment approach in favor of a more charitable and traditional one" (p. 202).

outlined above, it can be argued that the international component and all of the logistical and historical complexity of engaging in transnational exchange in this way does not benefit the outcomes more than an equivalent experience in a domestic context (Neihaus & Crain, 2013).

Finally, research on ISL has suffered from a lack of methodological creativity. There are problems with "borrowing" methods from other fields and disciplines rather than, as suggested by Bringle et al., (2013)

> ...emphasizing the development of novel theoretical frameworks, measurement tools, research designs, or practices that are inherent to – if not unique to – and, thereby, perhaps best suited for service learning as its own emerging field. (p. 352)

It is no wonder that it is easy to find literature that is descriptive of programs, activities, nuts and bolts, and rationales, whereas there is little work being done on theory (Kiely & Hartman, 2011; Steinberg et al., 2013). What theoretical work exists tends to be "multidisciplinary," with little attempt made to "integrate these perspectives so that the discussion is *interdisciplinary*" (Bringle et al., 2013, p. 352). Furthermore, because of the inconsistencies, there are few studies that build upon one another or draw from recommendations in previous ISL research (Kiely & Hartman, 2011). Steinberg et al. (2013), perhaps, offered the most focused evaluations and suggestions for the future of SL research that includes two points. First, there is the need to clearly identify and define terms and constructs. There is little clarity around the use of service and learning or what defines community, reflection, global citizenship, and outcomes. Second, there is a need for increased contextualization of the results of a study. This is especially the case with ISL

where investigators should rigorously describe the characteristics of the participants and communities so that researchers can evaluate the transferability of the results (Steinberg et al., 2013, 364-365).

The Basket: Weaving History, Theory, and Methods

Remembering the basket as a conceptual framework, I invite the reader to consider the *varas* and *venas* that have been carefully bent and woven together in this chapter as I continue to construct the basket that is this research design. I think about the history of ISL and see the roots of colonial education. I also see the connections of this practice to Dewey's (1938) progressive and liberal agendas and in many cases ISL exhibits commitments to critical theories and a desire to create social justice outcomes. However, the story of ISL is one that has no true anchor; it is a practice that has been plagued by universality, having no standardized or centralized theories and/or values from which to judge specific implementations. There are myriad variations to the practice that emphasize either service or learning on a spectrum of traditional to critical (Mitchell, 2008). ISL is also firmly tethered to Global North institutions such as universities, along with the politics of the nations that fund and influence their policies. The political commitments of many ISL programs are, "to put it bluntly," said Butin (2010), "ripe for conservative appropriation" (p. 35). Yet, this is only a part of the story.

I hope that there exists the potential in ISL to discuss further, as suggested by Chovanec et al. (2015), the "complex dialectic of being colonizers and colonized, oppressed and oppressors," and to gain "new learnings about our place in the colonizing narrative" (p. 166). I also hope spaces may be created for postcolonial, anti-colonial, decolonizing, and Indigenous perspectives to help re-focus on the importance of experience as a *social*

pedagogy that facilitates community engagement; a pedagogy that Butin (2010) argued has the potential to "implode our grand narratives and fixed truths…disrupt our sense of the normal to the extent that we internalize a 'state of doubt'" (p. 132). I do believe that ISL needs people, researchers included, who are willing not only to explore the transformative potential of this pedagogy, but to ask the question; "transformative for whom?"

The question of Global South participants and host community agency is a central concern addressed by a number of ISL scholars (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Clayton et al., 2012; Larsen, 2016). Dear and Howard (2016) said as much, suggesting a shift towards a model of "interdependence" where roles for both Global North and Global South participants are redefined based on co-constructed and mutually beneficial epistemologies and theories. Steps towards these kinds of models will require commitments from all involved in ISL; commitments to decolonize myopic visions of social justice and global citizenship, create space for new epistemological visions, and, pragmatically speaking, include Global South and Indigenous participants in all these tasks. I think there are many possible "futures" (Butin, 2010) for ISL as it is a practice that continues to find resonance and growth in a variety of disciplines and formats. I hope that there may be more than just a few of these futures that will consider these proposed directions.

The basket is almost complete. I am thankful for this community of researchers in the field whom I have figuratively sat with in a circle while I continue my own weaving, listening to their stories and wisdom. The final *varas* and *venas* that pull everything together will be discussed in the following chapter, which outlines the methodology of this project. It builds upon many of the identified gaps, recommendations, and the insights from those I listened to. For that reason, I do not claim that this basket stands out in any way

other than that it continues conversation threads that I have found hanging, and I hope

more than anything, that this basket is of some use to those who care about the future of

ISL.

Chapter Three – The Basket for Research takes Shape: Weaving Theory and Methodology

It has been good to spend time in the company of other weavers, as I did in Chapter two, situating and conceptualizing ISL. I credit those weavers, the other researchers in this field, for showing the way forward for the practice. Considering all that I have learned in listening to the stories and insights that this extended community has shared, Chapter three applies these learnings by weaving together theory and methodology to describe the research design. As this basket for research takes shape, its usefulness should become apparent. In this chapter my goal is to show the ways that the theoretical framework (Grant & Osanloo, 2014), which is a guide for understanding how the structure of a research design is supported, has molded the case study methodology that was utilized in this study.

I will say more about the case study methodology and the methods used for data gathering, data analysis, and knowledge translation and sharing below. But first, the purpose of weaving together theory and methodology is to demonstrate alignment within a research paradigm (Wilson, 2008). I believe alignment between theory and methodology supports the criteria of this research design, which strives for apparency and invitation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990).

I will begin by sharing a short story that provides an example of the ways that theory and methodology support these criteria.

In 2017, I had the opportunity to travel to Nebaj, Guatemala with Tomas,[27] a former Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worker who had lived in Nebaj for several years

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[27] All names used in this, and subsequent chapters are pseudonyms.

working on various projects, building relationships with the folks in the community and learning their indigenous language. I had arranged for him to accompany me as a guide and translator because of his position as a known and trusted person of the community. While our plan was to spend a week in Nebaj gathering data from various participants, my trip began by first meeting Tomas in El Salvador. He and his family live in the mountains several hours outside the capital of San Salvador. We quickly departed after renting a 4x4 and settled in for a weekend on their small family farm nestled in a beautiful valley. The trail leading down to their residence, if you could call it that, was like a staircase and I was thankful for Tomas' insistence that a 4x4 was required. We spent the days eating food from their land and discussing writing and research. One reason I had decided to spend some time with his family was that I had learned they were interested in keeping bees. I had been a beekeeper for a dozen years in the past and mentioned my experience as we were planning our trip. I suggested that I might be able to help them set up a hive and he told me he was aware of a swarm – a hive that is in the process of migrating – nearby, which we might consider capturing. This "side" project became the impetus for my visit and provided us a natural space to get to know one another.

A week later, during our visit to Nebaj, Guatemala, as we were arranging meetings with participants, I recall very clearly Tomas' relational approach. We met with one of the participants, Paula, around noon at her store front, a small stall in the midst of a market where she sold beautiful woven items. I quickly realized this meeting was protocol – we sat down and discussed anything but the research itself. As we departed, a plan was made to meet the following day at her residence. Those days spent in Nebaj were wonderful. Tomas, having lived there for years, was tour guide extraordinaire. We ate at some of his favorite

stalls and restaurants, we enjoyed street musicians and an outdoor film festival in the town square, and in one of the markets we came upon a mini-carnival complete with a foosball table, which consumed our attention for the following hour! It was a delight to see Nebaj through his eyes.

The night we met Paula at her home, she was in the middle of preparing a meal for us. We helped shuck corn and chatted together about life in Nebaj and our respective work. The dinner was fantastic and after she asked if we would join her for prayers at one of the sacred sites in the town. On route we stopped to purchase candles and I gathered from the shopkeeper's welcome that Paula was well respected in the community. Once we arrived at the site, Paula lit the candles and invited us to do the same, guiding us through the ceremony. We completed our interview back at her home over coffee.

Slow food, Slow Research

While it may be impossible to quantify, I am certain that the data we gathered that evening with Paula was different than if we had gone about data *collection*[28] it in a non-relational, transactional way. The difference in this slow and relational approach is not simply the methods that were employed. In the example with Paula, Tomas and I performed a semi-structured interview using a recording device supplemented by observational notes, memos, and journaling that I completed post-interview (Rozsahegyi, 2019; Winwood 2019). These methods are commonplace in qualitative designs; however,

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[28] I distinguish between data collection and data gathering. While the methods may share similarities, data collection is a term embedded in quantitative designs and signals a transactional approach to research, whereas data gathering is a way of expressing a collective process.

the theoretical framework is what infuses these methods with the quality of care and trust that are important in supporting a relational approach to gathering data.

I think about the specific methods used in a study, such as interviewing, and that they may be performed without any prior knowledge of the field of research. A simple understanding of how to ask questions and how to record conversations would suffice. However, as a researcher with a specific ontology and epistemology,[29] the choice of a theoretical framework is of utmost importance in supporting the research processes and purposes one wishes to pursue. Multiple studies proposing the same questions may arrive at different findings depending on how theory is applied. Theory and methodology, as I will argue, should be woven together to form something indistinguishable.

To help explain I will reference an idea proposed by Dr. Alexandra King, Cameco Chair in Indigenous health and wellness at the University of Saskatchewan, who has spoken to me about her idea of slow research (Researchers Under the Scope, 2021). She references the slow food movement as an analogy, which promotes avoidance of fast foods and embracing time in the preparation and consumption food as a way of making food a part of wholistic wellness. Applying this concept to research I reflect on the way that time and, therefore, experience, influence research design and practice. Over the course of several years that this study took place, those of us on the research team were continually learning, holding an openness to surprise (Lugones, 1987), and were therefore able to incorporate new-to-us relevant theories as we blended our experiences, our insights, and the findings gained during data gathering with our continued reading of the literature in this field. Slow research meant, for this dissertation, that new theories were woven into the basket of

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[29] See chapter one

research as they became known to me and meaningful for the process and purposes of this dissertation work.

There are two broad components that provide a background for the theoretical framework I wish to employ with this study; colonialism and Indigenous theory. As I describe the ways these two components have shaped my choices for the framework used in this dissertation, I do so, knowing there is great diversity within the literature as to their application within a research context. My goal was not to commit to one school of thought but to explore the different theories I discovered in the literature that aligned with my epistemology and ontology and, therefore, that confronted colonial histories and experience as well as accounting for the Indigenous context in which this study takes place. For this reason, I have woven together several theories that help to create the framework that *this* dissertation utilizes to shape and guide all aspects of research. My intention in this approach is to acknowledge that there was no one theory that fit or that could account for diversity of my self-location, the context of Guatemala and with the *Ixil* people, or that provided the appropriate materials to weave this basket for research. I also acknowledge that research done slowly should be malleable, so that when new insights are gained, they are applied immediately, benefitting the next steps of research. This is an iterative process and, in my experience, an organic way to approach research. In what follows I will explain how this dissertation utilizes different theories that speak to research done in the context of colonized places and people as well as with Mayan Indigenous communities.

Colonialism

I spent some time in chapter one describing the context of this research as located in Nebaj, Guatemala and encountering the colonial history the *Ixil* people have experienced. I

have also spoken about my own colonial past as a settler whose Mennonite identity was shaped by generations of settlement. For this project our research team was aware of the transnational encounter between our Global North team members and the Global South and Indigenous community members. We wrestled with our own self-location as researchers representative of a settler-colonial heritage and the history of doing research on and in Indigenous communities as having further perpetuated power relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Kovach, 2009). Colonialism was one of the key elements in our shared histories and demanded intentional theoretical wrestling in order for our research design to be developed in a good way. Thinking through the effect of colonialism in research necessitated the use of theories that confront colonialism. Here, I will speak about three that have contributed to the theoretical framework of this research design. I want to be clear that my choice to weave together three theories that confront colonialism in this theoretical framework is intentional. The different perspectives that they offer have helped in shaping different aspects of this dissertation.

Anti-colonial Theory

I first encountered anti-colonial theory through the work of Sefa Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) who suggested that it provides a discursive framework that propels action. It is this emphasis that I find appealing as someone who self-locates as a settler. For this dissertation anti-colonial theory has shaped me as the researcher, providing a structure from which to understand and reorganize my role and positionality within the project and a lens from which to understand my relationship with others in the study. My story emerges from and within Settler-colonialism and I see in anti-colonialism the appropriate language to describe a posture or openness to discuss that history and the

histories of colonized people in our collective work toward decolonization. As Sefa Dei and

Asgharsadeh (2001) explained, they prefer to use the language of discursive rather than

theoretical because it avoids "the rigidity and inflexibility that theory has come to be

identified with" (p. 299). I recognize in their conceptualization of anti-colonialism a way of

making it a living and breathing conversational framework. This is something I sought to

apply in this dissertation. Rather than commit to one theory with clearly defined

boundaries and distinctions, which is a Eurocentric way of thinking,[30] the flexibility and

fluidity of a discursive framework means, especially for this study, that the different

aspects of research design became emergent and were shaped by the learnings we made as

a research team in the midst of doing research. This was the case with the design of the

Encuentro event that grew from side conversations between team members, gradually

becoming a conversation with Global South partners and participants, and ultimately

culminating with the event designed by and for the Global South community members.

Decolonization

Colonization is synonymous with terror and oppression for Indigenous people.

Thinking of the stories of the *Ixil* experience or those stories of the Indigenous people who

live on Treaty 6 territory and Homeland of the Métis, where I reside in Canada, it is clear

that one of the objectives of colonization was to de-indigenize Indigenous people. The

infamous Canadian residential schools sought to 'remove the Indian from the child,' by

removing the children from their family homes and culture. Another tool used by

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[30] More specifically Santos (2014) had coined the term "epistemicide" which in short, is giving a name to the violence that occurs when certain knowledges are given preferences over others in such a way as to silence them. A key theory that he endorsed is that "there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice" (Santos, 2007, p. ivx).

colonization was research, where Indigenous stories were taken by Western academics with little thought of giving back to communities or acknowledging the communities who shared their knowledge (Q'um Q'um Xiiem et al., 2019). These stories were then "misrepresented, misappropriated, and misused" for (Q'um Q'um Xiiem et al., 2019, p. 5) further colonizing aims. Decolonization, used prominently in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) work, is meant to critique power imbalances and colonial relationships experienced by Indigenous communities. Decolonizing research does not dismiss Western approaches but reminds us that there are ways to infuse research processes with decolonizing aims to that they are done in a good way. Hernandez (2018) has pointed out that within the field of SL and ISL the decolonizing lens is "rarely, if at all, found" (p. xx), which is a comment that gave motivation to decolonize the research that this dissertation seeks to explain.

I have been hesitant to consider decolonization as part of the theoretical framework for this project in part because I have been haunted by Tuck and Yang's (2012) warning that decolonization is not a metaphor. They questioned the proliferation of decolonization within academia and critique the ways it has become domesticated within academic discourses. Tuck and Yang's (2012) arguments extends those efforts to decolonize should not remain symbolic but that it "implicates and unsettles everyone "involved (p. 7). For this dissertation I wanted to heed their warnings that decolonization should not remain a cognitive venture. For my work, decolonization had a way of shaping the process and activities or research. Whether it was reconsidering methods used in an interview, how our team was using the tools by which we accomplished data interpretation and analysis, or the planning of the next steps of research, the goal was to unsettle each task, creating space to consider what decolonization means for each of the activities of research.

Decolonization is not a theory that is applied at the beginning of a research project that then implies a goal. Rather, decolonization is brought into every conversation throughout and then unsettles our inherited or assumed practices as well as our relationships with one another and with the *Ixil* people who participated with us in this study. The relational and ethical emphases (Wendler, 2012) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers is, perhaps, a key feature of decolonizing research. Rhee and Subedi (2014) added that decolonizing work "requires centering Indigenous and colonized communities' knowledge construction as alternative knowledge systems" (p. 352). Creating space for the community to take the lead in designing research activities permeated the second half of this project where we were able to navigate our growing relationships with participates in a way that helped create research activities that were more meaningful and that honored community approaches.

The way I use decolonization in the theoretical framework for this dissertation is influenced primarily by Mignolo and Walsh's (2018) ideas about decoloniality, which call for *vincularidad,* or "the awareness of the integral relation and interdependence amongst all living organisms" (p. 1). Likewise, Rhee and Subedi (2014) conceptualized decolonizing research as requiring an interlocking of spirituality, history, community, and the land. Decoloniality responds to colonialism, it does not sweep it aside or disregard its influence. In responding, decoloniality is a way of thinking and acting that denaturalizes colonial power and knowledge structures (Steinman, 2011) and stands "for the possibilities of an otherwise" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 17). This research design follows Hernandez's (2018) lead, who sought to incorporate decoloniality as a way "to uncover the hidden

colonial epistemologies and ontologies tied to power that are at work within traditional practices and methodologies" (p. 120).

I applied decoloniality within this research as a disruptive force to Western/Eurocentric approaches to research, which prioritize Global North outcomes and fail to recognize the importance of relational ways of seeing the world. I find myself challenged to think and act contextually, relationally, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually – interweaving myself into the research design. Decoloniality further emphasizes the need to incorporate decolonial thinking in our research practice. My approach to applying decolonization within the research design follows Steinman (2011), who said,

> when a course not only teaches about a decolonizing political imaginary but utilizes and is framed through such an imaginary, when students experience the collective power of an indigenous healing dance, when "smudging" occurs within the halls of a Western educational institution… such actions themselves manifest decolonization in the same way that ceremonies actually accomplish social transformations. (p. 14)

Postcolonialism

Of the many aspects of postcolonial theory, I have most appreciated and apply in this dissertation the notion of *hybridity*. This is a pillar of postcolonial theory that means bringing to the attention of the powerful the voices of the *subaltern*, who are "at the heart of postcolonial studies" (Young, 2015, p.165). The subaltern, are by definition, the ones who are overlooked and undervalued. Applying hybridity within a project asks researchers to cultivate space between peoples to "enable the articulation of experiences," and the

discovery of very local stories (Young, 2003, p. 79). It seeks to raise the voice, for example, "of the Ethiopian woman farmer," and diminish that of "the diplomat or the CEO" (Young, 2003). In postcolonialism, people in the Global South "are not objects of someone else's understanding, but active, speaking subjects," not to be taken advantage of, even (or especially) in the name of research (Young, 2015, p. 150).

In this dissertation hybridity was considered throughout the knowledge production aspects of research, such as in the interpretation of recorded narratives, the form and format of writing, and in my attempt to bring to life the stories shared by giving prominence to participants in the ensuing chapters. I have been influenced by postcolonial literature (Ashcroft et al., 1989; Johnston, 2009), fiction and non-fiction stories that tend to be the vessel through which the *subaltern* voice speaks clearly for Western audiences. Postcolonial literature has brought the subaltern point of view into focus. This oft-neglected perspective invites the reader to critique the dominant power structures and epistemologies that often comprise the setting of the stories. Young (2015) called this a "double perspective," which in postcolonial literature is helpful for Western readers because "fiction is the form of writing that can give an account of history at the same time as it shows what it is like for the individuals involved to live through such times" (p. 150). My approach was to follow the lead of postcolonial authors, knowing that this academic work should speak to and impact academic audiences.

There are several implications that emerge as I have applied postcolonial theory within this dissertation. First, stories of place are emphasized, and a focus will be given to illuminating the details of the context in which the data gathering took place. Postcolonial

theory encourages the construction of *place-worlds*[31] (Basso, 1996), which gives attention

to both the personal narratives of participants and the dominant power structures that

comprise the settings of their stories. Stories provide scaffolding in which to name the

ongoing impacts of colonialism and capitalism. Stories, as a medium, are also

epistemological vessels that align with postcolonial sensibilities. Stories animate

knowledge. As I have put to words this dissertation, I have intentionally sought to bring

forward an approach to the language and style that promotes hybridity.

What distinguishes postcolonialism from decolonization or anti-colonial theory? In

review, what postcolonialism brings to the theoretical framework is a hopeful dialogue

about ethical solidarity and an emphasis on representing the voices of all involved in this

project in a way that honors the unique aspects of their stories – hybridity. This stands in

stark contrast to Eurocentric thinking that promotes epistemic violence through the

"imperialism of the same" (Young, 1990, p. 45). Decolonization is an actionable framework

that influenced the activities of research throughout the project. As part of the theoretical

framework I sought to decolonize the processes by which we do research. Finally, anti-

colonial theory provided the necessary self-reflective toolkit that has helped me to

articulate and live into a way of becoming a researcher that confronts my colonial heritage

and recognizes the impacts of colonialism on the participants involved. In this way I hope

that by weaving together three theories that speak to colonialism the theoretical

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[31] Keith Basso (1996) shared about the act of *place-making* as "a way of constructing history itself, of inventing it, of fashioning novel versions of "what happened here" (p. 5). In doing this people build and share "place-worlds," which serve as "durable symbols of distant events and as indispensable aids for remembering and imagining them" (p. 7). His work listening to the *Apache* people demonstrated the value of place-making as an act of the community constructing its history and identity. However, I wonder if, in a sort of negative image of Basso's experience with the *Apache*, whether tourists construct "place-worlds" as outsiders looking in on communities.

framework used in this dissertation demonstrates the fluid approach to research that was my experience and honors the learnings that were made along the way.

Indigenous Theory

This research project did not start out with an intention to integrate Indigenous theory. The choice was emergent, in response to the growing relationship between the research team and the *Ixil* people. Some of the features of postcolonial/decolonizing/anti-colonial theories are the emphasis on context, consideration of colonial history, and an openness to approaches that align with the actions of decolonization. Therefore, it was natural in the later half of the study to include more and more Indigenous theory, as we were learning alongside the *Ixil*, to speak into the research design. This shift was most clearly demonstrated in the story of the Encuentro.[32] Previously, I had mentioned that the origins of this event began as conversations between Global North and Global South team members and grew into an inclusive process where each of the participating communities in the study were invited to offer feedback and recommendations for its design. A small team of researchers, two from Nicaragua and two from El Salvador, travelled to participating communities in Nicaragua and Guatemala to consult with participants, inquiring with them how this event would benefit their communities. The result of these consultations and the ensuing event were something that our Global North research team could not have imagined on our own. This was supported by Indigenous theory.

I wish to explain the ways that Indigenous theory has been integrated into the research project. Our research team was aware of the challenges of research relationships

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[32] See chapter Five.

in context of Guatemala, a country with a colonial history. We were also cognizant of our starting point within Western education, which has historically been Eurocentric. Building relationships in qualitative research is an essential task, emphasized by post/de/anti-colonial theories. Therefore, given our position as Settlers and the *Ixil* community – among others – who were Mayan, there was a need for a framework for relationships that accounts not only for our transnational encounter but also recognizes our relationships and perspectives both as Settlers and Indigenous people. This framework, which I will detail below, is not multiculturalism, which is essentially Eurocentric in its approach to "describe cultural" and epistemological "diversity within the framework of the nation-states of the Northern hemisphere" (Santos et al., 2007, p. xxiii). The multicultural conception of knowledges tends to be "descriptive" and "apolitical," (Santos et al., 2007, p. xxiii) thus suppressing the problem of power relations. It relies on ethnocentric stories that divide the world into the "first" and the "third," promoting imperialist views of the difference. What we set out to do with this project required local knowledges and local research methodologies. Knowledge produced collectively is a hallmark of Indigenous research (Wilson, 2008). The four-year study and the relationships between our research team and members of the community in Nebaj was and remains only the beginning of an ongoing relationship.

Two-eyed Seeing

Mi'kmaq Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall's writing on *etuaptmumk*, Two-eyed Seeing (Marshall et al., 2015), is a theory that was introduced in my role working with *Pewaseskwan*, the Indigenous Wellness Research Group, at the University of

Saskatchewan.[33] Two-eyed Seeing is a way of honoring both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and provides an important theoretical framework for the projects undertaken by *Pewaseskwan*. Working in the field of medicine, researcher Martin (2012) made note of the ways that health research has been shaped by Western colonial logic while Indigenous perspectives are sidelined or absent. In the eyes of Indigenous people, health is part of human wholeness or wellness and includes four components: spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual. Two-eyed Seeing in the context of health research provides a way for honoring Indigenous teachings and knowledges while incorporating the value of Western science. It is a "guiding principle for walking in two worlds" (Marshall, Marshall, & Bartlett, 2012, p. 17).

Two-eyed Seeing has informed this research design in the way that it speaks to holding multiple perspectives in balance. As someone trained in Western education I have learned and grown to love many of the tools of Western research. I recognize the deep history, traditions, and practice that has been honed by many researchers over time, which I have borrowed and built upon. I also recognize that Western research does not represent the same thing to me as it does for Indigenous communities. Applying Two-eyed Seeing has been a helpful frame for incorporating Indigenous theory without claiming to do Indigenous research (Kovach, 2009); as a way of navigating the Settler and Indigenous relationships at the heart of this project. I believe that adhering to the Two-eyed Seeing

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[33] *pewaseskwan* – is a Cree term that means "the sky is starting to clear" or "the weather is improving." For Indigenous communities, the term reflects an opportunity to get out on the land after a storm. For Dr. Alexandra King, Cameco Chair in Indigenous Health and Wellness and the Indigenous Wellness Research Group (IWRG), *pewaseskwan* reflects optimism for a healthier future, clearing our beings from the clouds of colonization and privileging Indigenous ways while bringing in relevant Western ways.

approach intersects with Ermine's (2007) idea of creating Ethical Space in relations with others.

Balance

Maya conceptualize something similar to Two-eyed Seeing when they speak of balance. Estrada (2005), a Mayan scholar, explained that balance is exemplified in the Maya's comfort navigating complexity by holding multiple ways of knowing in tension. They embrace the principle of duality as a means for finding balance. In contrast to the multicultural approach that maintains dichotomies, here is an example of a way of integrating complexity and honoring connectedness rather than difference: "east/west; north/south; above/below; sky/earth; good/evil; shadow/light; male/female; life/death; beginning/end; emptiness/fullness" (Estrada, 2005, p. 46). What is important for this research design is the relational ethic that Settler researchers and Indigenous participants contribute from their experience and together find something they could not discover alone. Approaching research with a mindset of duality engenders unity as opposed to division and promotes a balanced approach to the tasks of gathering data, analyzing it, and sharing knowledge.

Embracing duality in research also implies embracing relationality. It means recognizing the connectedness of Settler researchers and Indigenous participants. Duality in research inspires a commitment to these relationships that are ongoing, long-term, and considerate of dynamics of power (See Castledon & Garvin, 2008, p. 1394-1395). Pre-existing relationships in research are acceptable and valued (Kovach, 2009, p. 51), participants' voices are not "romanticized" or "excluded" (Dei, 2013, p. 34) and values of trust, openness, honesty, and integrity are things to develop throughout the process (Dei,

2013, p. 32). Integrating the principle of balance in research also means inviting "relational accountability" (Wilson, 2008, p. 77) in how the research activities are expressed. The research *process* should aim to harmonize with the research *goals*, or as Estrada (2005) remarked, "research that shows respect and values life and cultural diversity is not merely an intellectual pursuit – it is a necessity" (p. 48).

Research Design

I want to reflect again about the story that introduced this chapter. In it I recalled several stories that framed an interview between Paula, Tomas, and myself. I suggested this relational approach differs from what I call transactional or extractive research. Designs that model this approach tend to employ methods that are directional, where researchers hold power and control over particular questions and subjects answer, offering data that is used to support researchers' arguments. In this way data is extracted from subjects and contexts to be used as a product. The question of who the research is for is typically less important than what research produces or provides and the assumption, then, is that research is for researchers and the aims of institutions.

In a relational research design, audience is a central question and defining the audience or audiences shapes the inquiry, including the specific methods utilized. With this project the *Ixil* were both research participants and the audience. The theory, as I have outlined, guides the thinking behind the doing. The methodology is the doing, which was informed by the theory. Again, the conceptual framework of weaving a basket of research is helpful. Yet another element of weaving for this design involves the connection between theory and methodology so that alignment is developed and demonstrated. It remained important to find a methodology and specific practices that promote this alignment. Theory

and methodology were in constant dialogue during the research, and in some instances

during data gathering certain methods were used while different methods were chosen at

other times based on the relationships, context, and the newfound insights our research

team discovered. This project's design channels an openness to surprise (Lugones, 1987)

and leans into the notion that in research there are no starting points (Kovach, 2009).

Methodology in Flux: Thoughts on Case Study Design

Case study designs are malleable. Employing a case study for this project enabled

the research to align with the emphasis on contextual details and the importance given to

place (the cases), which are central features. It is a great benefit to lean into the focus on

particularities, where the details provide the reader with a wealth of information from

which to enter into the researchers' shoes and see the study from their eyes. At the same

time, case study designs provide researchers with a flexible framework where they may

integrate various ontological, epistemological, and theoretical variations (Stake, 2006). The

interplay between these two aspects of case study designs highlights the human factor in

doing qualitative research, where the choices of the researcher or research team play an

important role in the gathering, analysis, and representation of data. In my experience, the

versatility of utilizing a case study approach frees researchers from methodological

commitments early in their research journey, and instead makes space for the theoretical

framework to shape the methods to be employed.

Case study designs also allow for a storied quality in research. Flyvbjerg (2011)

suggested that keeping the case study methodologically "open," so that researchers can

focus on the "choice of what is being studied" (p. 301) as they wrestle with how to tell the

story, allows "story to unfold from the many-sided, complex, and sometimes-conflicting

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stories that the actors in the case have told researchers" (p. 311-312). This allows

researchers to integrate changes in research design along-the-way as they are influenced

and shaped by their experiences doing research. Case studies are also resilient. Adapting,

sometimes midstream depending on the site of study, demonstrates sensitivity to the

participants involved. I am reminded of Kovach (2009) who said that there is no starting

point in research, that researchers remain "in flux," oscillating between the ontological,

epistemological, and methodological influences they encounter while being immersed in

their study. At times throughout the span of a project, and as new insights are gained, they

may also be applied, re-shaping the way the research is done in the moment.

The case study design for this project changed over time. Re-considerations, in light

of knowledge gained, helped refine the methodology. This flexible approach nurtured good

relationships between those on the research team and with those who participated in the

study. New methods for data gathering, analysis, and presenting findings arose as a result

of listening to and learning from one another in the midst of our shared research journey.

By way of example, one of the most important events in this project, the *Encuentro,* in

which participants gathered for validation, feedback, and future recommendations, began

as an idea that emerged because of the conversational approach taken by the research

team (Heidebrecht & Balzer, 2019; O'Sullivan et al., 2019).

I have fond memories of the time we spent together, reflecting on our experiences as

we shared coffee and meals together during our travels as a team. Our relationships with

one another were genuine and honest and offered opportunity to challenge the existing

frameworks and methodology that the project employed. As I have argued in chapter one,

self-location such as we practiced with one another, is a critical aspect of doing research

with Indigenous communities (Peltier et al., 2019). It was in and through our informal conversations that we encountered new ontological and epistemological perspectives, which opened our eyes to unexpected methodological refinements. By taking the time to self-locate with one another and by employing a methodology in flux, we were able to navigate the research design in a relational way.

ISL Research and the Case of the Ixil

I believe that SL and ISL research benefits from case study designs because of the potential they offer for telling stories of research. I follow the arguments of Flyvbjerg (2011) who, speaking specifically of case studies, noted that "narratives not only give meaningful form to experiences we have already lived through, but they also provide us a forward glance, helping us envision alternative futures" (p. 312).[34] This project aims not only to deconstruct but also to inspire decolonization and transformation of SL and ISL curriculum, especially where these programs take place in Indigenous communities. The *Ixil* participants in Nebaj constitute the case for this study and were chosen because of the strong history of relationships that members of our research team had with the community and because of the ongoing growth of our relationships throughout the project's four years. Our connection with MCC, an NGO that had organized ISL programs, called learning tours, in Nebaj for many years, provided an existing agency for Global North learners encountering Global South host communities. The *Ixil* participants were familiar with these forms of experiential education and have a history of Indigenous education in their

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[34] To support this argument Steinberg et al. (2013) suggested that while much of the "existing literature on service learning could be viewed as case studies" they also highlight the importance narrative in service learning research could play (p. 364-365).

community, positioning them as uniquely qualified to offer insights and critique about these programs that were operating within their community, but were not born from within the community.

Methods

Finally, I hope to articulate with some precision the methods that were used for data gathering, analysis, and knowledge sharing. Each of these activities contributes to the basket of research and, as it is with the final stages of weaving a basket, the weaver must pull taut each of the *venas* to make a tight and appealing seal. This final step also includes tying off the ends of each *venas* by weaving them back and under to lock in place. Similarly, the final stages in weaving this basket of research includes an explanation of the methods. As I explain each method, I hope the reader will see the *varas* and *venas* align and become a whole. Extending the metaphor of this conceptual framework a little further, I also find it interesting that many baskets, once complete, reveal patterns or images through the weaving. Likewise, I envision the methods being revealed at this stage of the weaving of this research, although they were envisioned much earlier in the process. Methods that remain invisible, simply supporting the overall research design, help propel the relational approach.

Data Gathering

Returning once again to the story of data gathering I described at the beginning of this chapter, my hope is that the story may be seen from a new perspective after explaining the other elements in this research design. This is an example of an activity of data gathering that was wrapped in the theoretical framework of the design. I highlight several

additional aspects about the data gathering activities that took place throughout this project.

Individual interviews were essential and formed the backbone of the recorded data. Interviews were performed by both the Global South researchers and members of our Global North research team, including myself. In the case of Nebaj, individual interviews took place in four separate data gathering trips by four different researchers. Each of these interviews was audio recorded and transcribed in Spanish as well as translated into English. No singular approach was imposed on the different researchers. Instead, they were encouraged to go about the interviews in a way that was comfortable to their person and experience, focusing their efforts on collecting stories. The approach I took in asking questions was open-ended and conversational in nature. I prefer to memorize the essence of the questions that are specific to the individuals I am meeting with and pose them conversationally, rather than with a notebook in hand, in order to create a space that is natural as well as diminishes the perceived power of the researcher. This open-ended and informal approach was also conducive for gathering narratives. It was important for each researcher who engaged in the interviews to honor and respect the protocols of the *Ixil* participants who offered the gifts of data.[35]

Focus groups were arranged throughout the project. In Nebaj, during data gathering trips, different arrangements were set up for participants who joined in the conversations,

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[35] Data as "gift" is an idea that I borrow from Margaret Kovach (Lecture, January 20, 2017). It signals a fundamentally different attitude than treating data as resource/material. Holding to a view of data as gift affects the analysis of data collected in colonial/indigenous contexts requires methods that honor the impacts of these forces. Data as gift helps the researcher treat field texts as stories to be taken as a whole rather than searching for "extractable" data points. Positioning data as a gift also asks the researcher to step into the shoes of another, which is at the heart of many transnational research endeavors (Andrews, 2007).

often around table at a café or restaurant with food and drink in hand. Sharing space together, rather than researchers controlling and manipulating research spaces, is a decolonizing approach. Focus groups were also used frequently during the *Encuentro* event, where table groups gathered to discuss specific topics and ideas, while the World Café method was used to promote different groupings of participants speaking into set topics. Focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed, and translated similar to the individual interviews, however, in some cases as with the World Café, poster paper was used to document the emerging conversations between groups and were photographed as well as transcribed in Word documents to be use for analysis.

More can be said about the data gathering activities at the *Encuentro*, which I outline in detail in chapter five. Briefly, I will note the emphasis on participatory activities that facilitated the building of relationships. The theoretical framework supported this and the fact that participants were gathering from diverse communities, four from Guatemala and four from Nicaragua. *Dynamicos*, or 'ice breakers,' were used throughout to get to know one another and facilitated moments of fun and surprise. Members from each of the eight communities prepared and gave presentations on their political, social, and economic experiences as well as their encounters with ISL. Finally, theatre of the oppressed (Boal, 1992) was used for gathering insights into experiences, where groups performed for one another, creating scenes based on ISL incidents, challenges, and celebrations. These dramas led to rich conversations as they were debriefed in the larger groups. Each of these activities was audio and video recorded.

Observational field notes and journaling were used to contribute to an "active reconstruction of the events" (Clandinin & Connnelly, 1990, p. 9). My practice was to make

point form notes immediately after an interview when possible, that would then form an outline of a journal entry I would make in the evening or when time permitted. Field notes and journals were best made in close proximity to the interviews or focus groups so as to capture the details of the setting and tone of the conversations. Attempting to harness narratives and story through field notes and journaling was difficult. I approached these by writing in an aesthetically playful way (Kim, 2016). Lugones (1987) too speaks of having *"a playful attitude"* (p. 16), which has informed my approach to decentering researchers' need to control the data and operate imperialistically (p. 15).

Data Analysis

Two values form the foundation for data analysis. First, is a commitment to an "ethic of reciprocity" (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012, p. 47). Analysis was done with an eye to interpret participant responses respectfully, seeing this task as a way to "re-connect" (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003, p. 213) with the relationships established throughout the data gathering process with the participants (Wilson, 2008, p. 77).

Second, a commitment will be made to discovering knowledge that "enhances the capacity of people to live well" (Castellano, 2000, p. 33). Estrada (2005) says that an important aspect of conducting research "involves the transferring of skills so that local members can reproduce the research process themselves with the goal of fostering autonomy" (p. 48). Findings should be "useful," "visible," and "beneficial" for both Global North and Global South communities (Wilson, 2008, p. 15).

Initial reflections and reactions were captured in the form of observational field notes and journaling that, for my process, formed the initial codes. These were inductive and based on an interpretation of the whole of the data gathering activities rather than

simply based on transcribed documents. Working on a research team that was committed

to the theoretical framework I have outlined necessitated collaborative analysis work. In

some cases, we engaged online together in the form of long email threads that were

conversational in nature. Conference presentations and academic publications also shaped

our analysis and provided opportunities for our team to meet in person, where we devoted

time to structured analysis.

A common codebook was formed over the course of a year where three researchers

from our team met weekly to bring their individual coding work together for evaluation. I

used both paper form copies of the transcripts and Nvivo as tools to aid in discovering

"codes, categories, patterns, and themes"[36] (Kim, 2016, p. 188). My approach was both

inductive and deductive. Once codes were established, I re-coded using the research

questions as a lens, checking for alignment and whether any novel perspective might be

found. My preference in analysis was to connect with the data as if it were a living

organism. I would regularly listen to the recordings and read out loud the transcripts in

order to understand the tone of the conversations, which would help me better understand

the emotions that were sometimes lost when moving from an oral to written medium.

Throughout the activities of analysis, our team focused on our relationships, mimicking the

value placed on relationships within the activities of data gathering.

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[36] I also hope to utilize variations of the suggestions found in Hays and Singh's (2012) "steps of qualitative data analysis," which includes: reducing data, collecting data, memoing and summarizing, organizing and transcribing text, coding, identifying themes and patterns, creating multiple code books, and developing theories and narrative plots (p. 295-306).

Knowledge Sharing and Giving Back

Kovach (2009) affirms that a relational research approach insists on giving back to the communities in which the research took place (p. 149). "Relevancy," she says, "is integral to giving back" (p. 49). Knowledges learned should never be divorced from the people who share them. I am resistant to the language of dissemination in the same way I am resistant to generalization. Traditional academic avenues for dissemination create asymmetric benefit, diverting much of the information through the well-trod trails of conferencing and publishing. For this study, the findings were not interpreted for the sole benefit of Global North audiences. Instead, an Indigenous approach to research speaks of giving back as a principle for knowledge sharing. Applying a Two-eyed Seeing perspective here is a helpful corrective, providing a balancing focus on knowledge sharing for the benefit of further decolonization of ISL curriculum and programming as well as providing immediate benefit to communities.

When presentations were given at conferences, however, it was critical for our team to be fully represented. In each of the conferences we attended, Global South team members as well as members of the *Ixil* community contributed to the presentations. Travelling together enhanced our relationships and trust with one another. Our team's intention for publishing has focused on contributing and furthering decolonizing conversations for ISL. The lack of literature pertaining to community and Indigenous community outcomes and impact of ISL was a motivation to be at the forefront of creating change that would directly affect the people we worked with.

Finally, the *Encuentro*, which I have referenced throughout this chapter, was the most tangible way of giving back this research design. Since much of it was a validation and

feedback event it also included two important opportunities for the attendees. Significant

care was given during the event for communities to share about their stories. Evening

presentations became a highlight, and it was obvious how much care and enthusiasm those

who spoke had when they shared. Resonating with one another's stories was a significant

connecting point for many of the communities who had never met the other participants.

This was further re-enforced during visits to two communities near Managua, Nicaragua.

These visits were arranged much like an ISL trip and were meant to be a way of giving an

educative experience to the Guatemalan attendees akin to the Global North visitors of ISL

programs. These were a highlight, not only for the Guatemalan participants who expressed

gratitude for these opportunities, but also for the Nicaraguan communities who were able

to celebrate their communities by sharing food, stories, and cultural events with their

Guatemalan neighbors.

Filling the Basket

The process of weaving a basket has come to an end. In these introductory chapters

of this dissertation that I have woven, an emphasis was placed on thinking about context

and self-location, the field of experiential education and ISL, and the ways that theory and

methodology support the inquiries in this project. The basket, as a conceptual framework

has allowed me to be playful and open to surprise (Lugones, 1987) in my approach to

research design. Now that the basket is complete, I want to draw the attention of the reader

to think about what it contains. I will reiterate that the following chapters are written in

such a way as to stand alone, providing enough context and details to make sense of the

arguments. However, I think they are best read after these introductory chapters. As the

reader, you have now accompanied me in the process of weaving and have a good

understanding of the basket you are now holding. This is important because it provides a framework for greater understanding of the context of the research as well providing an opportunity to see things from my point of view as I experienced my role within the project. I hope that enough detail has been provided to evaluate the following chapters in a good way.

The following chapter is currently being considered for an upcoming edited volume.

Chapter Four – Anti-colonial Approaches to Experiential Education in Indigenous Mayan Communities

In the spring of 2017, I travelled to El Salvador and Guatemala to work with a local researcher and friend. Our plan was to visit a community together in Guatemala in the hope of reconnecting with participants who had already contributed to the project and to present and request validation and feedback on some of the preliminary findings that emerged during data analysis for a SSHRC funded study on the impact of International Service Learning (ISL) on host communities. My companion, Tomas, had lived and worked with the *Ixil* people, a Mayan Indigenous group who live primarily in the Nebaj region of the *Quiche* Department in the Guatemalan highlands, before moving with his family to farm in El Salvador a few years earlier. His investment with the community who call that region home began through his work with a development and aid agency, however, his organic learning posture, desire to adopt the *Ixil* language and protocols, and long-term commitment has positioned him as a gatekeeper;[37] someone trusted by the community and able to act as a liaison for the upcoming interviews we planned on this visit.[38] This chapter is part autobiographical as I retell stories from my travels, weaving them together with the stories I was told by the *Ixil* people from the community of Nebaj where Tomas and I visited to gather data. These people have hosted groups of Global North visitors travelling as part of ISL programs and, for this study, played a critical role in helping elucidate the

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[37] See Hays and Singh, 2012, p. 180-183. They talked about the importance of building rapport and entering communities through "gatekeepers, stakeholders, and key informants" (Hays and Singh, p.180-183). I recognize the immense privilege I have as a researcher who is able to enter into this year's long process alongside a friend like Tomas who has put in the time and built trust with this community.
[38] Tomas is what I would consider an "organic knowledge holder." See Kovach, 2009.

political, colonial, and transnational complexities that are a part of these forms of experiential education.

Research texts, such as this chapter, are interpretive, and therefore, while I unpack several important themes related to the impact of ISL on host communities, the knowledges interpreted are properly situated as derived from and within my experiences in Nebaj and the discursive encounters I had as a researcher with people from the *Ixil* community. One of the purposes of this chapter is to take the time to honor the details of the context in which the study took place as a way of drawing the reader into understanding the richness of the findings. To begin I present several excerpts from a field journal to set the scene that I penned during a two-week visit to *Ixil* territory beginning with our twelve-hour journey by truck from his home in El Salvador to Nebaj on April 14, 2017.

Place-making and Identity

We had just spent two days on Tomas' small farm in Northern El Salvador. It's a hectare-sized plot perched on a mountainside with a driveway from hell. He and his partner Yasmin bought this land just about a year and a half ago, which they described as being "a mess of bush." With a six-month daughter in tow they slowly beat back the bush and carved out a place for a home. I couldn't imagine all they'd done since the purchase.

I stayed in an enchanting cob home they built from the dirt on their land. It is organic in design, littered with splashes of Yasmin's art that's carved into the cob structure or painted over it, giving the home a sense of meaning. Stepping out the door on my first morning, I was welcomed to crisp fresh air and soft clouds caressing

the valleys below us. The view of their fields and the surrounding peaks was stunning. Below me were orchards filled with peach trees, bean and pea plants, quinoa and chia fields.

‘Capitalism systematically distances us from each other, the land, our food, and the waste we produce,’ Tomas reflected in conversation with me that evening. This whole farm ‘experiment’ is a direct response to this distancing. He told me how, early in their settlement, they put all their garbage waste into the used water bottles they bought, which then became building blocks used in the walls of their attached bathroom. It's a literal beating of swords into plowshares – a peace-building image common in the Anabaptist faith community I grew up in – albeit a variation that inverses the distancing of the gratuitous wastes of consumer capitalism.

‘Now,’ he said ‘we unfortunately drop off one bag of garbage a month when we visit San Salvador.’ This, I realize, is a part of place-making. It's an idea, notion, or concept that I've been entertaining for the better part of a year. During my previous visit to Guatemala I was reading Keith Basso's wonderful book ‘Wisdom Sits in Places.’ There are exciting if not dangerous ideas in there for the person who has been haunted by the specter of capitalism. In short, it's a book that tells of Basso's story as an anthropologist who worked amongst the Western Apache, helping, as per their request, to make maps, "not Western maps – we have plenty of those – but Apache maps" (pg?). Basso's book is a tale of learning about a different way of knowing that is intimately connected to places. Wisdom, he learns from this different people, sits in places. Wherever we are, the land is filled with stories and only sometimes, as he notes, do we know how to access them. I admire what Tomas and Yasmin have done. Their

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connection to place is tangible, having soaked the ground with their sweat. Here is a

demonstration of another way of being in relationship with food, waste, and ultimately

– people. (Field Note, April 14, 2017)

There are learnings embedded within this project of place-making that Tomas and Yasmin

have undertaken, which with a little translation, have informed my interpretation of the

findings from this research project as well as my reflections about the nature and process

of research. I open with this story, which is continued below and woven throughout, as a

way of demonstrating the *responsibility* of self-location that I recognize needs to be at the

forefront of any research involving Indigenous people (Peltier et al., 2019).

> *These conversations frame our long drive, juxtaposed against the rough ride of our*
>
> *rented 4x4. Motorized travel, in many ways, is the antithesis to place-making. Fleeting*
>
> *glimpses of life pass us by as we use so few of our senses to interact with the land we*
>
> *traverse. It's a long and slow drive up to Nebaj. We come to a near stop at a speed*
>
> *bump positioned menacingly on the highway and purchase two piña fermentado, a*
>
> *local cousin of the more commercially available Kombucha drink one might find in*
>
> *Canada. We take roads that Tomas swears are short-cuts, but which would be*
>
> *considered nearly condemned and impassable in the Canadian context. Washboard*
>
> *gravel pockmarked with potholes and dressed in fist-sized rocks make up the*
>
> *consistency of one particularly harrowing stretch of road that winds its way along a*
>
> *precipice with little more width than our vehicle.*
>
> *I'm driving at this point in the journey and taking it easy. As we round a bend*
>
> *my peripheral vision alerts me to something above. Immediately slowing I begin to*
>
> *recognize for certain a few larger-than-I-would-like rocks falling in front of us. We*

come to an abrupt stop and hear what sounds like thunder from above to which Tomas

yells "back up!" More rocks, sizeable enough to not just threaten damage, splatter the

road ahead.

> *'Fucking mining company,' says Tomas. 'They don't care about anything or*
>
> *anyone, just getting the rock they need out of the mountain.'*
>
> *Unregulated mining, such as we encountered, is, in his estimation, all too*

common. We are stuck on a sharp switchback with nowhere to go but forward. We

wait until the next rain of rocks hits the road and burst out of the gates. I whip the

truck through the next hundred meters at speeds uncomfortable given our road

conditions. Thankfully, no incidents.

> *'We're entering Ixil territory,' Tomas tells me. It's immediately apparent, given*

the women's commitment to their traditional and distinct red skirts. (Field Note, April

15, 2017)

Ixil clothing, I have come to realize, is a political statement, tied to centuries of colonizing

experiences the Mayan women have had. Since the expansion of Catholicism beginning in

the sixteenth century and with the rise of Protestant evangelicalism within the context of

Guatemala, these and other institutions of colonization, such as the education system and

military, have all played their part in threatening "the viability of Maya spiritual knowledge

(Hinojosa, 2011, p. 173). Nationalized education systems have shaped "acceptable" ways of

being Maya and defined what constitutes "valid knowledge" (Hinojosa, 2011, p. 178) while

the military has forever changed Mayan cultural practices so profoundly that it was

common for Indigenous women to forgo their traditional dress for the sake of safety and

anonymity during much of the conflicts. More recently, in post-war Guatemala, there has

been a resurgence of Maya women's embrace of traditional clothing as an "anchor of identity" (Hinojosa, 2011, p. 181) and different garments have themselves become markers of specificity and locality. As a visitor, whether I realize it or not, I am entering a visibly politicized community; one whose emphasis on reclaiming identity is a message spoken not by words and philosophies, such as those imported by the Colonial religions, but through daily practices, such as the wearing of traditional clothing.

It is the case that Maya ontology in the Guatemalan highlands, where the *Ixil* live, is defined more by "*practice* rather than *abstraction/inscription*" and, perhaps because of this more material focus, Maya spirituality has survived in "living form" (Thelen, 2017, p. 10). Their experiences of transition from external, Spanish colonialism to internal, Ladino colonialism (Peláez, 2009) did not stunt the acts of resistance communities practiced, but instead, argues Arias (2006), this history has shaped the Mayas into a truly "postcolonial" (p. 12) people where the value of cultural agency has spawned various proofs of their transnational identity making. For instance, Thelen (2017) documented the rise of *alcaldias indigenas* (Indigenous mayoralties), a system of Indigenous government that exists parallel to municipal mayors. In Guatemala, during the early period of colonization, Indigenous communities, to varying degrees, were given authority to maintain pre-colonial forms of local governance for local, legal, and familial matters (p. 13-15). However, in post-1944 Revolution Guatemala, governments eliminated these localized forms of power and disavowed Indigenous municipal government structures. The *alcaldias indigenas* was a grassroots response to this shift and grew alongside counter-revolution (1954-1963) Guatemala where even today, as is the case in Nebaj, there are Indigenous mayors who play a role in enacting traditional authority in family disputes and put into motion various

services for the community. As one participant reflected on the differing roles these mayors play, "the indigenous mayor is there to defend the territory of the people. The municipal mayor is there to execute projects, when of course those abide by the different rules of the state since he is part of that system. Meanwhile the indigenous community leaders are there to serve the community" (Gustavo, interview, January 18, 2017).

The Spirit of Extraction

While I cannot claim to understand the complexities of this kind of duo-political atmosphere, it is worth making note that the participants who responded to our questions about challenges within their sphere were all very perceptive about the existing "political divisions" (Katy, interview, May 6, 2016) due to the two systems of government in their community. The lack of jobs for young people (Flor, focus group interview, March 2, 2017; Margarita, interview, May 6, 2016; Gustavo, interview, January 18, 2017) exacerbates the political situation and many are left with seemingly no choice but to consider migrating away from the community. One participant (Gustavo, interview, January 18, 2017) observed that "about 75% of the young people migrate each year – they go to the coast or to the capital, or the U.S." and notes that at least "15 young people from the community" left this last year (2016). Migration, claims one of the *Ixil* youth, leads to "family disintegration," a disinterest in "wanting to work in agriculture," and a disconnection from elders in their lives (Caterina, focus group interview, March 2, 2017). This political perceptiveness and ability to grasp the connectedness of governance, family life, culture, and education is demonstrative of the *Ixil* sensitivities to such things. It is this posture that has shaped the *Ixil* encounters with Canadian mining companies that have infiltrated their lands and harassed their communities (Binks-Collier, 2020), riding the coattails of national and

municipal government support. Pedersen (2017) likened the strategic plans of these corporations to "neocolonial conquistadors" where economic interests are intertwined with subterfuge diplomacy in the form of funding NGO projects within host countries (Pedersen, 2017, p. 193). There is an emphasis on a developmental model (Nolin & Stephens, 2010) of natural resource extraction being touted by the Canadian mining conquests, but in the experience of those who live in proximity to the mines it is a misnomer. It is easy to understand why, in a tangential way, Canadian and other foreign experiential learning groups are seen with skepticism. Likewise, ISL and other experiential learning groups have arrived in the same spirit; a spirit of extraction. Gustavo (Interview, April 6, 2017) recognized the similarities telling me that "the *Ixil* region is very rich in natural resources and especially water resources which have brought us struggles with all sorts of multinational companies. Unfortunately, several NGO's have also come into the community to 'assist' us with paternalistic projects and they essentially teach the people to abandon their ways, become consumers, and create dependence."

Taking a more optimistic stance, one participant recognized the opportunity that critical Canadian ISL groups represent in building allyship. He said that it would be "good to find a shared theme between our realities" and wonders about the potential aid that Canadian learners might provide the community as there are likely "documents in English related to these companies that we don't know what they mean… if we could have the support of certain groups to translate these documents to support our struggle… we could create an alliance with folks who could get us information related to the companies that are operating here" (Pedro, focus group interview, April 8, 2017). The developmental model I am hearing is synonymous with Western extraction, whether it be natural resources,

community knowledges, or a space for students from Canada and elsewhere to achieve their own learning outcomes through ISL programming.

Reclamation

These observed challenges by those in the community affirm the politics of reclamation that the *Ixil* have come to adopt, which promotes "dignity, traditions, and the value of Indigenous culture and society with the goal of seeking self-determination for Indigenous peoples to continue their cultural and societal practices without impediment" (Thelen, 2017, p. 15). This is a politics of *reivindicacion* (vindication) that stands in contrast to the politics of colonization (Thelen, 2017). Practically, this politic is manifested in efforts to work toward Mayan language reclamation in light of centuries of colonization, oppression, and in the *Ixil* experience, a genocide operation that has left their language and culture in a fragile state of survival (Dalton et al., 2019). Efforts at Mayan language revitalization have broken out of the local and national context of Guatemala and have been popularized in the West, as seen in the *testimonios* style of writing taken up by Mayan authors such as Rigoberta Menchu (1983) and Victor Montejo (1987) who wrote in this autobiographical genre (Arias, 2006). It is in this context that the *Ixil* University arose as an alternative for Mayan teachers and learners who seek to "embrace *Ixil* Indigenous thinking" as well as a pedagogy, *Xula'* that "challenges western education models" by prioritizing "oral tradition over written and within its curriculum, promotes ancestral knowledge born of that same land" (Sabas, 2016). Former rector, Pablo Ceto, clarified that the "university values conversation and our facilitators are trained to make students speak. As *Ixileños*, we need to recover the right to speak" (Sabas, 2016).

The plan – as much as we have one – is to connect with Tomas' contacts; both friends

he made while working in this community years ago as well as connections at the Ixil

University. It's the latter I'm most curious about talking more with him. Tomas has

told me about this institute – a vision of the Ixil community for recovering and passing

on Ixil knowledges and practices.

'Tomorrow,' says Tomas, 'we visit Tzalbal,' which is the small town outside of

Nebaj where the University is located. I later learn that there is also a small room

reserved for students in the market in Nebaj, a sort of satellite classroom for weekends.

The choice of location in the town of Tzalbal is deliberate and one could see it as an

essential curricular device since most Ixil youth, I'm told, drift towards the urban

centers and away from the places where their traditional practices are most prevalent.

The University, then, beckons students to return to a space where teaching is rooted in

the rhythms of an Ixil community. Where one learns and what one learns are not

divorced in this Indigenous pedagogy.

The following morning after our arrival in Nebaj, Tomas and I set out. We

arrive in Tzalbal in the midst of a morning class, which is really a conversation that

hinges upon three spheres – the local, regional, and international. Leaders from the

University take their time reporting on important events and possible ways to respond

in each of these spheres. I take note of a bullet point on the chalkboard under the

'international' column that says simply "Donald Trump – Syria." The prior evening,

while flipping channels in my hotel room I caught segments of this news story and was

able to deduce that the United States had bombed Syria. Here, in a place that seems as

far removed from this Syrian-American conflict as possible there is a group of

politicized students discussing how they might respond to this. This experience wasn't shocking. In fact, it was for me a tangible demonstration of this community's investment in politics. The Ixil, as I've learned from several sources during my visits to Guatemala, are politically attuned. Their story, for the outsider, is one of unknowable suffering. During the Guatemalan civil war they were targeted for a genocide operation – identified by the military as a people from a region who were opposing the oppressive government. Needless to say, their experience solidified their resolve to intentionally keep Ixil identity at the forefront of their lives. Resilience is a part of their DNA, though that word seems like a hollow English way of trying to name something that a settler cannot fully comprehend. Regardless, the Ixil are concerned with reclaiming their Indigenous knowledges and practices and thus, the University was born – a fully community owned dream that stands apart from and deliberately in contrast to Western academic institutions. What an absolute pleasure to sit within this circle of Indigenous leaners – young people who are passionate about the things they are learning, not for the benefit of claiming certificates for economic prosperity but as tools for re-constructing epistemologies, community, place, and character.

In the latter part of the morning we sat with the 3rd year students who were tasked with presenting their wonders and problems that would, eventually, form their focus of research. Most interesting, to me, was that the students, prior to cultivating their own wonders were required to talk with people in the community from which they would gather ideas about what problems existed – from those most affected. The process is thus: discover what the community is concerned about, formulate your wonders based on those problems and offer those to your peers for critical feedback.

The goal of research is, seemingly, always practical, always meaningful, and always gives back to the community. (Field Note, April 17, 2017)

Research as Discussion – Reconsidering Theory and Method

In this writing, I wish to draw attention to the context where research takes place; to invite the reader to engage in as Basso (1996) called it, placemaking. I hope my integrating short stories frame something important that I have grown to understand as central to conceptualizing research in Indigenous contexts; that peoples' experiences of colonialism have worked to, as Tomas so eloquently stated, "distance[s] us from each other" (Field note, April 8, 2017). It is becoming clearer for me that Basso's (1996) point about wisdom being found in places then also holds a critique of those who fail to name the places from which knowledges are found. In writing a research text, such as this, it would be akin to mimicking the mineral extraction industry practices that have taken from the *Ixil* lands for decades without recognition, recompense, or reciprocity.

In this chapter I wanted to not only present the findings from the research that took place in Nebaj but to take time to share about my experiences and the details of the places, theories, and methods, that informed the process of research. In this way I hope that this chapter also offers something to the dialogues about relational research. In my learnings about the field of educational research I am reminded of the idea that Margaret Kovach proposed that research should recognize that there is a relationship between the knower and the one wanting to know (Personal Notes, Lecture, January 20, 2017). Relationships form the foundation of all aspects of research (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008), from theoretical frameworks, data gathering, analysis, and knowledge sharing. Composing research texts (Clandinin, 2013) is but one aspect of knowledge sharing and should not be

reduced to rush to create structure, justification, explanation, findings, results, and discussion. Rather, I wish to think about whether the ways of writing a text demonstrate research as extraction or research as giving (Kovach, 2009).

Discursive Frameworks

It follows then, that research which claims to be relational must also employ frameworks that push and sometimes pull the design along the entire course of the project. Even here, in the composition phase of research, in order to adhere to a relational ontology I must commit to language that is flexible, transparent, and fluid; and have found that the ideas offered by Sefa Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) of utilizing a discursive framework in research rather than a theoretical framework emphasizes these qualities (p. 299). Theory, they suggested is problematic if it "has no bearing on the lived realities of people" (p. 298) and when theory becomes fixated "with/in particular intellectual orthodoxies" (p. 299) it is no longer functioning in a way that benefits practice and is therefore restricted by a colonial way of thinking – in dichotomies. Daza and Tuck (2014) similarly spoke of theory becoming domesticated where it is utilized to perpetuate further theorizing rather than speaking to social change (Sefa Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 298), and the material nature.

I too am hesitant to claim this research text offers anything decolonizing. It does not assume change will happen because of the words written herein and it does not claim to define what decolonization of ISL is for the *Ixil*. However, I do hope that education research that seeks to change policy, create better practices, or inspire decolonizing conversations that move people into action is of benefit, both in the now and in the future to the *Ixil* people who continue to be a part of the Global North ISL programs. I follow Patel's (2014) admonishment that "to begin to decolonize we must first learn to account for settler

colonialism," (p. 313) and "provide a context for the particular colonial project(s) we are responding to" (p. 314). I have attempted to do the latter in the beginning of this chapter and here will pivot to address the former.

Settler-Colonialism and Anticolonialism

I was born on stolen and unceded land of the Stó:lō First Nation in what was then and is now the city of Abbotsford, BC. I moved with my family to Treaty 6 territory and homeland of the Métis where I grew up in a small town, known locally as a 'bedroom community' as many of the residents would travel to the city of Saskatoon for work and return in the evening. Little did I know as a child in that community that I lived a mere fifty kilometers from Fort Carlton, where Treaty 6 was signed. My ancestors settled in Canada as Mennonite refugees, escaping as many families did, the Bolshevik revolution, leaving behind their way of life to find peace elsewhere. Settler-colonialism is part of my story. I am at once complicit in the colonial enterprise and a colonized person; colonization has shaped me as it has all in Canada living within its system of governance and economics. I am also a cisgendered white male, who has benefitted greatly from the settler-colonial structures that aim to support exactly my demographic. That word, 'structure' is the most apt term to describe my experience of this settler-colonial existence (Patel, 2014), where land has always played a central role. Whether or not my ancestors understood the complex interactive relations of coloniality, racism, gender, class, sexuality and desire, capitalism, and ableism (Snelgrove et al., 2014, p. 2) that they would inherit through participating in the settlement projects in the prairies, they knew that land was a key lure and a gift for their own personal peace-making projects where they could bury the horrors of war they had experienced by tilling the earth as new agriculturalists. It would be far too easy to look

back and critique the adoption of "settler grammars" (Calderon, 2014) that settler communities, like those my ancestors were a part of, were learning. This organizing system is embedded in and reproduced in the settlers' education (Calderon, 2014, p. 316), which struggles to be inclusive of the displacements of Indigenous people, as well as Indigenous epistemologies. I echo Patel's (2014) reflection that it is exactly because I have enjoyed "the spoils" of the settler-colonial project that I "must participate in the project of dismantling settler colonialism" (p. 359). Becoming awake (Lugones, 1987) to my own story, to this history and this structure, is the requisite first step for any participation in decolonizing research. Calderon (2014) stated clearly, "if we are truly interested in decolonizing work, we must attend to the context of coloniality that we find ourselves in" (p. 332).

I briefly mentioned, but did not give attention to my Mennonite, or what I will refer to as *Anabaptist* heritage (Klaassen, 2001; Reimer, 2014). It is a term that denotes several religious political groups that emerged in the 16th century amidst Catholic and Protestant revolutions and violence. I wanted to take just a moment to make note of the "loving perception" (Lugones, 1987) I have of many of the traditions that were gifted to me. The Anabaptists practiced peaceful action and were founded in anti-violence, clearly a reaction to the kinds of oppressions they observed and experienced as outsiders within Christendom Europe. Similar to Latin American Liberation movements, there exists a shared commitment that "theology comes afterwards, it is the second act (Gutierrez, 1973, p. 35) and that the first act, as Segundo (1976) reminded, is a "personal commitment to the oppressed" (p. 81). Anabaptist and liberation theologies are oriented to the political nature of everything (Segundo, 1976) and cognizant that one must accept their relationship to the political (Balzer & Heidebrecht, 2017). I carry with me these learnings as my ontological

foundation and aim to perceive the ways researchers, such as myself, are both theoretically and politically invested. In the same way I am motivated to participate in the dismantling of settler-colonialism, I am also motivated to apply a political lens to the inquiry of ISL because of the ways I have benefitted from their programs, both as a participant and facilitator.

As I shift my attention back again to the task at hand in this examination of the *Ixil* experience of ISL it becomes clear to me that I must assume a political stance in utilizing a discursive framework. Specificity is important in education research where terms such as postcolonial, anticolonial, and decolonizing are framed as subfields of critical or anti-oppressive education; "they are," said Daza and Tuck, (2014) "often treated as different words for the same things, as synonyms" (p. 309). I take the position of interrogating my own use of such terms flippantly and rather wish to be clear, if somewhat limited in what I claim this chapter may or may not do, rather than ascribe to the kinds of universalizing claims that are propelled by the "seemingly unrelenting quest for data and publications" (Patel, 2014, p. 358). To contribute in this way only supports the colonial logic of reproduction, mimicry, and settlement. And so, as much as this is a final research text it will remain something temporal and interim (Clandinin, 2013). It is offered to the broader research community as a piece that furthers discussion about decolonization of the specific topic at hand. For this chapter, then, it is time to say more clearly that I intend to apply an anticolonial discursive framework (Calderon, 2014; Patel, 2014; Sefa Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001) that will aid in my analysis of the impact of ISL within the *Ixil* context.

Primarily, the anticolonial framework applies to my role as researcher and composer of this research text. The anticolonial approach brings awareness to the limits of

the written word in producing material change and the situatedness of education research within colonizing institutions. An anticolonial approach is not the same as decolonization in that its focus on change is about becoming awake (Dewey, 1938; Greene, 1995) to question the settler-colonial paradigm that has worked so hard to simplify the complexity of relations (Calderon, 2014; Snelgrove et al., 2014). Taking up an anticolonial approach as a researcher meant for me to delight in surprise (as Lugones, 1987, stated about research), recognize the opportunities afforded by vulnerability (Greene, 1995), and to embrace a pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999). It was also a framework that helped me situate myself as a settler within an Indigenous context for research. Sefa Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) outlined eloquently that:

> The anti-colonial discursive framework allows for the effective theorizing of issues emerging from colonial and colonized relations by way of using indigenous knowledge as an important standpoint. As a theoretical perspective, anti-colonialism interrogates the power configurations embedded in ideas, cultures, and histories of knowledge production, validation, and use. It also examines our understanding of indigeneity, pursuit of agency, resistance, and subjective politics… the anti-colonial approach recognizes the importance of locally produced knowledge emanating from cultural history and daily human experiences and social interactions… the goal is to question, interrogate, and challenge the foundations of institutionalized power and privilege, and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations. (p. 300)

For this chapter the anticolonial discursive framework will be seen most clearly in my interpretation and inquiry of the ways ISL may re-colonize (Sefa Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001) as well as the capitalist political and economic trappings that experiential education fall prey to. Therefore, I preference the *Ixileños*' Indigenous knowledges by taking the stance of an ally in a struggle "against hegemonic colonial relations" (Sefa Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 312). I also recognize that the anticolonial approach is incomplete (Patel, 2014). Its purposes are to expose and articulate settler-colonial epistemologies and practices and bring light to bear on settler-colonial and Indigenous relationships. I will hold onto this discursive approach as something that aids in this writing project. It is a conversational approach that and a lens I wish to use as a researcher.

Embracing the Incomplete Nature of Research

>*The market in Nebaj reminds me of other markets I've visited in my travels; impossibly tight streets shared by vendors who spill their wares across tables, pile things in baskets and wheelbarrows, and hang goods from the ropes holding up the temporary tarpaulin shade tents constructed this morning. I'm balancing watching my steps, avoiding pools of water I'd rather not step in, while visually indulging in the variety of items on display. The vegetable and meat markets are a personal favourite; they are colorful, loud, busy, and filled with smells that we've seemingly made extinct in the Canadian context. I find myself questioning my resolve of whether I'd buy that butchered chicken that's been hanging on display all morning, whose marketing strategy hinges on the skittish buzz of flies. I'm not sure, but I do know it is refreshing to be connected to the violent and sometimes (according to my cultural norm) disgusting process of butchering animals for food. My mind drifts to the parasitic*

nature of capitalism that aims to remove us from the human element of consumption.

I'm reminded of the proximity we share with food when I'm attempting to avoid

stepping in blood-soaked puddles.

As we meander, Tomas suddenly veers left into a building that houses an open-air court in the center, shops all around. It's a small market area for traditional Mayan crafts, clothing, and art. We are looking for Paula, a woman who operates one of the vendors and, whom Tomas suggests, would be an excellent person to talk with about ISL trips in the Nebaj region. She's setting up shop, arranging shirts on hangers as we walk up. It's obvious that she has appreciated Tomas from past experience as she beams and gives him a hug. I learn, afterwards, that Paula is the godmother to Tomas and Yasmin's daughter who had baptised her as a baby in a traditional Mayan fire ceremony. Tomas tells me she is one of a few important Mayan spiritual leaders in Nebaj tasked with performing ceremonies at one of four (North, South, East, West) altars in the city. She has a wizened face, a gentle presence, and welcomes us to sit on two stools she digs out from behind her stall. This conversation, I realize, is protocol. We are trying to arrange a time to converse more formally later in the day. She tells us of her recent trip to support the Indigenous community of Standing Rock in the United States. I'm captivated by her story and her resolve to support Indigenous resistance efforts. I imagined her, dressed in her distinct Ixil red skirt and beautifully embroidered shirt, who, speaking no English, shows up to support her kin in a foreign context. She exemplifies the Ixil spirit it seems. We make plans to meet at her home later in the day and depart with many thanks for her hospitality. (Field Note, April 17, 2017)

The primary gifts of data (Kovach, 2009) that this chapter draws upon are derived from two sets of interviews; the first set took place in September 2016 and was performed by a Guatemalan research assistant. The second set took place in April 2017 and I was thankful to have had the opportunity to visit and converse with individuals and in focus groups using a semi-structured approach at times and more often an emergent open-ended approach. I was accompanied in each of the conversations by Tomas, a central figure in this chapter, who was and is a trusted gatekeeper and someone who navigated the cultural and ceremonial expectations of each of the encounters.

Real-time Analysis

Analysis occurred in the midst of our travels, as I recorded regular voice notes and penned reflective journals. Initial thematic interpretations were also beginning.

Tomas and I were able to record a conversation, reflections on the stories of our time in Nebaj. The process of thinking with stories (Morris, 2001) rather than about stories was something we attempted. I say 'attempted' because I'm not entirely sure of the nuances but am committed to exploring this approach in practice. We shared a meal together in a little shop down an alley in Nebaj. It was evening and dark out. The horrid fluorescent lights buzzed in the small taco stand and we chose a table, dirtied from the previous customers' plates of gloriously barbequed meats. As we sat down, we discussed the experiences we had interviewing the community members and leaders. (Field Note, April 9, 2017)

An interim report of the findings based on this primary data was compiled and presented to community members from the *Ixil* who attended, along with members of four other Guatemalan and Nicaraguan communities. A three-day *Encuentro* (gathering) was born at

this time and was developed over the course of the next year to take place in Managua, Nicaragua. This was both a validation event as well as an opportunity to give back (Kovach, 2009) and look forward to what these participants would like to see for the future of ISL research (see chapter six). Pivoting now from the stories and reflections on the process of research that supported this chapter I will spend the remainder of this chapter offering my interpretations of a thematic analysis.

ISL Deconstructed and Reconstructed

We need to begin

by combatting this idea that is engrained

not only in the groups, but also in our communities; that

development is something that comes from the outside and not from within

our own communities

We need to understand the different visions

of what true development is

and know how to read our reality

and know where the problems we are facing stem from. (Gustavo, interview, April 15, 2017)

As I reflected on this sentiment from one of the participants in this study, I could not help but replace the word *development* with *research*. As a part of my attempt to integrate a conversational approach in this analysis I thought it an insightful statement and equally important to consider in relation to education research. There are competing visions of what constitutes research, and more to the point that he was making, 'development.' Transnational corporations have utilized this tag to justify their economic neoliberalism

(Nolin & Stephens, 2010), so shaping the cosmovision of we who live in *developed* nations and have ubiquitously adopted the term that immediately conjures up a construct of reality framing some nations as *developing*; at once justifying development projects as good while also absolving ourselves of the responsibility to critically consider otherwise. Walsh (2015) named this state of global development as "colonialism in sheep's clothing" (p. 9), exposing the self-serving trends she had witnessed in her work in Bolivia.

Tourism and the more wholesome attempt at re-branding with voluntourism, in which ISL may easily be misconstrued, requires further problematization beyond a dichotomous suggestion that there exists a way to filter *traditional* approaches from *critical* (Mitchell, 2008); the latter aiming to attain a decolonized curriculum. It remains that ISL is caught up in the colonization incognito and firmly embedded in the pedagogy of whiteness (Bocci, 2015; Mitchel et al., 2012; Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2015) that rests on the potential and hoped for outcomes of producing global citizens without recognizing the need to consider the coloniality, transnationality, and effects of consumerism that underpin all our relationships (Kivisto & Faist, 2007). What is required of ISL is greater transparency, a theme that the *Ixil* named and expounded on in several ways.

Asymmetry and Trust – Experiences of ISL

Historical oppressions have been a part of the *Ixil* story who have "for over 500 years" been "defending our land and territory" (Juan Carlos, focus group interview, April 18, 2017). There are those within the communities whose doubts and mistrust of outsiders are deeply interwoven with their experiences of colonization, genocide, and the empty promises of development. While these voices do not represent the entirety of the community, especially those who have hosted and enjoyed visitors that show an interest in

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the "fight of the people" (Flor, focus group interview, March 2, 2017), it remains that the

privilege and political freedoms that visitors bring with them is representative of

asymmetric relations of power so pervasive in settler-colonial encounters with Indigenous

peoples (Snelgrove et al., 2014).

After attending a day of classes at the *Ixil* University, I gathered along with Tomas

and several instructors to discuss their experiences of ISL. Echoes resounded that

reminded me of the felt asymmetry as explained by Juan Carlos, who said

we don't feel we have borders

that is something that has been imposed upon us

borders are something we are against

we can't go study other cultures and people

a lot of time when white-looking people come from the outside to visit

the community has distrust

wondering what is going on

who are these people?

why are they here? (Juan Carlos, April 8, 2017)

"White-looking" visitors bring with them more than their bodies to the communities they

visit. They, like myself, bring an inheritance of Settler colonialism, which is that of

whiteness; the underlying idea that the cultural values of European settlers is somehow the

norm by which other cultural values are measured (Mitchell et al., 2012). In many cases

whiteness remains invisible to the visitor but is seen and felt by the hosts who recognize

the dynamics of inequality, power, and privilege that exist between these new temporary

relationships that descend upon their communities. This is a transnational encounter, a

visit full of political baggage, often carried by the Guatemalan hosts in much the same way as they carry the baggage of the environmentally and socially damaging impacts of the Canadian mining corporations in their region.

After several days in Nebaj, Tomas planned a trip to the *Acul* valley, known as the Cheese Valley for its farms' production of wonderful European style Swiss and Cheddar. We intended to visit *Finca Mil Amores*, a farm nestled amongst some of the more remarkable mountains draped in lush greens that I had seen since arriving in Guatemala. It is owned by Italians who benefitted from government efforts to rebuild and develop *Acul* after the military carried out their scorched earth operations that left 70% to 90% of *Ixil* communities destroyed (Oettler, 2006). As I enjoyed my cheese, which gave me the taste of familiarity, I was struck with the very painful expression of settler-colonialism I was living. Several days later, with this still in my mind, I was enjoying an afternoon coffee with the same group of instructors from the *Ixil* University in a café in Nebaj and our conversation turned to the idea of community distrust of ISL groups.

> *There are so many Ixileños who have given their life*
>
> *trying to make it to the USA,*
>
> *and then the people see that it's so easy for these foreigners*
>
> *to come to our country*
>
> *and to walk around freely*
>
> *this can cause people to feel frustrated*
>
> *it seems unfair to families.* (Flor, focus group interview, April 8, 2017)

The anti-colonial approach demands this undercurrent rise to the surface. Much like my visit to *Finca Mil Amores*, experiential education that touts *intercambio* would benefit from

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historical interrogation and transparent ethical standards for engaging with specific

communities (Hartman et al., 2014). I wonder if reciprocity is truly attainable given the

transnational asymmetry that is expressed simply through the freedom of movement that

ISL visitors take for granted. As one of the *Ixil* University leaders explained so clearly,

> *Migration authorities don´t allow us to likewise visit Canada*
>
> *to visit the students there as well*
>
> *and we also don´t have the money to travel there.* (Juan Carlos, focus group interview,
>
> April 8, 2017)

Amidst these complex wonderings there are many seemingly trite examples of 'white-

looking' privilege that at first glance seem asinine, but work to further condemn the

Ixileños' way of life through the extension of whiteness. While hosts worry about whether

visitors might eat their food (Malcarito, interview, May 6, 2016; Marguerita, interview, May

6, 2016; Juana, interview, May 6, 2016; Vicente, focus group interview, April 8, 2017),

concerns were expressed by visitors about the lack of hot water for bathing (Maria,

interview, May 6, 2016), or apprehensions about the dynamics of sharing rooms, locks on

doors, and the different kinds of beds visitors must sleep on (Marguerita, interview, May 6,

2016). Guillermo, an *Ixil* who is a forensic anthropologist, offered an insightful reflection

that eloquently summarizes some of the issues related to transnational exchanges.

> *the groups of students that come*
>
> *they come with technology*
>
> *with shoes*
>
> *with pants*
>
> *jackets*

they look like they are going to explore Everest

but those of us who work in this area know

that if we're going to go on an exhumation

we use our old pants because we don't want

to make others (in the community) feel bad and also because we get dirty

but those from the groups

bring their special things

boots that possibly cost $1,000, what do I know

their big cameras

and that is something that really intimidates the people

those who come want to take pictures of everything

the trees

the dogs

and we've told them from the beginning

that they have to have tact with this

especially when taking pictures of children

because of the cases where people have come to kidnap the children

and sell them somewhere else. (Guillermo, interview, January 18, 2017)

The triviality of visitors' complaints and the demonstrations of wealth are revealing of the kind of power that visitors who are steeped in a "market-based citizenship" (Nagar & Swarr, 2010, p. 30) bring with them. ISL cannot divorce itself from the development model of tourism in the eyes of the community. Experiential education built on the privatized economic platform may perpetuate the project of settler-colonialism – now unintentionally

exported, where visitors to these lands once again re-shape and claim indigenous spaces to suit their preferences, never the wiser. I am reminded of Vrasti's (2013) critique of volunteer tourism, an industry I would argue encapsulates ISL, in which she wondered about the kinds of political subjects and social relations that are produced through these good intentioned international visits. Of course, Illich's (1968) condemnation of the marriage between education and volunteerism rings true a half century later. Experiential education continues to suffer from obscuring the moral and ethical dynamic between visitor and host by playing up the supposed moral and ethical good of micro-philanthropy, which in the end is "used to strengthen the logic of capital" (Vrasti, 2013, p. 3). What is required with ISL and other such international experiential education programs may be the adoption of a transnational lens, which is a "specialized analytic frame that can account for varying scales of representation, ideology, economics, and politics, while maintaining a commitment to difference and asymmetrical power" (Nagar & Swarr, 2010, p. 25). At very least integrating a transnational perspective that considers the various asymmetries and dynamics of power is something the *Ixil* request in their deconstruction of ISL experiences.

Indigenous Agency – an Imperative in ISL Design

Pivoting from deconstruction to re-construction of ISL, then, is what the remainder of this chapter will aim to present while adhering to the anti-colonial discursive framework that provides theoretical guidance for my analysis. I want to restate one of the goals of this framework, which is to bring to light settler-colonial and Indigenous relationships. One of my personal learnings throughout this project as a researcher was that of prioritizing relationality in research. I am indebted to Kovach (2009) and other Indigenous scholars who have discussed the necessity of relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) and the

beauty of becoming open to learning together in the ethical space of engagement (Ermine, 2008). These lessons have informed the research process and shaped the analysis.

In reading and re-reading the stories shared by the *Ixil* who participated in this study, one of the central themes that emerged was that of respecting Indigenous protocols. As mentioned, the political context of Nebaj includes different layers of authority including the *alcaldias indigenas.* Community members who play the role of host for ISL programs have taken it upon themselves to include, in their preparation for incoming visitors, to practice proper protocols with the ancestral authorities. Flor explained that

> *Any time a group or person comes into the community, we tell the authorities and let*
>
> *them know what the objective is of their visit. For that reason, the visitors can visit*
>
> *without any problems in the community.* (Flor, focus group interview, March 2, 2017)

This is the protocol of introduction that is helps to set the foundation upon which relationships of trust can be established. Trust cannot be earned if the community remains uninformed about who is visiting, as Guillermo reflected,

> *The biggest worry*
>
> *is about how the group is going to behave*
>
> *who is going to come*
>
> *every group is different*
>
> *with different people*
>
> *and it can be very stressful*
>
> *some might have a good experience*
>
> *others no*
>
> *and the differences in age*

and other things

you never know who is going to come

and what their tastes are going to be. (Guillermo, interview, January 18, 2017)

A recommendation from the *Ixil* for visiting ISL participants is to respect this protocol of introduction;

> *we also ask the visitors to share with the community authorities what they are*
>
> *doing. They need to share with the authorities the purpose of their visit so that there*
>
> *will be no miscommunication.* (Juan Carlos, focus group interview, March 2, 2017)

The authorities in this case include the governmental representatives as well as the ancestral authorities (Paula, interview, April 9, 2017) and elders, who are all made aware of the intentions and goals of the incoming group, so that they "trust us and thus offer their trust to the groups who come which allows them to truly experience our community and our way of life" (Flor, focus group interview, April 8, 2017). The protocol of introduction also safeguards against potential negative community feedback, as Jaun Carlos described, "if the community criticizes the visitors, we are at peace because the community authorities know" (Juan Carlos, focus group interview, March 2, 2017). The attention paid to the different layers of authority is all about creating relational accountability (Wilson, 2008), which is a value that underpins the *Ixil* way of life and needs to extend to visitors who partake in ISL programs in this *Ixil* and other Indigenous territories.

The desire for agency extends beyond the inclusion of proper introductory protocols, which is seemingly a bare minimum request for incoming groups. More important is a shift in control, which manifests in two different ways: increased control related to the logistics of hosting and involvement in co-development of ISL curriculum

including objectives and goals. The first is pragmatic and has a lot to do with establishing more direct relationships between the sending organization or institution and the receiving or hosting community. It is typical in international experiential education that an intermediary NGO or other Western-based community organization may be involved. Critique of this approach highlights the diminishment of the voices of local communities (Pisco, 2015) and the normalizing of settler-colonial approaches to travel planning and experiential pedagogies; yet another example of whiteness manifest, excused by visiting organizations and institutions as universally accepted values. Instead, as I sat with a group from the *Ixil* University, an institution still unrecognized by the current government but practicing self-determination through their teaching of Mayan epistemologies, I heard practical recommendations being made;

> *The first step would be*
>
> *to get to know us directly*
>
> *without any intermediaries between*
>
> *the community and the groups that come to learn...*
>
> *it is also important to formalize*
>
> *in some way or another*
>
> *the relationship on an institutional level...*
>
> *it is also important*
>
> *that this agreement is formalized*
>
> *as a long-term commitment on both sides.* (Flor, focus group interview, April 8, 2017)

There is literature that supports the focus on developing better community-institutional partnerships (Butin, 2006; Srinivas et al., 2015; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009) as well as the

necessity of further research into these partnerships as units of analysis (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Enos & Morton, 2003; Hartman, 2015; Morton & Bergbauer, 2015). However, while these conversations intersect and support this recommendation for increased agency in being involved in logistical and curricular planning, it is not the purpose of this chapter to delve further into this discussion of what these partnerships might look like other than to name the connections (see chapter six).

As Tomas and I reflected on the conversations we had with the *Ixil*, we wondered about how to infuse long-term relationality within what is often perceived of as the fickle nature of institutional partnerships. Tomas surmised,

> *I think on a practical level it would probably take a number of years to develop something that would work. The first couple of years you (institutions) come and start to develop relationships. But that presupposes that you are going to be coming back to the same place with the same institution… the folks at the Ixil University have an idea about and understand that having long-standing, long-term relationships with these types of people would be something that would be good. And they haven't had that.* (Tomas, interview, April 9, 2017)

Addressing decades of asymmetry between non-indigenous and Indigenous partners might require a swinging of the pendulum, a pre-commitment from Global North institutions prior to getting anything out of the partnership, to build trust and demonstrate a willingness to honor protocols and Indigenous agency. Ongoing relationship is essential from the perspective of the *Ixil*:

Sometimes, unfortunately, some of the visitors don't pay attention to what we want to

teach them. When we have long term visitors, it is easier to learn. (Juan Carlos, focus

group interview, April 8, 2017)

These types of relationships tend to be better when longer term. There is more trust,

more contact, and more shared work that can be done. (Flor, focus group interview,

April 8, 2017)

Our conversation turned also to reflect on the lack of consistency shown by different

intermediary NGO and other foreign community organizations regarding how they

establish expectations for ISL programs and collaborate on program design with the *Ixil.*

Too often, these intermediaries obscure communication and function as guardians between

the visitors and hosts; very clearly controlling the process and representing a colonizing

approach that aligns with a Eurocentric logic of charity (Hernandez, 2018) and piggybacks

on the capitalistic growth model of the volunteer tourism industry (Vrasti, 2013).

Ecology of Knowledges – the Proposal for ISL Curriculum

Santos introduces the concept of an ecology of knowledges (2004; 2007; 2014),

which I will borrow as a metaphor for this final part of my analysis of the *Ixil* experience of

ISL. Santos (2007) said,

the ecology of knowledges is an invitation to the promotion of non-relativistic

dialogues among knowledges, granting "equality of opportunities" to the different

kinds of knowledge engaged in ever broader epistemological disputes aimed both at

maximizing their respective contributions to build a more democratic and just

society and at decolonizing knowledge and power. (p. xx)

Developing an *ecology of knowledges* is, in short, the creation of a space to interrogate privileged knowledges (Santos, 2014), such as those of the settler-colonial and its maintenance of whiteness. In one of his works Santos (2014) reflected on two difficulties that block the transformation of colonialism and by way of extension, settler colonialism, suggesting that, first, those within these systems are incapable of "imagining the end of colonialism," and second, that they have adopted the widespread colonial "social grammar that permeates social relations, public and private spaces, culture, mentalities, and subjectivities... it is a way of life" (p. 26). With this assessment in mind I want to focus in on ISL, which is but one cog supported by and supporting the colonial systems of Santos' critiques. It is difficult to imagine the end of ISL as it is, although, even as I write this our world has been transformed by the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has, in so many ways, revealed the colonial imagination to be a falsehood. Now, more than any other point in the history of ISL, may represent an opportunity to re-imagine and re-define the social grammar of these experiential education programs by listening to counter stories (Nelson, 1995) such as those offered by the *Ixil* who have demonstrated resistance and who may aid in reconfiguring the dominant stories of ISL.

Mignolo and Walsh (2018) share about their interest with "knowledges resurging and insurging *from below* (that is, from the ground up) within and through embodied struggle and practice, struggles and practices that, in turn, continually generate and regenerate knowledge and theory" (p. 19). This sentiment is echoed in the words I heard in an interview with some *Ixil* youth;

> *When we debate with them (visitors)*
>
> *About things in the community*

It is good

To have new opinions

And the community feel happy

Because someone from the outside

Has come to hear the voice of the community

And knows the reality that we live

This helps us feel strengthened

That our voice is heard

By people from other countries

The community

Feels motivated

When they have the opportunity

To share about our struggle

We are in a struggle here

And it helps

When people come

To listen to our struggle. (Juan Carlos, focus group interview, March 2, 2017)

Further, Guillermo explained for those unfamiliar with the *Ixileños'* history of oppression,

You have to remember

that family members of victims of violations

are traumatized

they have trauma, shock, they have suffered a lot in their lives

so what is left of them

is to at least tell their story

and hope that story doesn't die with them

but that it is shared elsewhere

even if they don't know where that story is going to go

if it's going to be written about in a thesis or what

but this story is going to transcend their lives

and so I think there is a benefit

and the people are content

With some groups they've been able to make a deeper connection

and I think they have some lovely moments

they live

share with the people. (Guillermo, interview, January 18, 2017)

The anti-colonial analysis recognizes the importance of politicizing the ISL experience for all involved; these programs facilitate transnational encounters that hold the potential for an ecology of knowledges to flourish as visitors and hosts share about the political dynamics of their nations and between their nations. Gustavo explained this so eloquently, telling us about a recent example.

> *Our struggle is a great learning experience for ISL groups. The ruling of the constitutional court is the first time that communities have had their right to be consulted respected by the state, so this is a great learning opportunity for students. Also since many of these mega projects are run by companies from the US and Canada, these students can come and learn the reality to share with their governments the*

reality of what they've seen and what we have had to live through. (Gustavo,

interview, April 15, 2017)

A modest proposal for ISL curricular objectives that take place within Indigenous contexts

based on an anti-colonial perspective is for those Global North visitors who participate to

consider and participate as allies with Indigenous resistance efforts. This objective is what

Boler (1999) would call a pedagogy of discomfort, which is a call for action, and "action

hopefully catalyzed as a result of learning to bear witness" (p. 179). The sharing of stories

of struggle, as the *Ixil* have highlighted, is seen as a benefit to the community and as an

extension of this logic. I suggest that the practice of bearing witness become a formal

objective for those visitors who identify as benefitting from their settler-colonial

situatedness.

The disruption of settler colonialism may begin by taking a moment to be still and

listen and, instead of taking up space, to make space for dissenting stories to be told. It is

unfortunate that there are many examples shared by the *Ixil* community of their

encounters with young people who,

> *come and they don't learn anything*
>
> *but rather complain*
>
> *that they don't have 'their' food*
>
> *and then they get sick*
>
> *and never truly learn about our reality.* (Gustavo, interview, April 15, 2017)

Or as Kaxh expressed his disappointment with groups that

> *come to see the sadness*
>
> *and the poor conditions which*

some families live in…

it is almost like tourism…

They should rather commit

to helping the community in its struggles. (Kaxh, focus group interview, March 2, 2017)

Another example of missed opportunities is explained by Elias, who recognizes the settler-colonial filter of aid and development that some participants bring with them. He said,

there was one time when a gringo came and he saw that the Ixil families cooked over a fire on three rocks and that there was smoke in the room and he wanted to save us from our suffering. That´s great that they want to help, but they need to understand our reality first. That guy didn´t understand the spiritual significance of cooking over the 3 stones and wanted to help us by purchasing gas stoves, but that´s not what we needed. (Elias, interview, April 15, 2017)

Instead, bearing witness requires the emotional capacity to confront our own defensive angers or fears and "re-evaluate and struggle to develop a pedagogy that calls on each of us to be responsible" and open to the "invitation to discomfort" (Boler, 1999, p. 179). Feliciana, reflecting on her desire for visitors remarked,

They come

And see our ceremonies

The community norms

How to respect the sacred places

The water

How to respect nature

Through the ceremonies

They learn

Because they don't do this in their country. (Flor, focus group interview, March 2,

2017)

Practically speaking, the point being made here is a critique of the laissez-faire approach

taken by sending organizations and institutions in the selection of ISL participants. In many

cases, there are economic restraints that shape the viability of ISL programs and, while it

may be a challenging perspective, it is good to hear from host communities such as Nebaj

that they would prefer criteria be developed.

> *We would like to have contact with the people who bring these students to be able to*
>
> *express our concerns about what type of student comes to our community. Those who*
>
> *show most interest in what we can teach are older students who are more mature and*
>
> *they are also more willing to commit to some sort of relationship with our community*.
>
> (Gustavo, interview, April 15, 2017)

There is a desire for visitors who have technical or professional skills to help in their

resistance to "mega projects" (Elias, interview, April 15, 2017), specifically in translating

English documents for the community so that they can better understand the scope of what

these projects entail (Pedro, focus group interview, April 8, 2017). They are inviting allies

to join in their efforts to speak to the neo-colonial oppressions they are experiencing.

> *We need witnesses from the outside*
>
> *To come and observe*
>
> *To share with the wider world*
>
> *What is really occurring.* (Gustavo, interview, April 15, 2017)

What I hear as I listen to the *Ixileños* requests is that ISL become a politics of commitment (Mohanty, 2003), where the unaddressed focus on the Global North learner be transformed into a platform for developing advocates and allies who understand that solidarity and reciprocity are nothing if they remain cognitive concepts. To decolonize EE, as articulated in this chapter, is a highly politicized and relationally significant endeavor. It may become an educational space for *reivindicacion* (Thelen, 2017), a politics of reclamation, which stands in contrast to colonizing logic.

Please note that the following chapter has been published:

Heidebrecht contributed 70% and Balzer 30% to the writing. Together, Heidebrecht and Balzer conceived of the idea of examining in depth the notion of reciprocity within the field of ISL by applying a decolonizing lens. The *Encuentro* data gathering event provided an opportunity to analyze the Mayan participants' recommendations for future ISL practice. Within the data Heidebrecht and Balzer recognized the ways that the Indigenous participants articulated a desire for reciprocity in ISL as seeking to have more agency within program design and implementation. This manuscript contributes to the dissertation by focusing on this research event and adding to both the ISL literature while also contributing to literature related to decolonizing research methodologies.

Chapter Five – Decolonial Experimentations in International Service Learning Research and Practice: Learnings from Mayan Indigenous Host Communities

Research on the impact of international service learning (ISL) on student participants including our own work (Balzer, 2011; O'Sullivan & Smaller, 2013) and that of others (Ash, Clayton, & Atkinson, 2005; Kiely, 2004; Moely et al., 2002; Ogden, 2007; Pompa, 2002) has been a growing field of study. As with much research, ours had mixed beginnings. Because of opportunity and curiosity, we have travelled; because of a belief in social justice and a responsibility to live well in the world, we were drawn to ISL; and because of growing awareness of our position as settler-colonists and the impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples in the Americas, we began to question our previously held worldviews. What began as a conventional research project, examining the impact of ISL experiences on secondary school students, validating opportunities to travel and connect with the Other, morphed into a realization that we were the Other in these contexts. We brought with us power and wealth that had the potential to undermine local communities and perpetuate existing power imbalances. Broadly examining the literature on the topic reveals that there is comparatively little research conducted focusing on the impact of such experiences on host communities and organizations (Brabant, 2011; Crabtree, 2008; Erasmus, 2011; Larsen, 2016; Sutton, 2011). This omission constitutes an important gap that we sought to address in a recently concluded study. Identifying an emerging field of study, we hoped to learn alongside literature that shares these aims, taking into consideration Bringle and Hatcher's (2011) suggestion that "identified community needs" (p. 19) should be a central component of their definition of ISL, the

absence of which, according to Crabtree (2008) and Erasmus (2011), raises the issue of

neocolonialism if student engagement in the host community is dismissive or disruptive of

local practices. More recently, Larsen (2016) highlighted the lack of problematization of the

underpinning "values, knowledges and assumptions" of ISL (p. 10), and while

representatives of Global North sending agencies insist that they enter into rewarding

partnerships with their Global South counterparts (Dear, 2012), the literature, while

asserting the importance of such practices, and often espousing reciprocity as a central

tenet, ultimately lacks evidence of such experiences from Global South partners and

communities.

Indigenous Communities, Resource Extraction, and Problematized Research

Our experiences working with ISL programs and these observations form the

background and set the focus of a four-year research project in which we contributed as

members of a broader research team offering a connection to four Mayan Guatemalan

communities who participated in the previous study. Our ongoing relationships with these

communities and the fact that they all identified as Indigenous, we would realize,

transformed the project by bringing to light the importance of decolonization. The project

culminated in August 2017, when residents from the four Guatemalan communities as well

as residents from four Nicaraguan communities gathered for an *Encuentro* (symposium) to

discuss their experiences hosting ISL participants from the Global North. This *Encuentro*

was intended to be a concrete expression of decolonizing theory. This theoretical

framework was intended to provide a lens from which to understand the ways colonialism

and the imposition of Western Eurocentrism have impacted these particular Mayan host

communities as they relate to ISL. To provide a bit of background, as a result of

marginalization and discrimination exacerbated by political conflict and violence, these communities in the context of Guatemala have been forced "to drop out and reside in 'internal colonies' with little or no hope of upward mobility" (Kanu, 2006, p. 8). Local exemplars in each of these communities have responded to these internal colonizations through the creation of grassroots organizations that aim to promote sustainable and developmental goals such as employment, improved education, food security, and health measures (Howard & Henry, 2010; Sabas, 2016).

These social justice initiatives have often been interconnected with the work of NGOs, which though hopefully beneficial to the grassroots organizations, may further complicate the colonial and neocolonial relations of power in which these communities find themselves. Despite and sometimes in spite of their experiences working with NGOs, the grassroots initiatives may be seen as expressions of *decolonization* as Indigenous communities seek self-determination and identity reclamation. This is an important detail for our study and for this article as we are awakening and deepening our understanding of the necessity of relationality in working toward decolonization: seeking first to understand the ways in which communities are already working toward their own liberations. We will say more about this learning as we further outline our self-situatedness.

Furthermore, of particular importance for the Guatemalan participants to share at the *Encuentro* were their stories of *epistemicide* (Santos, 2014) and subsequent journeys of reclamation of Mayan Indigenous knowledges. The histories of violence—whether they be physical or epistemic—experienced by the Mayan communities differed in ways from the Nicaragua communities in the study and cannot be overlooked as they have profoundly affected their perceptions of education and contributed to a weariness of programs like ISL

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that are perceived of as external and disconnected to community aims. Estrada (2012), a Mayan Indigenous scholar, unpacked some of the complexities present, making specific note of the way the relationships between "nation building, citizenship, democracy, and development tie back to the issue of knowledge production" (p. 73). National curriculum development in Guatemala has traditionally tokenized Indigenous peoples' participation (Estrada, 2012, p. 68) and excluded Mayan ontological and epistemological perspectives, which situates these communities as foreign, although they reside within the national education systems borders.

Parallel to this, the history of resource exploration and extraction in Mayan regions (Deonandan & Dougherty, 2016) and the lack of consultation between government and Indigenous communities exacerbates feelings of disregard and generates worries of further exploitations and displacements. In fact, one community in Guatemala received visitors claiming to be ecotourists who were incognito working for mining companies. Examples such as this are of paramount importance when considering bringing outsiders such as Northern ISL participants into these communities. Interconnected and further problematic is the growth of the development industry in the last decades in Guatemala, sometimes responding to the injustices created by resource extraction (Balzer & Heidebrecht, 2017), accompanied by the growth of ISL programs that focus, sometimes myopically, on student experience (Jefferess, 2012; Mitchell, Donahue, & Young-Law, 2012) and too often cater to the objectives of NGOs and their stakeholders rather than the trajectories of, for example, Mayan communities reclamation efforts. This kind of development work could be likened to "colonialism in sheep's clothing" (Walsh, 2014, p. 9), and within the context of Guatemala, it is also hard to ignore how entangled this work is within the history of U.S.

interventions (Grandin, 2004), the exclusion of Indigenous voices within the Guatemalan national education curriculum, and the previously mentioned experiences of deception some communities have encountered.

Understanding the context and particularities of each of the communities within the larger frameworks of colonialism, globalization, and neocolonialism is helpful in developing sensitivity to the ways that research within these communities may either be misconstrued as similarly problematic or may, in reality, become further expressions of neo-colonization. One of the sensitivities to develop is, as Kovach (2009) highlighted, becoming aware of the all-too-common reality that Indigenous communities "are being examined by non-Indigenous academics who pursue Western research on Western terms" (p. 28). Considering this, we wished to interrogate the way that the Western academy and research methodologies have represented colonialism (see Wilson, 2008, pp. 45–52) for many Indigenous communities. Such research often "called into question Indigenous peoples' humanity" (Henhawk, 2013) in a blatant disregard for reciprocity and, furthermore, by focusing on knowledge as something to be extracted. One of our fears for the process of research was to echo the issues related to community experiences with resource extraction industries. Given the embeddedness of education research within colonizing institutions where policies often shape the research/researched relationship in asymmetric ways, we found Larkin, Larsen, MacDonald, and Smaller (2016) provided a helpful perspective as they wondered what this means for "service learning" and "our desire to conduct research on our impact on our host communities" (p. 23). On this we also find Kovach (2014) provided some insight, highlighting that research in such contexts, as we have outlined, is often riddled with *directionality*; the primary beneficiaries of such studies being

institutions, organizations, or persons from the Global North is due in no small part to the

reality that research involving Indigenous peoples is "highly fundable" (p. 104). In light of

this, it became clear for us as researchers in the midst of a project that included Mayan

communities that committing to decolonizing research meant, in part, expanding the focus

of the decolonial efforts, shifting the traditional focus from results and findings toward

process and relationality. It is this framing that informs the remainder of the article, and we

hope it becomes clear that our intent is to tell the parallel stories of the communities'

contributions and our learnings as researchers. In this way, we hope that this article

provides a glimpse into our growing understanding of a way of doing research that aims to

offer reciprocity in process and in its hoped-for outcomes.

Decolonial Experimentations

We begin with our part of the story, wherein, at the time of developing the

Encuentro, we were also mindful of the implications embracing decolonizing theory as it

relates to the design of such an event. Tuck and Yang's (2012) *decolonization is not a*

metaphor was a guiding mantra, specifically their note that "when metaphor invades

decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it

resettles theory" (p. 3). Considering this and in light of the very active grassroots examples

of decolonization being undertaken by communities, integrating decolonization as a

theoretical framework within the study sometimes felt like an inauthentic attempt to be

intentional. It was difficult to draw connecting lines between the trajectories of the existing

social justice initiatives within the communities and the goals and impact this research

project might contribute. This is something we have continued to wrestle with as a

research team, wondering how to design research that is not simply full of great intentions

but that is resonant with the participants' own hopes and goals. Tuck and Yang's critique is pertinent and has led us to consider the ways decolonization challenges Western researchers in the choice, design, and presentation of methodologies when working with Indigenous communities. This is especially true for researchers, such as ourselves, who are implicated by our settler-colonial lineages, which we understand to be "intrinsically shaped by and shaping interactive relations of coloniality" (Snelgrove et al., 2014, p. 2). As a distinct form of colonialism, settler-colonialism may be conceptualized as a "structure," one that has been and is imposed upon Indigenous peoples with the goal of separating them from their lands for the "creation of settler spaces for settler collectives" (p. 8). This framing resounds true in our experiences living in "settler spaces" within our home province of Saskatchewan in Canada, where the storied history of settlement too often obscured the history of displacement of the Indigenous peoples. With this in mind, a point of decolonization, for ourselves, is to become awake (Dewey, 1938) to the power of the structure of settler-colonialism to shape our imaginations in ways that capitulate to the virtues of development and modernization and where Eurocentrism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism are deeply intertwined and normalized (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

This task is something we wish to undertake for our own liberation from how settler-colonialism has, if we are honest, shaped our imagined possibilities of what experiential education and education research might look like. Similarly, in doing so, we also hope to gain a new perspective from which to see the ways ISL research and practices are often caught up in relations of power, implicitly replicating and mimicking settler-colonial structures. Drawing connections between these learnings and the hoped-for decolonizing research of this project in Guatemala meant for us developing a new

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vernacular that made space for *decolonial thinking*, which is a term we borrow from Mignolo and Walsh (2018), who defined it as learning to see "two sides of the story" (p. 112). Decolonial thinking reveals two competing stories in the context of the Mayan communities that participated in this study. First is that of modernism, with its promises of wealth and progress through the growth of the mining sector and hydroelectric projects, and is an imposed narrative and one that we recognize ourselves as implicitly caught up in as researchers who are also representatives of our Canadian nation (Howard & Henry, 2010). Second, is that of colonization, historic and ongoing, which show connections between the stories of land dispossession and marginalization suffered under Spanish colonialism, American interventions, and the growth of the mining sector and hydroelectric projects. Modernism is a story of good things to come, of progress, and an idealization of capitalist expansion seen most explicitly in globalization as a common good, whereas coloniality is the story, or stories, of things often hidden by the former and once uncovered reveal wounds, oppressions, and inequalities of peoples' experiences.

So far, we have learned that decolonial thinking is, in part, about seeing both sides of the story of a place and, in part, about allowing the now-revealed aspects of the story that were previously ignored or forgotten to re-shape us. Learning about the once unrecognized yet widespread and embedded neocolonial "social grammar that permeates social relations, public and private spaces, culture, mentalities, and subjectivities" (Santos, 2014, p. 26) is a continual task in decolonial thinking, which for this research project meant learning about our own histories and about the histories of liberative struggles of the Mayan participants who were a part of this study that we have, however incompletely, outlined above.

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Our efforts to integrate decolonizing theory in our research was not a simple endeavor. It was not a matter of adopting certain methods or using certain key words or even writing explicit plans into our proposals. Swardener and Mutas (2008) articulated this challenge:

> It has become clear that what makes decolonizing research decolonizing is not an adherence to a specific research method or methodology. Decolonizing research does not constitute a single agreed-upon set of guidelines or methods. . . Decolonizing research does not have a common definition. . . Decolonizing research is defined by certain themes and defining elements and concepts that arise when researchers engage in what they describe as decolonizing research. (Cited in Henhawk, 2013, p. 33)

Throughout our project we could best describe our efforts as *decolonial experimentations.* Therefore, the remainder of this article is littered with aspects of self-facing, how we learned to think *decolonially* (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) as a result of being involved in this project.

The Encuentro: Preparation

In what follows we will share how a commitment to decolonial thinking helped shape the design of the *Encuentro* as well as the interpretation of the findings and conclude by making some observations about the nature of reciprocity as it pertains to host communities' experiences of ISL. Something that we hope shines through the writing is our sense of hopefulness and excitement as we recognize the liberating potential of embracing such thinking; readers might not find final answers or bold claims, but we are hopeful that they may be able to see the analysis and conclusions from our perspective. However, with

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this in mind, we readily admit to the desire embedded, or perhaps trained in us and our writing, that prefers generalization and universalization. Instead, our commitment to decolonial thinking invites particularization.

We also preface the story of the *Encuentro* with our thankfulness for the diversity of our team, which consisted of members from the Global North and the Global South, most notably Xochilt Hernandez and Ramon Sepulveda, who both consider Nicaragua home. The conversations we had together as a team naturally led us to critically wrestle with the role of knowledge frameworks that undergird our assumptions in terms of how to design and conduct research. A clear example of the value of such conversations came a year before the conclusion of the study when Xochilt Hernandez inspired the idea of the *Encuentro* as a way of giving back to the communities. This idea emerged as a result of creating decolonial cracks (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), and, as Hernandez emphasized, this was a natural extension of one of the central aims of the study, which was to "re-define the colonial dynamic between researcher and researched" (X. Hernandez, Managua field note, August 6, 2017). Hernandez's and Sepulveda's increased investment in this project in the final year was a critical factor in its various successes, and while we were unable to create space for their collaboration in this article, we have chosen to include their voices as best we could in the following sections.

The Encuentro: Design

The plan for the *Encuentro* involved the hiring of four local facilitators, who through consultation with the communities over the course of several months would create a schedule as well as provide leadership for the event. The facilitators were hired based on the connections of trust they had developed with the research participants in the four

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Guatemalan and four Nicaraguan communities. Reflecting on these consultations, Sepulveda, who also played the role of one of the facilitators, highlighted some key values and practices that would influence the design, including Mayan ceremony, the choice of contextually relevant and relationally grounded methods, and the "non-involvement of Northern academics" (Managua field note, August 6, 2017). Hernandez too outlined the key conversational methods (Kovach, 2010) employed, shown here in an excerpt from our field notes (Managua field note, August 6, 2017):

- *Group Integration—bringing people together from diverse backgrounds to prep for discussion. Ice breakers, Indigenous contextual practices (i.e., ceremony), presentations on communities.*

- *Non-violent and Effective Communication—after bringing participants together, it is important to develop a sense of consensus around how dialogue with the other is going to happen. Dynamicos (icebreakers)—connections with others, short explanation graphic about communication.*

- *World Café—a participatory technique used for brainstorming—allows all participants to contribute to all elements of the conversation—dialogue is distributed equally, increasing the chance of participation.*

- *Theatre of the Oppressed—a tool for digging deeper into themes and exploring alternatives through the use of arts (alternative communication).*

- *Knowledge Mobilization—presentations of theatre of the oppressed to outside group of NGO workers for the purpose of mobilizing the knowledge created.*

Hernandez added that the community consultations further deepened trust, which was the foundation that led to the possibility of such an *Encuentro* and, therein, a greater

openness of participants to discuss their experiences. Sepulveda explained the impact this had on data collection throughout the project, saying "we saw evolving responses in our research participants—at the beginning there were limitations in collecting data due to colonial power dynamics . . . the first interviews in this research project from community members were 'shallow'" (Managua field note, August 7, 2017).

Creating space for community voices to affect the design of the research project was an important pivot point. Those of us from the Global North were learning to embrace an openness to surprise (Lugones, 1987) and a growing comfort with taking on the role of something that could be equated to *midwives* as we supported and encouraged the facilitators throughout the development process; this was an attempt to respond directly to the desire for the non-involvement of Northern academics during the *Encuentro*. We were thankful to hear, post-*Encuentro*, one of the Guatemalan participants reflect on their experience and make specific note about the backgrounded role of the Northern academics, which they likened to the "role we sometimes play when we host in our communities" (Ed, focus group, August 6, 2017). This represented a departure from the habitually infused hierarchical structuring of research relationships and provided an interruption that Hernandez articulated as an act of decolonization:

> the fact that you (research team) took into account the voices of us local researchers made a huge difference. Coloniality is directional and maintains structures of power. The fact that Northern researchers listened to Southern researchers, the fact that we engaged in debates, the fact that we openly discussed these things is different. (Managua field note, August 7, 2017)

We heard similar affirmations during a focus group debrief of the *Encuentro* with the Mayan participants who pointed out that the "process of giving back" in research is "really important to us" (Feli, focus group, August 6, 2017), and that while there was a skepticism about "why you wanted to do research" with the communities, it was the *Encuentro* that helped them realize it was not to "expose the other—it is to learn from each other and become better people" (Ana, focus group, August 6, 2017). We didn't have the language to articulate this at the time, but reflecting on Mignolo and Walsh's (2018) conceptualization of decolonization, we recognize now that the current of decolonial actions flows toward deeper connections and hoped-for reconciliation.

The Encuentro: Findings

In the several years leading up to the *Encuentro*, local researchers had collected data in the communities through interviews and focus groups. Our initial analysis of this data revealed six themes, which we ordered based on the frequency they were mentioned. This was our initial ordering:

- the monetization of the ISL experience;

- the unequal burden placed on host village women during these visits;

- the locus of decision-making with respect to making practical and programmatic arrangements with the host community;

- the social impact influenced in part by historical memory as communities work through their traumatic pasts while building a future;

- meeting the needs and desires of guests; and

- curiosity about the post-visit impact on Northern guests.

The *Encuentro* gave us the opportunity to present our findings to 28 of the participants

who had been a part of the study and invite them to speak back to our analysis. Throughout

the various sessions of the three days, we embraced the midwife role with the goal of not

further influencing the process beyond the presentation of the above, our initial analysis.

Participants were given the opportunity to engage with our conclusions and offer their

suggestions and wishes for the future of ISL in their communities. As community members

identified *their* priorities, the following ordering emerged (our initial ordering in

parentheses):

- the locus of decision-making with respect to making practical and programmatic
  arrangements with the host community (3);
- curiosity about the post-visit impact on Northern guests (6);
- the social impact influenced in part by historical memory as communities work
  through their traumatic pasts while building a future (4);
- the monetization of the ISL experience (1);
- meeting the needs and desires of guests (5); and
- the unequal burden placed on host village women during these visits (2).

The community-led re-consideration of the importance of the data was a helpful

corrective, a cultivating of *conocimiento*, an "insight" (Anzaldua, 2015, p. 1). Prioritization

of community voice in the development of the local ISL experiences became paramount.

This insight resonated with experiences we have had over the years as planners, leaders,

and observers of ISL programs where the goals and objectives of the experiences have

typically been determined by the leaders or sending organizations from the Global North.

Usually, in consultation with a coordinator in a host country, arrangements are made with

the community to meet those goals and objectives. Consultation with the community is, sadly, often minimal in this planning process. Language and access to reliable communication networks are an impediment to planning, but the current model is reflective of the marketization of ISL, a model that the research participants critiqued. Although most communities recognized the financial cost associated with hosting ISL students, one community refused to accept payment; in their assessment, monetary exchange meant that they were selling a service and therefore were relinquishing control.

The community members recognized that the sending agencies were invested in ISL for specific academic and social reasons; however, the communities also invested in ISL for specific purposes. These purposes varied by community but, within the Mayan communities, were always interconnected with the decolonizing activities already happening. Three different community goals were identified as important aspects for future ISL programs: space to share about their culture, that is, developing community connections and building relationships as well as offering experiences that demonstrated their resilience through storytelling and the opening of their homes; developing an ecotourism industry and supplementing community income; and building advocates as Indigenous and marginalized communities. If these goals are promoted as a basis for ISL and when aligned with the decolonization efforts of the community, ISL programs may represent further opportunities to develop agency for communities. Understanding the objectives of both the hosting and sending groups becomes important in ensuring that the correct matches are made and that the two groups are not working at cross purposes. In order to do this, trust is needed, communication must be fluid, and reciprocity must be co-defined.

Decolonizing Notions of Reciprocity in Global North (settler-colonial)—Global South (Maya) Relationships

As Canadians, we are working toward reconciled relationships with local Indigenous communities and have become increasingly aware of the protocols associated with our engagements. It should have come as no surprise that Mayan Indigenous communities in Guatemala would have similar protocols that should be respected and honored. The complexity of traditional governance and current political structures necessitates patience and relationship building and, as in our case, translating our learnings from one context to another. The community-led approach to the design of the *Encuentro* situated a Mayan spiritual ceremony at the outset, an invitation to remember the long history and traditions of engagement with the land and a centering of Maya cosmology as a relational orientation to each other and to the process of research that would ensue. Too often, according to the stories of the Mayan participants, these community beliefs and values were ignored or diminished. They sensed that guests from the Global North found them quaint and superstitious rather than a reflection of Mayan peoples spiritual and historic relationship with the land. Honest insights such as this contributed significantly to this project and were birthed with the help of a commitment to decolonizing research.

Turning now to the practice of ISL, with this understanding we hope to sketch a clear—while utterly contextualized—vision of reciprocity for ISL that is grounded in Mayan ways of knowing. We are aware of the imprecision that accompanies conceptualizations of reciprocity in the literature (Dostilio et al., 2012) and are equally aware of the complexities in conceptualizing reciprocity in the context of *international* SL that takes place in Mayan communities where the history of tourism and voluntourism

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have plastered a layer of commodification on all relationships (Little, 2004; Medina, 2003). It is difficult to disentangle ISL from these broader and growing industries and sometimes impossible to distinguish between visitors from the Global North who travel under the identity of tourist, voluntourist, or ISL participant. This is a challenge for Indigenous communities who, as we noted above, hope for the possibility of developing relationships of solidarity with visitors in their communities. Conceptualizations of reciprocity, therefore, will remain constricted without a critical examination of how the forces of marketization (Crabtree, 1998) have affected ISL in ways that create exchange-based relationships (Dostilio et al., 2012): volunteering, helping, service, and other directional terms often used in ISL are steeped in language that draws attention to questions of efficacy and dialogues about best practices (Palacios, 2010). Even terms such as *service-learning* that utilize the hyphen as a way of symbolizing mutual benefit (Hernandez, 2018) may, unfortunately, become a political placeholder rather than a true signifier of a practice that facilitates the potential for reciprocity.

Decolonial thinking is again a useful guide here, like a hammer and chisel to be used to chip away at those plastered layers, exposing our contributions to *epistemicide* (Santos, 2014). We wish to state again that conceptualizing something like reciprocity in a universalizing way is akin to the kind of homogenized global good of aid projects found in highly commercialized movements such as "Me to We" (Jefferess, 2012). Instead, reciprocity should be understood as malleable and defined by the particular relationship one finds oneself in; it is, ultimately, co-defined. Thinking decolonially, we wish to understand the ways that reciprocity in researcher/researched relationships differs from reciprocity in Global North participant/host community relationships. Likewise, and as an

extension, reciprocity will likely include different variables in Global North (settler-colonial)/Global South (Maya) relationships than it would in Global South/Global South relationships, such as those cultivated during the *Encuentro* between the Guatemalan and Nicaraguan participants as well as between two Indigenous peoples*.* The commitment to indigenization that the Mayan participants brought to the *Encuentro*, based on their experiences of oppression in Guatemala, inspired several Nicaraguan participants to re-consider their Indigenous identities. We heard the Nicaraguan participants express an appreciation for these new growing relationships, saying things like, "I've related to the struggles of others" (Juan, focus group, August 6, 2017) and "I have learned to admire many of the women I met in the communities—they have a strong sense of resistance. . . We appreciated seeing other communities resisting—it helped us realize we are not alone in our struggles" (Marg, focus group, August 6, 2017). In these examples and in our observations of these of the growing relationships between peoples who both claim the Global South as home that solidarity was a core aspect of conceptualizing reciprocity. Simply stated, the desire for ISL programs to facilitate meaningful relational encounters was a key theme that emerged as a result of the *Encuentro* conversations between the Guatemalan and Nicaraguan participants (Managua field notes, August 7, 2017).

There are, however, barriers to developing relationships of solidarity in and through ISL, which is something that the participants at the *Encuentro* outlined and that we saw hints of throughout the findings of the study. Looking back at the data collected with this lens as our primary filter, we interpret two things to be significant. First is a move away from transactional encounters between Global North and Mayan peoples. We heard stories during the initial interviews that highlight consumer economic exchanges: families built

additional showers and toilet facilities in order to meet the expressed needs of ISL

participants, families traveled to larger markets in order to supplement the local produce

with more exotic and protein-rich fare, and work projects that were initiated by ISL

programs were redundant or underutilized by communities. Dismantling these kinds of

exchanges may prove difficult as the current structures (secondary and postsecondary

schools) that offer ISL are often institutionalized (Butin, 2006, 2010), and Global North

participants looking for these opportunities often require greater financial capacities,

which, as one insightful NGO worker in our study pointed out, constitutes the basis for

"luxury education—it can't help but adopt consumerist logic" (Nance, Antigua focus group,

May 18, 2016).

An overview of the literature pertaining to community impact reveals studies that

examine the ways ISL benefits community partners, the institutional-community

relationships, and the possibilities of such programs to create new and long-term

investments in the work of NGOs and community organizations (Blouin & Perry, 2009;

Reeb & Folger, 2013; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Foster, 2002). While all these

efforts represent fantastic and important areas of study, we suggest that the people who

live in these Global South communities, and more so those living in Mayan communities,

remain understudied, which diminishes Indigenous ways of knowing and acts of resistance

and liberation these communities are already participating in and that may provide helpful

context for assessing community impact. Something we fear in research projects in

international and Indigenous contexts, and even in this article, is an interpretation of

community impact from a Northern analysis that subtly confuses community voice with the

voices of community agencies, organizations, or the NGOs doing work in such places. It is

for this reason that we wished to provide a self-facing reflexive analysis of our own research practices.

The reality remains that gathering data from those secondary sources is logistically less complex; however, something we wish to problematize is the tendency of information, analysis and findings, to flow northward. An example that hits close to home for us is that the Guatemalan participants in our study expressed their misunderstandings of ISL research, stating their perceptions at the outset of the various researchers who played a role: "Why are they coming, what do they want to know? Why are they here doing this research, what are they going to do with it?" "If they are going to do this (research) are they going to share the research with us? Are we going to have access to the information that they are taking away?" (Jas, Antigua focus group, May 18, 2016). Similar worries were expressed regarding student participants of ISL programs. During the *Encuentro,* it was expressed that "the community doesn't have any sense of follow-up; they see these groups as tourists and nothing more" (Feli, focus group, August 3, 2017), and there were frustrations expressed that "we really don't know what they do with the information they take from us" (Gene, focus group, August 3, 2017). In an ensuing conversation, one participant floated a question to the group, wondering what happens to students after their visits, to which someone replied with a touch of dark humor, "they forget about us" (Mary, focus group, August 3, 2017).

We find some wisdom in the words of Ana, a Maya elder from one of the Guatemalan communities who expressed a desire that "they (students) should stay in contact with us and continue to accompany our communities in whatever way they can" (field note, August 3, 2017). There is a distinct interest in building relationships of solidarity, of hoping for

people to become advocates of and for their communities' decolonizing actions. When these tangible requests from communities to become advocates are harnessed by students and other participants upon returning to their homes for their own growing sense of "advocacy," it seems to us to be a demonstration of the extractive nature of learning through ISL. This, unfortunately, tends to be a common outcome of such neutered social justice efforts since Global North participants rarely speak the languages of the communities they visit, and, when combined with the oft-short-term reality of ISL programs, there are few opportunities to develop relationships of any depth. Furthermore, Global North participants often lack the knowledge and means to continue to be involved in host communities' struggles. In the cases where community organizations and/or NGOs offer opportunities to invest back, it is likely there are discrepancies between the NGO's evaluation of the Mayan communities needs and their own perception of need. Both the inability of students to develop relationships within the confines of ISL and the lack of continuity in relationships over the long-term, which is a key component of trust building, are forms of disregarding reciprocity. We wonder, skeptically, about the use of the term *reciprocity* when it is claimed by only one, often Northern, party as an outcome of ISL.

Conclusion

Let us reflect on our own growing understanding of decolonizing research and consider how Mayan epistemologies may shape conceptions of reciprocity in ISL. To frame this, we return to an important moment we observed during the *Encuentro*: upon hearing the "gifts of story" (Kovach, 2010, p. 46) that each of the eight communities offered one another through presentations about their communities' history and culture, as well as political, social, and economic dynamics, there was a tangible resonance and a sense of

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responsibility that people developed for one another. These feelings laid the foundation for rich conversations and, therefore, a foundation upon which to co-construct reciprocity. Estrada (2005) similarly notes that "if we accept that respect and reciprocity mean more than saying "please" and "thank-you," but to challenge our actions and motives, then this means also a deep transformative process regarding how we operate in this world" (p. 51). It is worth considering how to integrate storytelling within Global North (settler-colonial)/Global South (Mayan) ISL encounters in ways that cultivate meaningful connection and understanding of one another's lived experiences. Learning *about* the struggles and moves to liberation and resilience of a Mayan community may be half the story that need be told during ISL trips. We wonder about whether and how Global North visitors must prepare to share their stories and be capable of receiving the stories of others in more responsible ways that may lead them to consider decolonial experimentations within the context of the trips in which they are participating.

By responsible, we mean to say there is something important about how "immediate" the possibilities of giving back were for the people who attended this Global South/Global South *Encuentro*; stories were shared by all, phone numbers were exchanged, and a commitment to ongoing connection was established. This further problematizes Global North/Global South ISL, in which the big question, claimed one of the Guatemalan participants at the *Encuentro,* is that "the information they (students) receive isn't given back. . . We need to make a formal agreement between the students and the communities where the groups commit to giving back the information to the community" (Ed, focus group, August 3, 2017). Several comments were made in this regard, one of which is worth representing here in full (excerpts from field notes, August 3, 2017):

Woman 1: We receive groups from the basis of our Mayan spirituality. The way we host them and feed them and open our communities to them is a part of our Mayan spirituality.

Man 1: I think that the community should be able to tell the sending groups what types of students they want to receive; they should have the ability to create a student profile that they think would be beneficial for the community.

Woman 2: The groups don't always ask for permission to come into the community. They can come to Nicaragua without permission from the government, but we can't go to their country in the same way. Nonetheless, they need to ask permission to come into our community. It's an abuse if they do otherwise. We don't know what their motivations are. It could be that they want to come into our community and start to buy up land at a cheap price to take it away from us.

Woman 3: Often times, these groups abuse the community by coming into the community without asking for prior permission.

These comments point to the necessity of clear communication, which Estrada (2005) explained in Mayan protocol "necessitates periodical visits and/or correspondence including the consultation throughout the process as regards to the knowledge being produced" (p. 49). ISL programs in and with Mayan and other Indigenous communities need to be designed in ways that respect these protocols in an attempt to claim reciprocity.

We could say that these findings require further research and that is true. However, we also have come to realize that these findings demand further practice. Even amidst

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imperfect structures such as ISL there are decolonial cracks that we hope to continue to work at prying apart. Co-defining reciprocity with Global North and Global South participants of ISL will be an ongoing endeavor, and each subsequent encounter will shed light on ways to grow in and decolonize those relationships. To begin, giving back may be as "simple" as distributing our economic privileges. Suggestions arose from participants of this study that this might look like a tax being taken from each Global North participant that would help fund similar ISL opportunities for Global South participants (Toby, Antigua focus group, May 18, 2016). One participant excitedly responded to this idea: "We should make learning tours from the South to the North to learn about Colonialism!" (Nance, Antigua focus group, May 18, 2016). This suggestion represents a decolonizing act, something that requires practice and is, perhaps, a kind of education that could teach us to remain "present and alive" (Rendón, 2009, p. 66). We see experimentations such as these as being essential steps forward.

Finally, we conclude with a summary. For the Mayan Indigenous communities co-constructed reciprocity must include prioritizing the perspectives of those with less power, working to design programs that create space for storytelling, and respect for community ethics and protocols (Kovach, 2010). Reciprocity is not a product; it is not something that can be claimed, but it may be something to be made over and over again, cultivated through decolonial experimentations.

Please note the following chapter is co-authored by Luke Heidebrecht and Dr. Michael O'Sullivan, Associate Professor and Associate Dean, Graduate Student Services, Research, and International. Heidebrecht contributed approximately 65%, including the introductory, theoretical, methodological, and analytical content. O'Sullivan contributed the remaining 35% including his journal entries that provided the narrative foundation which this piece engages with. Heidebrecht and O'Sullivan had conceived of the idea of writing in a conversational way so that O'Sullivan's experiences, and subsequently his journal entries of those experiences, might be used to provide an example from which to reflect on the implementation of Experiential Education. In this way, Heidebrecht and O'Sullivan see this piece as being grounded and practical and hoped this format would bring life to the theoretical discussions they had been having conversationally together related to EE in international contexts over the past four years. The inclusion of this piece is important for this dissertation because it builds upon the stories offered in chapters four and five. Furthermore, the focus of this chapter shifts to examine the nature of international partnerships, an important topic within the field of international Experiential Education. This manuscript is currently being considered for an edited volume.

Chapter Six – Relationality as Central to Institutional-Community Partnerships in International Experiential Education: Building Trust Between a Canadian University and Ixil Maya Communities in Guatemala

Background

In 2013 we received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to conduct research on the impact of International Service Learning (ISL) programs on host communities in Central America.[39] The project included communities from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. A research team was formed that included Canadians, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans. Together we proceeded to gather qualitative data over the course of 4 years culminating in a validation event which was designed in accordance with community feedback gathered by contracted local facilitators from El Salvador and Nicaragua. This *Encuentro* (gathering/encounter) took place in August 2017, where participants came together, to represent their respective communities, validate and re-interpret the findings presented by our research team, as well as aid in imagining a plan for future research (Heidebrecht & Balzer, 2019; O'Sullivan et al., 2019).[40] This chapter builds upon the story of this event, specifically, considering the recommendations made by the *Ixileños*, a group of Mayan participants from Guatemala who attended. It further examines three subsequent International Experiential Education (IEE) visits to the *Ixil* communities that were designed in response to the recommendations. These visits are

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[39] The SSHRC grant was awarded to Dr. Geraldine Balzer (Principal Investigator) of the University of Saskatchewan, Dr. Harry Smaller of York University, and Dr. Michael O'Sullivan of Brock University who were co-applicants. Luke Heidebrecht joined in the project as a Research Assistant and Doctoral Student.
[40] We refer to the *Encuentro* in brief throughout this chapter and provide enough detail to aid the reader in understanding the background that underpins the narratives shared later. However, we would recommend reading the two citations for more contextual detail, which may, enliven the various discussion elements presented here.

illustrated by O'Sullivan, whose journal entries provide detailed accounts that provide a storied invitation to the reader to enter our examination. Finally, these stories of IEE implementation are analyzed to provide recommendations.

Research in the field of IEE has expanded in the last decades to include studies on the impacts of these approaches on students (Claus & Ogden, 1999; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, 2002; Butin, 2005; Cipolle, 2010; Farber, 2011; Tiessen, 2013; Niehaus & Crain, 2013), explorations of community partners and organizations' experiences (Vernon & Foster, 2002; Blouin & Perry, 2009; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009), as well as inquiries into the dynamics of partnership between institutions and communities (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Butin, 2010; Enos & Morton, 2003; Bucher, 2012). However, an outcomes-based approach to research in examining partnerships and the focus on fine tuning best practices highlights the underlying emphasis on institutions rather than communities. Furthermore, the inquiries that examine community impact from a cost-benefit analysis (Blouin & Perry, 2009) promote a transactional approach to partnership. Research with and for the communities who receive IEE visitors, especially in international contexts, remains understudied (Larsen, 2016). We recognize this gap in the literature and see this chapter as a contribution to this emerging area of discourse.

Part A: The Context of Research

The *Encuentro,* which we have already referenced, plays an important role in the story of this chapter. It took place in August, 2017 in Managua, Nicaragua as a part in our four-year SSHRC funded study. The idea for the event originated in conversation with Xochilt Hernandez, a Nicaraguan member of the research team. Her approach to research design based on decolonization (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Steinman, 2011; Hernandez, 2018;

Mignolo and Walsh, 2018) resulted in our collective reflection on how to create both a validation and feedback mechanism for the findings of the study while at the same time offering the research participants and communities something that immediately gave back as a way of honoring their gifts of data (Hernandez, cited in the minutes of the research team meeting, August 6, 2017).

The *Encuentro* emerged over an eight-month period of preparation, spearheaded by Hernandez along with three other Central American researchers who travelled to each of the communities that participated in the study to hold consultations (Heidebrecht & Balzer, 2019). Data gathered through these consultations became the source from which the design of the event would be constructed (O'Sullivan et al., 2019). Various activities and methods were chosen during this pre-*Encuentro* planning phase, guided primarily by the group of Central American facilitators. Throughout preparation as well as during the event the Canadian members of the research team, which included ourselves, carefully considered what role they would inhabit, settling on the that of observers.

The participants who gathered at the *Encuentro* were from 8 different communities across Guatemala and Nicaragua; 15 Guatemalans joined, all of whom identified as Maya and of which 12 spoke their Indigenous languages. The *Ixileños*, a group of Maya participants who came from the Nebaj region in the Guatemalan Highlands, brought with them a readiness to engage in critical conversation and provided meaningful feedback throughout the event. Their experiences as a people who were targeted for a genocide operation during the Guatemalan civil war (1960 -1996) (Menchu, 1983, Montoya, 1995) has re-shaped their Indigenous practices. They have invested in language revitalization (Dalton et al., 2019), *Xula'* (traditional) methods of education that promote ancestral

knowledges (Sabas, 2016), as well as engaged in resistance against neocolonial megaprojects such as the various mines constructed by the Canadian extractive industry in their region (Nolin & Stephens, 2010; MCC, 2015; Batz, 2020). These mines have been a source of controversy and have led to allegations of human rights complaints due to their entanglements with transnational corporations as well as odd but shocking connections with convicted former genocide-era leader Rios Montt (Nisgua, 2014; Malkin & Wirtz, 2018). The *Ixileños* are actively involved in these areas and the stories they shared during the *Encuentro* of their Indigenous resistance and reclamation were inspiring for all the attendees.

While this chapter does not wade any further than this cursory overview of the complex circumstances of recent *Ixil* history it is worth noting the ways that the *Ixil* experience of colonization, genocide, and neo-colonial megaprojects has shaped their worldview; they are a politicized people who are committed to decolonization, a lens they applied to the questions we posed about IEE programs. It is hard to deny the *Ixileños'* influence on the validation of the findings at the *Encuentro* as well as the impact they had making recommendations for future research and practice.

The *Ixileños* left their mark on the *Encuentro* design as well. It began with a Mayan spiritual smoke ceremony led by *Ixil* Elders*,* a practice meant to build trust with one another and to begin our coming together around a common task in a good way. The three-day event was facilitated by a stellar Central American team that intentionally included in the agenda numerous relationship-building elements each day such as *dynamicos*, data gathering and validation sessions that were deliberately collaborative, including *Café Mondiales* and the methodology of the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1992). This

approach helped the participants to feel comfortable by creating opportunities for them to move around the gathering space, meet new people, and share in casual conversation and laughter. Each day those from the different communities would conduct a plenary session presentation with the stories of their people, their struggles and successes. These community presentations would serve as a demonstration of the intention to cultivate a relational research space by taking time to learn and ask questions about one another's homes, people, culture, and way of life. The *Encuentro* program also included visits in the days following the formal Managua-based events, to two communities in Nicaragua (El Arenal and Santa Julia), both of which were represented at the *Encuentro*. The visits were designed to offer the Guatemalans a taste of what Northern ISL participants often do in their IEE programs. These visits were meant to be an immersive learning experience for those who regularly host visitors to reflect on the nature of this pedagogy *as* a visitor.

At the conclusion of the *Encuentro* our research team met with the participants for a final data gathering sharing circle where we inquired about next steps and recommendations for future ISL and other IEE programs. Participants reflected fondly on their experiences over the course of the three days, highlighting the new relationships that were formed and the communities visited, which Flor, an *Ixil* community member was quick to say "allowed us to put ourselves in the shoes of the students who visit us" (Flor Field note, August 6, 2017). The tone of this final sharing circle was self-reflexive and thoughtful. Speaking of the growing relationship between our Canadian research team and the research participants, Paula, an *Ixil* Elder, said "we learned together, not to exploit one another but to better live together" (Field note, August 6, 2017). Her sentiments resonated with our experience and supported the intention behind this data gathering event and we

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were happy to hear her express at the end that "I would like to continue to be a part of this project and be involved in the planning of future projects" (Paula, Field note, August 6, 2017). This invitation formed the foundation for an ongoing relationship between our research team, particularly O'Sullivan, and the *Ixil* community.

Conversations about the Community Impact of IEE

The bulk of what follows in this chapter are several vignettes; stories told by O'Sullivan of three subsequent IEE trips designed in response to the recommendations offered by the *Ixileños* at the *Encuentro*. These trips provide three cases for reflection, which O'Sullivan and Heidebrecht have discussed throughout the three years that they have continued building relationships with the *Ixileños* since the *Encuentro.* O'Sullivan journaled his observations and reflections, which are integrated verbatim. As O'Sullivan shares his stories, Heidebrecht sometimes interjects, offering reflections that, hopefully, read as if we were having a conversation. As we reach the conclusion, we come together in a dialogue about the key themes that emerge.

Our intention with this style of writing was to think about community impact with stories rather than simply theorize. We think that providing an example of a long-term process of developing good relations between global northern educators and Mayan community-activists such as the *Ixileños* also addresses the call for more longitudinal studies in IEE research (Eyler, 2011)*.* We also look toward to the future of IEE research and practice, thinking about theories and methodologies that may be implemented that work toward building relationships of trust, respect, and reciprocity and in what ways these values impact communities in a good way. The focus on relationships rather than Global North – Global South partnerships is intentional as we recognize that (i) trust must be built

over multiple engagements; (ii) Global North educators must be willing to understand and respect the expectations and protocols of their Mayan hosts prior to their visit to a host community; and (iii) the Mayan hosts need to gain an understanding of the implications of welcoming young, mostly middle-class, students from settler-colonial contexts who may have never ventured beyond their linguistic, geographic, or socio-cultural comfort zones.

Conversational Methodology

The research design we are utilizing for this chapter is influenced by narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990), specifically the ideas that Clandinin (2013) shared about dialogue between lived stories and telling stories (Clandinin, 2013). O'Sullivan's stories existed in oral form for some time, shared in conversations with Heidebrecht on virtual platforms. These stories enriched not only their research partnership but the lives in relationship of O'Sullivan and Heidebrecht as the stories grew to become an extension of the shared experience of the *Encuentro*. We do not claim to have conducted a narrative inquiry but to have borrowed the relational scaffolding that was so apparent and helpful for our process of learning and writing. Our design also borrows from the conversational method (Kovach, 2010), which we demonstrate in the way we integrate theoretical insights, connections to the broader IEE literature, and discussion about emerging themes. This is a way of opening the circle of conversation that started between us, inviting a wider audience of academics and those interested or experienced with IEE to join in. Narrative inquiry and conversational methods also align with the underlying ideas we wish to espouse about the importance of making good and ongoing relationships between researchers and participants as something distinct from research partnerships.

The data that we draw on is sourced from the *Encuentro* as well as gathered in the form of reflective journals written by O'Sullivan. Reflective journals have long been utilized in experiential education as a tool for instructors to hear the voices of students expressing their thoughts in a written medium that makes space for those uncomfortable with dialogue to share (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017). Journaling or writing as method (Richardson, 1994) is also a way of offering transparency by utilizing storied language rather than analytical (Ortlipp, 2008). This approach offers, as Clandinin and Connelly (1990) suggest, an "invitation to participate" (p. 8) in our ideas and entertain them "not necessarily as truth" but as a "phenomenon that may fit their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries" (Peshkin, 1985, cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 8). The method of inquiry is firmly conversational analysis (Berkenbusch, 2009) and the use of interruptions (Clandinin, 2013) play a critical role in shaping O'Sullivan's stories into living conversations.

Part B: The post Encuentro trips to Guatemala

Following the *Encuentro*, O'Sullivan was determined to organize a senior undergraduate credit course titled Global Education: Field Experience. Previously, on two occasions, O'Sullivan had taken students for short term study abroad in Cuba. This time, it included a 10-day trip to Guatemala based on the principles enunciated at the *Encuentro*. O'Sullivan consulted with, and then hired, one of the *Encuentro* facilitators (who we will refer to as Tomas) to make the 'on the ground' arrangements – food, accommodation, transportation, and very importantly, to act as an intermediary between the sending organization (the Faculty of Education, Brock University) and the host communities. Tomas, in consultation with community leaders, recommended two of the four Mayan

communities that had been represented at the *Encuentro* serve as the destinations for the trip. The objective of the visit was to provide the Canadian students with an insight into the struggles of the Mayan people in these two very different regions and their efforts to recuperate their languages and their cultural values and practices in the post conflict era that characterizes Guatemala today.

For the remainder of Part B we need to be clear about who is speaking as we move back and forth in conversation. Therefore, O'Sullivan's stories will be represented in italics and Heidebrecht's interruptions will be represented in plain text. Further, we will include our first names at the beginning of each of these segments.

Vignette 1: Communication Breakdown: Balancing Logistical Challenges and Relational Principles

(O'Sullivan) The first stop would be Santiago de Atitlán, the traditonal homeland of the Tz'utujil people. Lake Atitlán is a beautiful volcano ringed lake that is a Maya majority region but is one of Guatemala's most visited tourist areas and many of the locals earn their living from the tourist trade. The second stop of our visit would be the Ixil region, the homeland of the Ixileños, a very isolated zone some ten hours by dirt road from Santiago that is far from the places visited by outsiders. Tomas was very familiar with these communities and the regions in which they were located as he had lived in both of them for several years. Prior to our arrival, and with Tomas as the intermediary, in consultation with local contacts – all of them Encuentro participants – an agenda emerged that the host communities and I were happy with. We agreed that in the Ixil Region, we would include home stays in a rural community for two of the three nights. The night of our arrival in the regional capital, Nebaj, we would stay at a hotel.

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The agenda included a Mayan spiritual ceremony in each of the two communities, a visit to the Peace Park in Panabaj, a neighbourhood of Santiago de Atitlán, which is an important historical site relating to the genocidal civil war, visits to a number of Mayan run production cooperatives chosen by the local leaders in each community that we visited, and engagement with students from the Mayan Ixil University.[41]

(Heidebrecht) I am reminded of the two key findings from the *Encuentro* that were clarified and validated by the participants; one was the nature of the planning and decision-making processes prior to and during the visits and the other was the importance to the host communities that the visitors respect local protocols and customs (O'Sullivan et al., 2019). More succinctly, the *Ixileños* requested that in future IEE visits that they have more agency in planning and development. In my understanding the motivation to be a more integral part of IEE has a lot to do with the Mayan approach to *buen vivir* or the *Ixileños* understanding of *techahil*; both concepts expressing the necessity to live in a good way. During my visits to the *Ixil* region I was welcomed on their land and my hosts shared about this cosmology by living by it. A community member in Nebaj, previously remarked to me that "in my personal experience what I have seen is that the visitors, especially in terms of violations of human rights, what they want more than anything is that people know about it – they want people to hear their stories - and what they see in the foreigners is a chance for their story to extend beyond Guatemala" (Georgio, 2017). It is an incredible gift for the *Ixileños* to offer their *testimonios* (Huff, 2006), which is a method of storytelling that invites others to witness and become a part of what is shared. I think also about the culture of storytelling that has been cultivated by Mayan authors such as Rigoberta Menchu (1983)

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[41] For more information see Chapter 4.

and Victor Montejo (1987, 1995), who both have worked at developing transnational relationships with other Indigenous people around the world through this style of writing.

However, I think the *Ixileños* take a risk every time they invite IEE groups on their land and into their communities. Given the history of colonization experienced by the *Ixileños*, the loss of land, and the genocidal aftermath of the Guatemlan conflicts they demonstrate great trust in receiving visitors. Since you mention the *Ixil* University, I am also reminded of a conversation I had with several teachers at a Café in Nebaj. In that conversation Flor, one of the University staff, said that "it is a lot of work to build trust in the community and with the Elders to receive these groups (IEE)" (Field note, April 10, 2017).

When I think about the objectives that were implemented in the design of your IEE trip, which grew out of community-led discussions there is a clear alignment with historical and Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning that the *Ixileños* have developed. The concept of agency was discussed throughout the *Encuentro,* framed as a request from the host communities to be more involved in the planning and development of IEE programs. This request also has connections to conversations related to Indigenous self-determination (e.g., the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - UNDRIP) and sovereignty; conversations that I think must play a role in IEE research and practice with Indigenous communities. This is especially true when the institutions behind these projects are firmly planted within settler-colonial contexts, such as Canada.[42]

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[42] See also TRC Calls to Action. Specifically, we think about calls to action #62. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a five-year mandate to inform all Canadians about the history of Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in Canada and their impact on Indigenous people and communities. For some 100 years following the establishment of the Canadian state in 1867, the Government of Canada encouraged the Catholic

(O'Sullivan) The schedule included a two-night homestay in a community in the Ixil

Region. On the day following our arrival in Nebaj, the group travelled by bus to the host

community having stopped on the way to visit an agricultural coop run by several young

women. Upon arrival, the group waited at the local soccer field where some of the students

played a pick-up match with local young people as we waited for the host moms to arrive.

A local woman, an experienced community activist, Flor, who was an Encuentro

participant, had arranged with a number of local families to take three or, at most, four

visitors. Breaking down in this way meant that there were more groups of students than

there were bilingual participants. This meant that some students would be staying in

homes without the benefit of a translator. I was not worried about this. On multiple

previous occasions I had been involved in Nicaragua with grade 11 and 12 high school

students from Canada who also did not speak Spanish, the local language. They had stayed

in pairs in local homes in rural communities. If they had felt the need to find one of the

teachers or a bilingual facilitator they'd walk a few minutes from one house to the other,

find who they were looking for, and sort things out. This situation also allowed the group

leaders to check in from time to time with the students simply by wandering from house to

house for a quick chat. Unfortunately, in this community, things did not prove to be so

simple. Because several of the prospective host families withdrew the invitation at the last

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Church and a number of Protestant denominations, to established residential schools and Indigenous children were obligated, frequently by being forcibly removed from their homes. To attend these institutions which were frequently located hundreds of kilometres away. The objective was crudely described by Canada's first Prime Minister as 'taking the Indian out of the child' (Fine, 2015). The rules of these schools included an absolute prohibition against speaking Indigenous languages practicing their Indigenous spiritual belief. The last IRS school was closed in 1996. The TRC documented the truth of survivors and anyone impacted by the IRS through seven national events across the country, creating a historical record. The TRC calls to action emerged as a mandate to advance the process of Canadian reconciliation and provide a guidebook for government, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous communities to work toward healing. http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

minute, Flor had to improvise. She added one or two students to some houses that had

agreed to host three or four visitors and then, with six young women still to place, she had

to ask a further three families that were not on the original list of host families to help out.

As it turns out, their houses were on the outskirts of the community and were some twenty

minutes by foot which involved cutting through corn fields rather than following a road.

As a result of the ensuing confusion, the bilingual members of the team, including myself,

did not know where all of the students were housed, and the students had no idea how to

find the group leaders. Mobile phone contact proved to be highly problematic in this

remote region and to complicate things further, a utility pole came down early in the

evening and the lights went out in the community and surrounding area. Communication

either by foot or by phone with six unilingual students in three homes in the outlying area

broke down completely.

The following day the group took the bus to mountainous terrain to walk to an area

the local Mayan population hold as sacred and where a foreign owned mining company

had, until recently, mined for barite, used in cell phones. The ascent was very steep and

strenuous. So too, because it was the rainy season, the path, such as it was, was muddy and

strewn with stones that had fallen from above. While arduous, the climb was rewarded

with a spectacular setting at which several groups of Ixil University students made

presentations for our students. Following these presentations, the students broke into two

groups that formed circles, each of which was made up of Canadian and Ixil students for a

question and answer activity. Following this activity, a lunch was served. The lunch had

been cooked using food and pots and pans carried up the mountain by our hosts. This

included young women carrying babies on their back and loads on their heads or in their

hands. While the students were participating in the activities organized by the Ixil

University students, the women had searched for firewood, and prepared and cooked the

food. Up to that point, the day was ideal.

(Heidebrecht) This part of your story highlights the incredible generosity and flexibility of

IEE hosts. The role of host, as I read it here, extends far beyond a transactional partnership

between a group of Indigenous community organizers and Global North University student

visitors. The flexibility of the community hosts depicted in this story and their willingness

to provide immersive learning experiences for the visitors is a testament to their

commitment to building relationships and not simply engaging in a transactional

arrangement. During the *Encuentro* one of the six themes discussed was the issues related

to accommodating visitors. Primarily, communities reported feeling obligated to accept

visiting groups-imposed arrangements (O'Sullivan et al., 2019), whether they be related to

a particular time of the year,[43] demands on host families to accommodate at least two

students,[44] or food related challenges.

Even more relevant to this story, and an issue raised more than any other during the

Encuentro conversations about accommodating visitors, was that their inability to speak

their language that created a cascade of challenges for hosts. It was noted that visitors who

could not speak their language diminished their desire to host, where they might have an

opportunity to connect with others, to learn, and to share stories (O'Sullivan & Smaller,

2019). The relational aspects of ISL and IEE programs is critical in a host's engagement

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[43] Participants at the Encuentro expressed their frustration of visiting groups planning their programs during critical weeks of harvest where the hosts were already stretched thin.

[44] This is, of course, a safety issue. However, it is worth noting the challenge this represents for families whose homes are not designed to accommodate more than those who already live there. Oftentimes children shift into a siblings or parents bedroom or might stay with other family or friends.

with and interest in playing a role. It is clear from the findings at the *Encuentro* that participants would like to see visitors extend themselves to develop sensitivities toward their ways of life, learn their language, and follow community protocols (O'Sullivan et al, 2019). These are all signifiers of a relationship.

Vignette 2: Incidents and Accidents: Encountering Contradictions between Theory and Practice

(O'Sullivan) During the meal it began to rain. The students were used to this. It was the rainy season and rain was a daily event. Rarely was it very long lasting and frequently the group could find shelter. That was not the case that day. The rain quickly became torrential, and our hosts assured us that rain this strong was unusual and would let up. Unfortunately, they were overly optimistic, and it did not stop. Our hosts packed up their things and, when it became obvious that the rain was not going to let up, we started our descent in the downpour. The rocks along the trail became slippery, the mud harder to deal with, and the descent seemed even steeper than the ascent. Under these circumstances, the walk down the mountain side was frankly dangerous for inexperienced hikers. Two or three students fell and one of them tumbled several meters on a steep incline, getting quite bruised and only by sheer luck did she avoid serious injury. By the time we got to the bus, at least an hour after starting the descent, everyone was drenched and running shoes or hiking boots were soaked through.

As the students got on the bus, I was approached by Carmen, a Latina staff person at Brock University who played the role of trip administrator and 'big sister' to the female students. As they stood outside the bus in the pouring rain, Carmen explained to me that she had heard troubling stories from several students during the time on the mountain.

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She said that a number of them, all of whom were in the three homes that had been arranged at the last minute, were uncomfortable to the point of not wanting to return to those homes because of experiences they had the night before. Until this moment, I was unaware of these events. In retrospect, none of the students, all of whom were young women, could be considered to have been in danger, although in two cases the students experienced very disconcerting moments that, understandably, alarmed them. These two incidents involved unexplained visits in the middle of the night to the rooms in which they were sleeping. None of these young women spoke Spanish, the lights were out, and using their cell phones was not an option so contacting one of the group leaders was impossible. A third incident involved two students being put into a bedroom upon arrival at the host home and left unattended except to have some food brought to them some time after their arrival which they ate alone in the bedroom. That constituted their "interaction" with the host family.

These three incidents were in sharp contrast with the experience of the rest of the participants. Typically, they sat around the wood burning stove in the kitchen while the meal was being prepared, talked to the family members, made possible by the fact that they were in one of the four homes with a translator, and they ate supper with the host family. Having a bilingual leader in the same house made all the difference to their learning experience and to the level of comfort they felt.

The following day during the excursion to the mountain, the students talked among themselves and then shared these stories with Carmen. Once I was informed, in addition to considering the implications of asking three groups of students to return to a situation in which they felt excruciatingly uncomfortable, I had to consider the fact that none of the

participants had dry clothing or footwear to change into. It was now mid-afternoon and

according to the schedule in place, the group would not be arriving back at the hotel,

where they had stored their extra clothing, until around noon the next day. In preparing

for the two days in the village I had told the students that it would be inappropriate to

show up with their big knapsacks with all the things they brought for a ten-day stay.

Instead, I advised them to bring only a small pack with the minimum required for a two-

night stay. Despite the fact that it was the rainy season and the students had dealt with

rain every day up to that point, I did not anticipate the soaking the group experienced that

day or the disastrous situation of the group's footwear. Several of those that wore running

shoes rather than hiking boots found their shoes to be in such bad shape, they had to be

thrown out. Thoughts of wet, shivering students having to spend the evening and

overnight without the possibility of changing into dry clothes, added to the pressure to

make an immediate decision about cutting short the home stay and returning to the hotel

where their luggage, including dry shoes, was stored.

In consultation only with Carmen, I decided that the group should return to the city of

Nebaj and to the hotel. Tomas, who had made the arrangements for the home stay,

apprised of this, said that we should stay for the second night. I pointed out that as the

professor legally responsible for the well-being of the students, I felt I had no choice but to

cut short the home stay. Tomas spoke to the community leaders who said they understood

but asked us to go to an activity that had been previously arranged. A group of women

who produced traditional herbal medicines from plants that they grew had prepared a

presentation and were waiting for the group. I agreed for us to join this presentation and

the students sat through it in their wet clothes and then they returned to their host homes

to pick up their belongings and say goodbye. In some cases, the dinner had already been

prepared and the host families insisted that their guests eat before leaving. This politeness

by both hosts and guests, coupled with how widely dispersed the houses were, meant that

our departure was a lengthy process and awkward as many of the students had very

positive experiences and the host families were sad that we were leaving a day early. By

the time everyone was back on the bus and ready for the hour-long drive to the hotel, it

was quite late, and everyone had been in their wet clothes since lunch.

I was torn between what I saw as this violation of the spirit of the Encuentro which

stressed the importance of joint decision-making with the local organizers and hosts and

my duty to the well-being of my students which I saw as being compromised and, under

the circumstances, irresolvable without a return to the hotel, a change of clothes, and

avoiding asking the young women who had had negative experiences to return to

circumstances where they had felt extremely uncomfortable. I feared that spending the

night and part of the next day in wet clothing in the cool climate of the Guatemalan

highlands would lead to some of the participants falling ill.

(Heidebrecht) This is certainly a challenging story and one that invites comment. What you

articulate here is a moment, or more precisely, several moments of tension (Clandinin,

2013, p.76-77). Educators are often met with challenging situations and there is always a

risk involved when emotions become an explicit component of a learning environment

(Boler, 1999). As is often the case in many forms of IEE, learners and teachers will find

themselves in much closer proximity to one another relationally, blurring the boundaries of

time and space arranged in classroom settings. This intimate learning atmosphere holds

potential for students to become "wide-awake" and aware (Greene, 1995) of the world they

inhabit.

I might suggest that IEE is often, but not always, flirting with a pedagogy of

discomfort (Boler, 1999), a specter that accompanies both the learners and teachers

whenever there is a destabilizing of the hegemonic structures so pervasive in traditional

learning spaces (Boler & Zembylas, 2003). As a former participant of IEE and having

facilitated IEE programs I have recognized the presence of the pedagogy of discomfort

when students are put into circumstances outside of their comfort zones (Boler and

Zembylas, 2003) where they encounter defensive angers and fears. Harnessing these

emotions as a call to action rather than retreat is to accept the invitation of the pedagogy

(Boler, 1999). In the vignette, I recognize the way that your responsibilities and

relationships with the *Ixil* hosts comes into conflict with your responsibilities to and

relationships with the students. Your decision, which I commend, was well considered,

thoughtful, and as it is with many difficult situations, there are no correct ways to proceed.

You were, by all accounts caught between a literal and emotional downpour.

As much as the focus of the story above is on the students, I do want to take a

moment to consider the impact this decision had on the *Ixil* hosts and, perhaps, hosts in

general who participate in IEE. Stepping back from this particular story, I do think that it

reveals an example of the kind of risks that host communities face when receiving visitors

from the global north. The *Ixileños* have spoken about visitors that inadvertantly flaunt

their wealth and priviledge (Gustavo, interview, January 18, 2017), put undue stress and

financial burden on host families because of dietary concerns and issues with

accomodations (Flor, focus group interview, April 8th 2017; Gustavo interview, January 18,

2017; Woman 1, interview, April 15, 2017; Woman 2, interview, April 15, 2017; Man 1, interview, April 15, 2017; Man 2, interview, April 15, 2017), and there are worries expressed about the potential of visitors misrepresenting the stories shared upon their return home. It is a risk for the *Ixileños* and other Indigenous people to invite visitors to share in their way of life because of the intergenerational colonial reverberations (Young et al., 2015) that stem from the traumatic experiences related to Settler invasions. The *Ixileños* are experienced in receiving Global North visitors and they have spoken of more serious issues, of which this was not one. However, I wanted to bring to mind the perspective of the hosts and the kinds of stresses that they frequently encounter with visiting Global North groups.

I also wanted to draw a line between this thought and one of the conversations that was had at the *Encuentro* about changing plans and the effect it has in stunting the value of IEE programming for host communities. It is important to remember that the *Ixileños* are committed to cultural reclamation and political resistance and have deep connections to ancestral principles, historic struggles, and decolonization efforts (Arias, 2009). During the *Encuentro* there were comments made expressing that "some groups take advantage of us" (World Café papers) and questions about whether the stories they tell of their struggles, their *testimonios*, will transform their visitors' political commitments (O'Sullivan, 2019). Rarely, if ever, do hosts receive any feedback in that regard. Knowledge about how visitors apply their learnings is an important factor in the *Ixileños'* desire to participate in IEE programming, as they may then envision these programs as aligning with the efforts they are pursuing in Indigenous reclamation and decolonization. I wonder about feedback

mechanisms in IEE and whether and how these programs might benefit communities by offering feedback post-trip.

Reflecting again on Greene's (1995) admonishment for education to facilitate becoming "wide awake," it is worth remembering that this awakening does not come about simply through what learners do or encounter during IEE but is rather something that happens internally (Frank, 2011). The structures of IEE may well provide the spark for learners' imaginations (Greene, 1995) to come alive to things outside of the realities they have lived within the confines of settler colonialism (Snelgrove et al., 2014) and, as may be possible in their encounter with the *Ixileños*, to consider what solidarity with Indigenous nations means. Unfortunately, in many cases the opposite may occur due to the internalizing of fears and anger leading to becoming closed off to the world. The invitation to embrace the pedagogy of discomfort and become wide awake are denied, likely and primarily to the detriment of the hosting community.

(O'Sullivan) Three days later, on the last day of the trip, Carmen and I met with Tomas. While he continued to disagree with the particular decision and felt that the students could have handled another night in the village, we all agreed to work together on a repeat trip the following year which would be very similar to the trip now ending but would not include a home stay. Rather, the students would stay in a hotel and visits to the countryside would be day trips.

I highly valued the Mayan youth of the Ixil who I had met at the Encuentro and with whom I had collaborated on the trip. They had been instrumental in articulating the principles that emerged from the Encuentro and, in collaboration with Tomas and Carmen who played the role of big sister to the group of 16 female students and one male student,

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had made the 2018 trip a success. It certainly was successful because, despite the

experience described above, the students both in their face-to-face communication with

Carmen and I and in their journal entries handed in at the end of the trip, communicated

their satisfaction with the experience in a heartfelt fashion. The objective was to expose

the students to the struggles of the Mayan people and their work at cultural recuperation

in two very different regions of the country and the activities organized by our contacts in

both Santiago and the Ixil Region gave the students a glimpse of that aspect of Mayan life

in post-conflict Guatemala. An additional objective for myself was to seek to work within

the framework of North-South partnerships articulated at the Encuentro by the

representatives of host communities. By and large, I felt that, with the notable exception of

the decision-making around the home stay, that the spirit of the six themes had been

respected.

(Heidebrecht) Of The six principles from the *Encuentro* that you mentioned, the one that

was prioritized above all others by the participants was the plea from the host

communities for increased agency in all programming that enters their lands. The *Ixileños'*

spoke about their distaste of when "the University that makes the decision about the

programs" (World Café papers, see also Pisco, 2015) and their feeling that "groups often

abuse communities because they don't ask permission to enter the land" (World Café

papers). For Indigenous communities, protocols play an important role in forming and

sustaining relationships (Wilson, 2008) and play a different role than the signing of

contracts or consent forms (Estrada, 2005), which are Western tools that support colonial

imaginations of relationships. On this Taurima and Cash (2000) helped explain that

protocols are "living practice rather than only… a document" (cited in Estrada, 2005, p. 51).

The request for agency is also a request for the inclusion of Indigenous protocols.

I want to take a moment to make note of the attempts to suggest alternative approaches to IEE that are more community-centered such as the idea of "fair trade learning (FTL)" (Hartman et al., 2014) and its accompanying set of eight guiding principles, or the proposal of reciprocal service learning (RSL) (Callopy et al., 2020) as the orienting device that extends before and after trips occur. While these approaches signal a pivot toward the community the principles often emerge from Western epistemologies instead of Indigenous. In all our experiences with the *Ixileños*, working as a research team, as well as in your post-*Encuentro* trips, something we have learned is that Indigenous epistemologies have something to offer Western educational programs (Calderon, 2014). Moreover, they are essential if and when these programs intersect with Indigenous communities. I believe that Indigenous theoretical approaches may be relevant for future IEE designs. An example of one such approach would be *Mi'kmaq* Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall's, *etuaptmumk* – Two-eyed Seeing (Marshall et al., 2012; Martin, 2012; Peltier, 2018), which in their words is to "see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together" (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335). The nature of applying a Two-Eyed seeing approach in IEE demands trusting relationships and ethical space (Ermine, 2007).

I have become critical of partnership language in IEE as it so colored by transactional conceptualizations (Enos & Morton, 2003) such as collaboration between institutions and communities, which Bucher (2012) rightly called out as ultimately being less effective than "focusing on developing agency" (p. 272). In IEE the nature of

partnerships demands interrogation. I wonder about what partnership means from an Indigenous perspective and whether and how IEE programs may emphasize relational rather than marketplace values that seem so pervasive in the volunteer and alternative tourism industries (Tomazos, 2015).

Vignette 3: New Year, New Understandings: Pursuing Reconciliation

(O'Sullivan) In the post trip period, Carmen and I, assisted by Charlotte, a fluent Spanish speaking student who, during the 2018 trip, stood out as a natural leader, began planning a 2019 trip. We agreed that it would remain essentially unchanged from the previous trip except that there would be no home stays. The matter of how the decision to cancel the second night of the home stays stuck with me as did my commitment to maintaining a respectful working relationship with the Ixileños activists including Paula, the Elder who I had known for several years and who worked hard to make a success of our previous trip and Flor, the person who had arranged the home stays in her village and who might well have lost face as a result of my decision to return to Nebaj a day early.

I decided that during the February mid-term break it was essential to make a personal trip to Nebaj and attempt to meet with as many of the activists who had been involved with the trip, including and especially with Flor, and to explain myself and to make amends as necessary. I was accompanied by Charlotte on this mid-February visit. As I expected, she brought an insightful student-based perspective to the meeting with the Mayan team of youth leaders. As it turns out, this February trip coincided with the Mayan New Year and all of the people with whom Charlotte and I hoped to meet, many of whom lived in communities throughout the region, were in the city of Nebaj, the regional capital of the Ixil.

Despite the fact that she was extremly busy, as she was very much in charge of the New Year's celebrations, Paula warmly greeted us, invited us to her home on two occasions and to several of the celebrations including a smoke ceremony attended primarily by the Ixil elders, a ceremony during which a new council of elders was installed. At that event, I was called up on the stage, presented with a scarf and asked to say a few words to the gathered Elders. Clearly Paula was making a statement to the community, including the young people with whom we had collaborated the year before, that Charlotte and I were welcome guests.

Nonetheless, I approached the meeting with the young Mayan leaders somewhat nervously fearing that, given the events of the previous trip, and despite Paula's warm welcome, they might not be interested in such a meeting and much less in further collaboration. This proved not to be the case and to what extent this had to do with Paula's welcome – she was unable to attend the meeting – or was unrelated, we will never know. Both Charlotte and I spoke positively of the visit to the Ixil Region and confirmed that the students had a very positive experience there both in general and during the home stay. Charlotte had stayed in a home with five other students because of the last minute need to find new home stays. She recounted how well that evening with the host family had been. I had stayed with several others in Flor's family home and spoke in detail about how we had learned so much from her father and her brother-in-law during their conversations. I also described the experience of the six students who had unsettling experiences as being likely made to seem more serious because of their inability to speak Spanish. I then recapped the situation as the group descended from the mountain, how some had hurt themselves falling, and how everyone was soaking wet with no change of

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clothing. I then spoke about how I learned of the incidents that had occurred the night

before from Carmen as the students were boarding the bus and how I felt obliged to put on

the professor's hat as someone legally responsible for the well-being of the students.

Consequently, I felt compelled to make the decision to return to the hotel in Nebaj rather

than staying in the homes for a second night. I added that given the spirit of what was

discussed in Managua at the Encuentro I felt that I had to make amends because I failed to

consult with my hosts.

One of the group's acknowledged leaders, a young man who had been very actively

engaged during the Encuentro and who had advanced the principles that he and his fellow

participants felt were essential to guide the relationship between global Northern sending

groups and local host organizations, was the first to respond. He said, contrary to my

assumption, that those present had not discussed the matter. Attending the festival was

the first opportunity many of them had to see each other since our visit. He reminded me

that they live in different communities throughout the region and between their busy lives

and the fact that transportation is a problem for them, they rarely see each other. On the

issue I raised of the cancelled homestay, he said that he and his colleagues "do not see it as

a big problem when things like that happen." He said that when people travel "bad things

can happen because of the climate or the food … we understand that these things happen,

and we should see how to improve the situation and have the opportunity to continue

coordinating with student groups …". He concluded this intervention by saying that they

have received student groups over the years and that "more serious issues" than the one

being discussed had occurred with those groups. He did not elaborate on these

experiences. Others at the meeting also repeated the sentiment that what happened was

not a problem and some expressed the view that they, as organizers of the visit, had

responsibility for shortcomings that led to some of the students feeling uncomfortable.

Flor, the woman in whose house I had stayed and who had organized the home stays,

spoke about the willingness of families to host students – this was far from the first time

that groups had stayed in the village – but she recognized that the conditions were well

beyond the comfort zone of the visitors. She gave the example of outdoor toilet

arrangements and the fact that when the young women made their way to these very

basic facilities often there were no lights and someone from the house would accompany

them with a flashlight. Indeed, this had been commented on by several of the students to

Carmen and Charlotte at the time. The conversation then turned to options for the coming

trip in October of 2019.

The trip the following October to the Ixil region (which did not include the visit to the

mountain), with Tomas reprising his role as organizer, was so successful that the students

recommended that in the future, the time in Santiago de Atitlan be shortened in order to

spend more time in the Ixil region. Unfortunately, just as the planning for the 2020 trip

began, the COVID-19 pandemic made that trip or one in 2021 impossible.

(Heidebrecht) I am reminded of the Mayan spiritual smoke ceremony that the *Ixil* Elders

led at the beginning of the *Encuentro* (O'Sullivan et al., 2019)*.* The ceremony was a trust

building practice; the four cardinal directions were referenced as a guiding image and

invitation to those present to come together despite where we come from. Indigenous

communities, such as the *Ixil* utilize ceremony in building relationships. A Western

approach tends to look for ways to formalize relational agreement in writing, whether it be

contracts, MOUs, or other such tools reminiscent of treaties and, because they originate

from a Western paradigm in the language of English; these tools do not represent

Indigenous communities approaches to building relationships. It is typical within the

landscape of educational partnerships that bring together Western institutions and

Indigenous communities that formal Western-style agreements are made. What about the

inclusion of a ceremonial approach that emphasizes relational commitments within the

partnership such as you experienced with Paula and the group of Elders? I realize that this

was a unique circumstance, but their approach does point to a different way of navigating

relationships.

Kovach (2009) explained her approach in developing relationships with Indigenous

communities and the importance of particularity. She spoke of relationships with research

participants as a "holistic organizational device" (p. 41) and how important it is to use

specific tribal knowledges that will inform the entire research design and process. In her

case she was intentional about privileging *Nehiyew* (Plains Cree) knowledge in providing

guidance for all research choices (p. 43). Mayan scholar Estrada (2005) likewise speaks of

utilizing local metaphors and culturally-situated approaches to research to create

processes that are "about, for or from Mayans," and that "subverts current unequal power

relations due to racialized, gendered and oppressive frameworks" (p. 50). There are

lessons to consider for IEE when engaging with Indigenous communities. First, we might

think about the importance of self-situating (Peltier et al, 2019) as people who arrive in

communities carrying a settler ancestry. Perhaps, in preparation non-Indigenous visitors

should do the work of their own self-situating, naming their motivations for entering into

learning relationships with the hosts (Estrada, 2005). I would qualify this move in IEE as an

important step in becoming an authentic ally (Thomas & Chandresekera, 2018) who is willing to enter into reciprocal learning.

Thinking again about this story I read about a self-situating moment and a move to reconcile a fear of broken trust. In the story we do not find a generalizable model for building relationships and that is the critical point. Partnerships are conceptualized with models whereas relationships are distinctly organic in nature. I can think of relationships I have had in my life and the moments of surprise when someone initiates reconciliation with me when in conflict. Those moments are examples of an active relationship and an example of some intentionality about the long-term dynamics of that relationship. I believe this is a future area of inquiry for IEE. What about the impact on host communities of ISL programs when relational ethics are foundational to curricular design? How do we navigate the partnership landscape that is so pervasive in Western education? What about ceremonial approaches to create 'partnerships' between individuals in institutions and in host communities?

Conclusion

As we have shared in conversation throughout this chapter, we remember that stories of experience (Dewey, 1938) hold much educative potential. O'Sullivan's vignettes were helpful in painting a picture of IEE experiences. We think it is important in IEE research to write in this way because the stories give shape to theory in a way that tempers idealisms. Heidebrecht's interruptions interact with the stories, which we hope will inspire potential threads where further conversations might occur. Here we pick up on these threads and think back to the stories as we consider the following questions:

- What are the limits of a pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999)?

- Who is responsible for maintaining relationships in IEE?

- What differences do we see in a relational approach to partnerships in IEE?

In our continued discussions of these stories O'Sullivan has helped clarify that the student's experiences, the incidents, and accidents he tells of in vignette 2, providing an example of mis-educative experiences (Dewey, 1938). In the vignette the students, who confided in Carmen had reached a threshold in their capacity to learn. The pain and discomforts they had encountered during their trip up and down the mountain and the confusion and uncertainty several students had with unexpected encounters in their accommodations left them in a position where they were concerned with their physical experience. This disruption to learning also disrupted what Dewey (1938) refers to as continuity, where one experience builds upon another and where "the future has to be taken into account at every stage of the educational process" (p. 19). IEE provides a highly interactive and immersive learning milieu where continuity may be accounted for in a way that is different from the classroom due to the ongoing nature of the programs. However, it is good to note the potential disruptive forces to continuity that are unique to IEE. The pedagogy of discomfort is layered on top of the other discomforts students are already experiencing having displaced themselves through travel to an, often new, context. This is a further area of inquiry and one that we believe demands further attention.

As we thought about who is responsible for maintaining relationships in IEE we came away from the conversation with three thoughts. First, is that there is something different about IEE that is facilitated through a trusted relationship rather than simply a formalized partnership. It takes time to move from partnership to relationship. Multiple

visits are required that demonstrate commitment and continuity. Deliberate activities must also be incorporated into IEE that facilitate relationship building. We think back to the *Encuentro* and the *dynamicos* and community presentations, two different activities designed for the purpose of getting to know one another and develop trust. We wonder about how to apply these kinds of activities within IEE so that relationships between leaders and students from the visiting Global North groups may be cultivated with Global South hosts. Second, we wondered about who is responsible for maintaining relationships and concluded that there is no one model that emerges. O'Sullivan's approach was, like it is with many trusting relationships, organic in nature and his personal trip to reconcile with the community was a unique move based on a unique relationship. If any recommendation is to be made, we believe that it is important that a point person such as a staff or faculty member takes the lead on relationship building rather than rely on administration and CBO or NGO partners. This is not to say that administration and other intermediary communicators are unimportant, but we advocate that a direct relationship provides a relational foundation from which to address issues of reciprocity and develop solidarity in IEE design.

Finally, as we reflect on a relational approach to partnerships in IEE we think about the greater potential for engagement and learning that it facilitates. Emotions play a role in engaged learning and to approach IEE with a relationship-first mentality, designing curriculum from the ground up with activities that facilitate connections rather than content, is what we recommend. As O'Sullivan referenced in his stories, those host families that were able to connect with their visitors, either because they spoke their language or

had a translator, were also more engaged and contributed to an experience that showed

mutual learning occurred.

Chapter Seven – Gifting the Basket of Research to Others: Exploring Implications for Theory, Practice, and People

The basket for research has been woven and filled. I want to take some time to reflect on what has been said and to think about for whom this basket may be most useful. The question of audience was always in my mind as I was writing. Thinking about who research is for has been one of the themes of this dissertation, shaped by the commitment to a theoretical framework that confronts the impact of colonialism in education. As I wonder about who might receive this basket as a gift, I realize how easy it is to give back to those who have given to you. I am a settler and have benefited from a system of education designed for me. I have been gifted with a structure that supports me and invests in me. I acknowledge this privilege and know that it shapes this research. In their work, it is easy for settler researchers to benefit settler colonial education structures, such as the institutions that we are situated within. I do not look to critique this here other than to draw attention to the reality that it is natural to write for the academic audience. There is a glut of literature pertaining to ISL that speaks about student impact, institutional and curricular changes, the nature of partnerships, and best practices. These studies are invested in ISL and invest in ISL. I do not claim to escape this, especially given my personal stories having been shaped by ISL as a learner. However, I hope that this basket may also be a gift to the communities in the Global South that regularly receive Global North visitors.

At the core of this research project was to consider the perspectives of those whose voices are not often heard. It was, especially at the time of writing the initial SSHRC grant in 2015, a novel approach. It was also an approach that invited a pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999). Our research team journeyed together in what were uncharted paths. The

theoretical framework, which informed the methodology of this project was, as I stated in chapter three, emergent. It was in flux (Kovach, 2009). It was shaped by the relationships that were made with one another and with the participants in the study. I have learned that it demands a great deal of work to do research in a way that seeks to unsettle colonial relations in experiential education.

Reflections on Weaving

I hope that it was clear in chapter one that the context of this study had a significant impact on the research design. In this chapter I spoke about two stories. First, was the story of the *Ixileños*, their experiences of the Spanish conquest, the colonial dictatorship that was imposed upon their communities for centuries, and the events leading up to the genocide. It is impossible to avoid questions about colonialism and settlers and the ways they have shaped the *Ixileños*' experience of ISL. I argued that experiential education programs that facilitate transnational encounters such as ISL cannot disregard this history of oppression and operate in a way that circumvents the reality of Global North settlers[45] entering Indigenous lands. Second, and woven throughout this story, were my personal stories of benefiting from ISL as a young adult, of my becoming who I am and what I know, and my motivations to engage in this research. The intention of this chapter was to introduce the tone of this dissertation and the two most important lenses through which the reader might approach the writing; from the perspective of the host communities and from the perspective of myself.

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[45] I recognize not all who participate in ISL programs originating from the Global North identify as settlers.

In chapter two I explored more deeply the practice of ISL. I considered its historical and theoretical influences, suggesting that it emerges as a pedagogy from the Deweyan school of learning through experience. However, I trace its roots back to colonial forms of education such as the Grand Tour and make note that the travel industry has left its mark on ISL. Then, shifting the focus to ISL research, I discuss challenges that are distinct from SL such as logistics, national interests, and reductionist approaches. I argue that a turn to consider the impact of ISL on Global South host communities is a necessary inquiry and that there is an existing community of scholars who agree and have identified new and novel areas for research.

Chapter three logically follows, where I explained the theoretical framework and methodology. Given the context of this project that takes place in *Ixil* territory it was imperative to consider theories that confront the impact of colonialism. I explored several theories that align with this objective, postcolonialism, decolonization, and anti-colonialism and explained how they work together to inform the framework of this research design. Furthermore, I took some time to consider Indigenous theory and, while I do not claim to apply Indigenous theory in this work, I named the ways that it has influenced me as a researcher and the values that I have attempted to infuse into the research process. From there I explained the case study design of the project and how each of the component parts of research were done: data gathering, data analysis, and knowledge sharing and giving back. At this point I had completed weaving the basket for research. This conceptual framework helps the reader visualize the purpose of these first three chapters and that they worked together to figuratively 'contain' the subsequent three.

Chapter four returns the reader to the context of the project that took place in Guatemala, beginning by speaking of my experience as a researcher in the *Ixil* community. The first half of this chapter spoke to doing research as a settler in an Indigenous space, which provides a rich lens in which to read the interpretations of the data that I offered in the second half. Three findings were discussed, each supported by the qualitative data gathered prior to the *Encuentro* research event.

Chapter five chronologically followed the events presented in chapter four, providing some background to the *Encuentro*, or gathering, as well as explaining its purpose within the larger project. Co-author Balzer and I took some time to explain the preparation, design, and findings of the event and concluded the chapter by examining the nature of reciprocity in Global North/Global South relationships. We spoke to the challenges of reciprocity in ISL and wondered together about the necessity of further research in this area and how it may inform future ISL curriculum.

Chapter six built upon chapter five, where co-author O'Sullivan and I discussed what happened with the knowledge that was gathered after the *Encuentro*. Here we engaged in conversations related to three subsequent International Experiential Education trips (IEE) (O'Sullivan's preferred term for ISL) that were undertaken with the *Ixil* community and designed based on the recommendations made at the *Encuentro*. This is an important chapter as it demonstrated the priority in this project of knowledge sharing and giving back. O'Sullivan detailed his experiences while I reflected on those experiences through interruptions to his stories. We concluded by engaging in a conversation about the importance of relationships in IEE, the challenges in implementing curricular change, and the nature of partnerships between Global North and Global South people.

Gifting the Basket to Others

As I reflect on the journey that this dissertation entailed, I realize now that it will no longer belong to me and, extending the conceptual framework of the basket, I imagine gifting it to others. In thinking about the implications that this project may have I also wonder about audience. As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, it is easy and natural to think about giving back to the structures and systems that I have been supported by. I think it is also important to gift the basket to these academic communities that I am a part of. For this reason, I will explore the implications this study has for critical ISL studies as well as the organizations and institutions that continue to design and implement ISL. However, I hope that this dissertation may also have relevance for the host communities that receive Global North visitors.

For the Research Community

The field of ISL research is young. It may be that this is one of the key reasons that it also struggles from a lack of identity as demonstrated by the diverse ways in how concepts are used (Reeb & Folger, 2013). There is little clarity in the use of terminology and definitions in the field and, as I demonstrated in chapter two, ISL cannot escape its colonial history. Dan Butin (personal communication, October 17, 2017) has said that we have not moved far beyond Ivan Illich's (1998) critique, "to hell with good intentions." It may be an anecdotal statement but speaks to the confused nature of the field. I would argue, as would Allyson Larkin (personal communication, October 14, 2017), that while there is widespread acceptance and acknowledgement of postcolonial and decolonizing critique of ISL practices, programs continue to proliferate. One of the objectives of this dissertation was to confront the colonial underpinnings of ISL by emphasizing the contextual aspects of

the study. Alongside this, I wanted to respond to Kiely and Hartman's (2011) admonishment to researchers to undertake inquiries with honesty and subjectivity, engaging in ongoing reflection about their assumptions about the research process.

This leads me to thinking about theory in ISL. Katie MacDonald had told me that one of the most relevant problems that needs to be addressed in ISL "are the underlying white settler supremacist frames" (personal communication, October 16, 2017). Her point is well taken as I believe ISL to be a practice adrift from an intentional commitment to critical theories. It is clear to me that this is the case in the marketization of ISL programs that continue to entice Global North participants with the rhetoric that reminds me of the "Grand Tour." Many programs are indistinguishable from other forms of ethical travel. There exists an underlying assumption that there are historical and ongoing iniquities, however, instead of confronting this reality there is a tendency to focus myopically on ethical standards for practice (Allyson Larkin, personal communication, October 14, 2017). This is not always the case but for those programs that market their product in this way I think that an anti-colonial theoretical framework might curtail the unhealthy attachment to the ethic of consumption that so clearly seeks to sustain and grow the field.

This dissertation contributes to postcolonial/decolonizing/anti-colonial discourses for the research and practice of ISL. I sought to respond to the literature and add to the conversation the understudied perspective of Indigenous host communities.

For the Practitioners

There are diverse stakeholders in the field of ISL. Universities and other educational institutions, religious groups, Community Based Organizations (CBO), not-for-profits, Non-governmental organizations (NGO), and government agencies are all invested in various

forms of ISL curriculum and programming . I think that there are implications for each of these stakeholders, however, for the purposes of clarity I will focus on gifting this basket to universities and other educational institutions that practice ISL. I am reminded of several different conversations I have had with folks who are involved in ISL. I inquired about what they considered to be the next steps of development in the field. Richard Kiely suggested that there is a need for greater consideration of community partnerships and impact (personal communication, October 31, 2017). I could not agree more! Katie MacDonald spoke about the absence of focus on the land and materiality, hinting at the incorporation of place-based pedagogies (personal communication, October 16, 2017). Allyson Larkin wonders about the future of ISL as supporting transnational activism where Global North participants practice solidarity with Global South communities who are resisting exploitation and marginalization, much like the *Ixil* (personal communication, October 14, 2017). Randy Stoecker surprised me when he mentioned that he avoids ISL because "I think the problems with it are even worse than they are for local SL" (personal communication, October 13, 2017).

As I think about the implications for practitioners two things come to mind that are relevant. The first emerges amidst my current experience one year into the COVID-19 global pandemic. This is an unprecedented event that has disrupted many systems. Travel restrictions based on health and safety guidelines have stifled ISL trips for the past year and will greatly affect the near future. I look hopefully at this crisis for the field of ISL as an opportunity for critical reflection. The machine that was sustained by countless stakeholders has ground to a halt, and there is time to consider new theories and models before it is refueled and given the green light to restart.

This dissertation argues for community centric models of ISL where those living in the cities, towns, and villages that host Global North visitors are given greater agency to design the programs from the ground up as equal partners. Community centric models for ISL would recognize communities' seasonal rhythms such as harvest and plan accordingly, thinking first about the wellness of hosts rather than the convenience of Global North schedules. Community centric models may also include, when Indigenous people are involved, Two-eyed seeing approaches that bring together settlers and Indigenous people in learning together. Specifically, I think about the potential of curricular change that supports Global North students to grow in their mental models, understandings, and practices of reconciliation. The potential for ISL to facilitate reciprocal community engaged learning is an area that I believe would set the practice apart in education. Community centric models for ISL necessitate thinking with theory. The transnational encounters facilitated by ISL demand transnational theory, which work to unsettle nationalistic tendencies. Decolonization strategies for ISL that highlight the political determinants of education would be a welcome step forward.

For the Communities

Finally, I gift this basket to the Global South communities that host ISL. I am thinking about the *Ixil* communities who live in and around Nebaj, Guatemala who participated in this study. I also think about the many other communities in Guatemala, in other parts of Central America, and around the world that are popular destinations for ISL programs. One of the key themes of this dissertation is found in the title, 'Unsettling Colonial Relations in Experiential Education." Good relationships between Global North and Global South people, institutions, and communities is what I advocate as being one of the most important factors

in the future of ISL. There are no models or lists of best practices to recommend. Instead, I wish to inspire Global North stakeholders to approach ISL in a relational way, thinking first of community needs, desires, and ideas. The research team, including myself, that undertook this project become friends with the participants and continue to connect with several communities. One of the more tangible outcomes is the way the writing of this dissertation contributed to future research. In 2021, principal investigator Geraldine Balzer, co-investigator Michael O'Sullivan, and myself as a collaborator were awarded a SSHRC funded study that is a direct extension of the recommendations put forward here. I look forward to having further opportunities to continue working with the *Ixil* people to invest in decolonizing ISL.

Final Reflections

Lastly, I want to address two points of tension. Looking back at the challenges experienced in doing ISL research and thinking forward to future projects, I remain convinced that logistical barriers play a role in the dearth of studies focusing on Global South community perspectives. It requires great financial resources and time to conduct studies internationally. Furthermore, for research projects to integrate decolonizing perspectives the need for trusting relationships between researchers and communities is essential. I worry about logistical challenges being exacerbated in the time of COVID-19 and whether this global pandemic will create an insurmountable setback for new studies to take place. Thinking about resuming educational research, I wonder about funding agencies' priorities and whether institutional resources may focus inward as will likely be necessary coming out of the pandemic. If ISL and other EE programs do not resume, I

worry about the disruption this causes host communities who, in many cases, rely on the economic benefits of visitors.

I would be remiss not to mention the gaps in this study. I present three here that I hope will inspire other researchers to further inquiry where I was unable. First, I need to mention that the narrow focus on an Indigenous Mayan community limits the generalizability of the findings in this dissertation. The recommendations found are highly contextual and it requires some effort to discover transferrable application into different contexts. Of note is the fact that this study only included rural communities. Urban host communities and those communities in closer proximity to tourist destinations may have a different set of recommendations and the emphasis I place on relational ISL may not apply in the same way in these cases. A comparative study that inquires about the importance of relationship in ISL between different sites would be a future area of inquiry. On the limited nature of a highly contextualized study I will also say that national factors play a role in the results. This study examines cases of Canadian participants visiting Guatemalan communities. Studies that examine different combinations of transnational encounters may reveal different historical and political dynamics that require further inquiry. In the case that I present the reality of the history of colonialism and settler colonialism loom large. Likewise, the investment that the Canadian resource extraction industries have made in Guatemala provides a unique cluster of political affiliations between our nations that affect ISL whether it is explicitly addressed or not. Multiple case studies that examine the similarities and differences of ISL between nations may affirm that the political/transnational lens demands further inquiry or it may reveal it to be less of a factor than I predict. This study is also limited in its longitudinal design. The four-year SSHRC

funded study provided a foundation to build relationships, think about good research

design for the context, and implement and analyze the research, however, it remains to be

seen whether the recommendations made will have an appreciable impact on communities.

Further research that employs action-research or community-based action research

(CBPR) methodologies may provide more substantive longitudinal data.

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Appendix – notes on semi-structured and open-ended interviews

As I had mentioned in chapter three regarding the methods used for gathering data that four different researchers contributed, each employing their own skill and approach without imposition from the Global North research team. The first interviews were performed by a Guatemalan researcher who followed a semi-structured approach. Here I have provided here a sample of the questions they used, although not every question here was used in every interview and they were able to navigate conversations well by asking probes and prompting participants to elaborate when necessary.

- Who organizes these trips?

- Have you seen any changes after the groups come?

- How do the women participate when the groups come? How do the men participate? Who participates more, the women or the men?

- How is the relationship between the groups and the community?

- What do you think the community thinks of the foreigners when they visit?

- Do you think the groups learn from these experiences? What do they learn?

- Do you think there is something specific that the groups should learn from your community?

- What is the community's motivation to receive the groups?

- Do you think some communities benefit more than others?

- Do you think there is a relationship of dependency between the groups and the community?

- Have the groups brought gifts? What do you think of the groups bringing gifts?

- Have you had any concerns or worries about the groups coming?

- Has anyone been against the visitors coming?

- Has the community had any problems or conflicts with the groups that have come?

- Is there something that could be done so that the community benefits more from these groups?

- What would happen if instead of coming to visit, the groups sent money to the community? Would that be a good thing or not?

- Do you think that the groups of North Americans should visit other communities?

- What would happen if the groups stopped coming?

The second round of interviews was performed by a research couple who had lived in Nebaj and were known to the community having pre-existing relationships. Their approach was open-ended and conversational and the data they gathered happened while sharing food and drink with the participants. Likewise, the data I gathered in the third round was open-ended and conversational. Finally, the data gathered at the *Encuentro* gathering in Managua, Nicaragua included several sharing circles, world café, and theatre of the oppressed. These activities were audio and video recorded, photos were taken, and conversations were transcribed.