Race and Participation in International Experiential Learning: Case-Based Exemplar of a Habitat-University Partnership in El Salvador

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Abstract:

International experiential learning (IEL) has various pedagogical concerns associated with the colonial and racialized lineage underlying its Global South engagements. Drawing on critical race theory, White privilege, and globally engaged learning research as they inform IEL, this case-based study of "northern" participant perceptions of their experiences in a partnership between Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador and a Canadian university focuses on a "catalytic moment" in El Salvador. That is, a unique situation arose which prompted participant women of color (WoC) to share distinct insights and counter-stories from their positions, providing an opening for deeper attention to race for all of the participants and, we believe, for IEL practice more broadly. And in this context, the host partners saw opportunities for IEL participation both North and South to be strengthened through greater diversity in team composition and in associated host-community learning and relationship development.

Introduction

International experiential learning (IEL) is a diverse set of learning processes oriented around varying forms of global engagement and an increasing component of university curriculum across the "north" (MacDonald & Tiessen, 2018; Crabtree, 2013; Drolet, 2013; Tiessen & Epprecht, 2012; Jackson, 2008). IEL commonly consists of student-participants from what we refer to as the Global North travelling to the Global South, and is organized around a specific set of learnings and engagement activities. Though we see such engagements referenced in diverse ways—international service learning, study abroad education, globally engaged learning, etc. (MacDonald & Tiessen, 2018; Tiessen & Huish, 2013; Crabtree, 2013; Benham Rennick & DesJardins, 2013; Pluim & Jorgensen, 2012; McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Grusky, 2000)—for this case-based study we use *international experiential learning,* or IEL. This term captures most clearly the kind of experiential learning we are developing in our work in El Salvador.

This case study rests on the premise that IEL development with roots in the colonial and racialized construction of the north-south requires closer attention (Thomas & Luba, 2018; Tiessen

& Huish, 2013; Smith & Laurie, 2011). More specifically, this means attention in IEL programming to issues of privilege, north-south political and economic inequities, and more precisely, in our case, how it intersects with White's (2002, p. 417) challenge "to trace the implicit racial character of formally color-blind development discourse and practice." Drawing from Thomas and Luba (2018), MacDonald and Teissen (2018), Heron (2007), and White (2006), we see the complex intersections of race with gender, class, and other identity markers in this kind of engagement but choose to focus on race as a less well-examined facet of IEL (Power, 2006). Foundational ideas from critical race theory (CRT), White privilege, and other studies in whiteness and race are drawn on for wider context, while more specific works on race in internationally engaged learning realms are especially useful to our study. And we pay special attention to the fact that our IEL efforts of the last seven years witnessed shifting participant proportions, meaning greater numbers of people of color (PoC). We see this changing participant dynamic as yielding potentially useful insights to IEL development, filling a gap in previous north-south service-learning and engagement research focused largely on White participant groups (MacDonald & Tiessen, 2018; Thomas & Luba, 2018; Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017; Schwartz, 2015; Lough & Carter-Black, 2015; Heron 2007; Kothari a&b, 2006; Crew & Fernando, 2006).[1]

Problem Statement

Given the case-based exemplar character of this work on race and participation in IEL, we first explore a racialized learning moment and the shifts in participant experience and perceptions that followed from this incident in the partnership between Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador and our university. Second, we draw on observations that our in-country partners raised in association with this moment, and what it suggests from their perspective for this kind of engagement. The basic intention, drawing from research in close alignment with our own, is to imagine IEL that can more effectively "engage with race, and thus build more productive avenues for participants to grapple with aspects of race and racism shaping their experiences" (Thomas & Luba, 2018, p. 185). Recognizing that the diversity of participants in this partnership provides potentially useful exemplars, we highlight that "to understand human action, we need to understand the nuances of what people do in particular locales, and case studies provide a means of doing so" (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012, p. 382).

Theoretical Framing: IEL, Critical Race, and White Privilege

IEL

Contemporary IEL has various antecedents[2] which set the path for the more recent emergence of Canadian university opportunities for students to study, volunteer, and work in international settings – *international* commonly referring to the "Global South" (Crew & Fernando, 2006). At its broadest level, the central critique of IEL as a form of international engagement is that it can intentionally or unwittingly result in the perpetuation of north-south polarities, what Heron (2007)

[1] Since 2013, when we first began developing this international partnership, we've seen, out of a total of 108 participants (98 women and ten men), 66 white women and 32 women of color (WoC), with the ten men comprised of six whites and four men of color. Generally this means about 2/3 white, and 1/3 PoC, or racialized people.

[2] We see this in the form of organizations such as the British Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in the 1950s (Tonkin, 2011), and its antecedent the U.S. Peace Corps in the early 1960s (Schein, 2015). Both were created to send citizens to the "Third World" under the language of aid and development (Vrasti, 2013).

labels its "colonial continuities" (Clost, 2013; Thomas & Chandresekera, 2013; McGehee, 2012; Pluim & Jorgensen, 2012). It is clear that we must consider current manifestations of IEL in the face of often mutually reinforcing historical concerns such as perpetuation of dependency, imposition of Eurocentric beliefs and values, "othering," the "civilizing mission," the "helping imperative," "benevolent imperialism," and situating southern communities as merely educational platforms serving northern participants (see variously: Benham Rennick, 2015; Schein, 2015; Fizzle & Epprecht, 2013; Drolet, 2013; MacDonald, 2013; Thomas & Chandresekera, 2013; Smith & Laurie, 2011; Vodopivec & Jaffe, 2011). Generally, what we take from this complex of concerns is that IEL practitioners must be wary of the historic practices and language of "development" which "tends to reproduce the same global patterns of inequality and poverty, leaving intact – if not reinforcing – the dominant position of the North" (Palacios, 2010, p. 864).[3] And, drawing on White (2006), who sees race as a sort of "shorthand" for inequitable north-south relationships, we conduct our case study in light of the tensions between the "re-inscription" and "normalizing" concerns of uncritical engagement (Heron, 2007), with the challenges and disruption to the development conventions we hope it can provoke (Thomas & Chandresekera, 2013; Crabtree, 2013; Smith & Laurie, 2011).

In this vein, our work to enhance IEL through our examination of race and participation draws on ideas and practices from a diversity of learning pedagogies oriented to global engagement of this kind, with the framework by Feagan and Boylan (2016) providing a useful starting point. For example, pre-departure preparation would include content focused on colonial histories and their diverse legacies, and associations with the contemporary politics and economy of the host country (Park, 2018; Tiessen, Roy, Karim-Haji, & Gough, 2018; Crabtree, 2013; Drolet, 2013; MacDonald, 2013). Further, such content would require processes like journaling and critical reflection, self and group learning practices, and post-trip debriefing, reflection, and hindsight analysis (Shah, 2018; Benham Rennick, 2015; Drolet, 2013; Travers, 2013; Ortlipp, 2008; Grusky, 2000). Additionally, this would call on carefully facilitated group discussions pre-, during, and post-trip on concepts such as race, privilege, "social location," global social justice, and global citizenship (Latta, Kruger, Payne, Weaver, & VanSickle, 2018; Tiessen & Huish, 2013; Langdon & Agyeyomah, 2013; Cameron, 2013; Clost, 2013; Conran, 2011; Smith & Laurie, 2011; Andreotti, 2006). Our broader aim is to help participants move towards Thomas and Chandreseker's (2013, p. 103) "authentic ally," a figure that "understands, acknowledges, and engages in self-reflection regarding the power and privilege that they wield in the world."

Critical race and White privilege.

'Race' is fundamental in not only explaining how the modern world system emerged but also how it functions in localized and globalized relationships (Kothari, 2006a, p. 6).

Though there is recognition that race requires increased focus in IEL (Thomas & Luba, 2018; Tiessen & Huish, 2013; Heron, 2007), calling attention to it is still "like breaking a taboo" (Bandyopadyay & Patil, 2017; White, 2002). This is likely tied to the still deeply rooted mindset, especially of White people from the Global North, as 'educators' of racialized, backward others needing to be taught, saved, modernized, and controlled (Schein, 2015; DiAngelo, 2011; Pease, 2010;

[3] Tiessen and Huish (2013) and others like Benham Rennick and Desjardins (2013) provide useful forays regarding IEL and these issues of "development."

Kothari, 2006b; Power, 2006). Recognizing that the north-south world was built on so-called salvational discourses and long-standing Eurocentric colonial notions of 'progress,' 'civilizing,' 'development' – the *White man's/women's burden* – , and inherently racialized foundations, for our case study we draw from critical race theory (CRT) to more effectively incorporate race in IEL learning and engagement processes. This means seeing that "racism is not an aberration but rather a fundamental way of organizing society" (Sleeter, 2017, p. 157), and that it is endemic and systemic, ingrained in our societal systems and structures (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). So even though both White people and PoC are immersed in that world, they inhabit it in very different ways (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Given this, we contend that participants will carry and exhibit beliefs and perspectives that will differ even though the IEL engagement contours will ostensibly be the same for both. Works on U.S. students studying abroad, i.e., Willis's study (2015) on black women and Sweeney's (2013) on students of color, provide some of the grounds for this contention of ours.

The concept of White privilege is a part of this larger discourse, with privilege defined generally as

> . . . possession of a disproportionately large share of positive social value or all those material and symbolic things for which people strive . . . individuals come to possess these benefits by virtue of his or her prescribed membership in a particular socially constructed group such as race, religion, clan, tribe, ethnic group or social class. (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, pp. 31-32)

And the taken-for-granted nature of these unearned privileges means that they are commonly dismissed or unseen by White people (Bonds & Inwood, 2015; Martinez, 2014; Pease, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). We note from previous studies that the largely white northern participants in these international engagements commonly denied, or were simply unaware of, their racial privileges – their "whiteness," a quality that Bonds and Inwood (2013) and Delgado and Stefancic (2001) ascribe to its "normative" character. In this vein, when race is broached, White people characteristically meet it with a kind of awkwardness if not "silence" (DiAngelo, 2011; Kothari, 2006b; White, 2006), a perception that they occupy an objective, "neutral," or unraced position (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Crewe & Fernando, 2006) – though this is not always the case as Schwartz (2015) notes on research on privilege in sub-Saharan Africa.[4]

Key to our study and our contribution to race and participation in IEL is our observation that student groups we have worked with over the last seven years come from increasingly diverse racial backgrounds. The questions arising from this fact helped guide our study framing, information collection, and IEL enhancement objectives. When Pease (2010) asserts that Western culture is defined by a set of historic axioms and beliefs tied to the larger story of whiteness, we ask whether this allows space to recognize the experiences and ideas of northern PoCs – Indigenous peoples, people of Asian and African descent, and other racialized individuals who participate in these international experiences. Representation matters and as IEL increases in uptake, it is necessary that we more carefully account for this diversity. The common depiction of the North as White neglects a plural population of PoC who are participating in these forms of global engagement. It is possible

[4] Some volunteers were aware and uncomfortable with privileges to which in-country hosts did not have access (clean water, adequate living conditions, transportation), yet this did not translate into seeing these privileges as unearned advantages as members of the Global North, and the racialized foundations of the north-south system (Kothari, 2006b).

that these participants can provide valuable insights to this research area from their distinct positionality and social locations, while remaining careful to acknowledge that race is not one unitary or monolithic identity, as well as the vast diversity within and between racial categories.

Race and El Salvador

El Salvador's population is 86.3% Mestizo (European and Indigenous), 12.7% White, 0.2% Indigenous (Lenca, Kakawira, and Nahua-Pipil), 0.1% Black, and 0.6% Other (CIA, 2018). Because the majority of the population is Mestizo, people are commonly identified by the racial categories of *Chele* (light-skinned) or *Trigueño* (dark-skinned), as is the case in much of Latin America.[5] This demographic context is set in contrast to the enduring legacies of Spanish colonialism, where Eurocentrism and whiteness still prevail in the contemporary political economy of this country (Quijano, 2000).[6] We keep this in mind as we carry out this case-based study, while also recognizing, as Heron (2007, p. 3) cautions, not to imagine our southern partners as a "large group of undifferentiated, racialized Others."

Methodological Components

Case-Based Exemplar

We draw on Hodgetts and Stolte (2012, p. 382) who hold that "case studies allow us to investigate a particular social event, situation, or condition, and to provide insights into the underlying processes that explore how the particular event or situation came to be." In this vein, the information collection process builds on recognition of the benefits of remaining fluid, flexible, and sensitive to context for example (Mason, 2002). Study methods included individual interviews, facilitated discussion groups, participant-observation, and participant journal entries and e-mails. Our case study focuses on one group of students from Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada and their IEL program, which is part of our larger multi-year partnership in El Salvador, as well as on *key informants* from our partners with Habitat for Humanity Global Village (HFH-GV). That is, the Salvadoran coordinators and translators working in partnership with the university and the student-group. Acknowledgement of the importance of participant autonomy and respect of the fact that race and privilege are challenging concepts to navigate were coupled with carefully developed relationships with the participants (Shah, 2018; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Curry-Stevens, 2007).[7]

Positionality

The positionality of the primary researcher as both a WoC and a participant-observer has of course bearing on the study outcomes relative to the development of trusting relationships with the participants who consented to take part. The first author, who is biracial (black/white), conducted this work with the intention of discerning how race plays a role in such participation, recognizing, from her own lived experience in a working-class family in Canada, that race and racialization

[5] It is useful to note that there is no uniformity regarding self-identification as "black" in the south generally (Crewe & Fernando, 2006).

[6] The enduring dominance of Eurocentric colonial power is evident in laws enacted in the 1930s in El Salvador, which prohibited the immigration and settlement of Blacks, Asians, and Arab people in the country – laws that were not removed until the 1980s (The American School of Tegucigalpa, 2013).

[7] This study met and followed all of the ethical review protocols of Wilfrid Laurier University's Research Ethics Board (REB). This means that informed consent was obtained for all of the information used in this case study.

perspectives impact and contribute to social inequities and injustice. Her journaled thoughts going into the study are useful here:

> At the start of my research, I had not participated in any international volunteer trips before so I was skeptical about how much good could occur in such a short time. As a woman of color I also had my worries about the white-savior complex, and how these international trips might perpetuate colonialism and dependency. One of the main reasons I had doubts about IEL was that whenever I had seen advertising for these trips it almost always displayed a white person, usually a woman, helping a sad or sickly looking Black or Brown child.

Program

Habitat for Humanity Global Village (HFH-GV), an international volunteer organization with which this university partners in its IEL efforts, has been providing housing "solutions" in El Salvador since 1992 (HFH-GV, 2018). Like many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, El Salvador has housing inadequacy issues resulting from a long period of colonization, civil war and violence, neo-colonial structural trade arrangements, and natural disasters, among other concerns (see Sliwinski, 2018; Duncan, 2000). Inadequate housing in El Salvador encompasses issues such as overcrowding, homelessness, substandard housing, etc., with Inter-American Development Bank (IDB, 2012) citing the housing deficit in El Salvador at about 58%, with an even higher proportion of people suffering from poor housing services, figures coincident with the shelter issues raised by HFH-GV (2018).

HFH-GV El Salvador offers financial and housing support services, home improvements, and new home construction by working with 1,500 international and 2,500 local volunteers each year (HFH-GV, 2018). The *Global Villages* label references aspirations focused on developing relationships between its largely northern participants and its southern host-community members, which take the form of participants' labor support during construction, monetary donations for shelter costs, and social and cultural interactions among participants, family, and other host community members during the build-event period.

Participants

The IEL trip that is the focus of our case study was comprised of 12 student-participants: 11 identifying as women, and one as a man. Of the 11 women, seven identified as White, and four identified as women of color. The man identified as White. Choosing not to use the black-white binary about which Delgado and Stefancic (2001) raise concerns, the PoC identified as: East Asian, South Asian, Black, and Biracial. The first author conducted a total of ten interviews, the majority of which took place in the host country of El Salvador, with the exception of three which took place in Canada directly following the trip. During the time in El Salvador, there were also regular group discussions that covered topics including privilege, race, and gender, as well as general reflections on volunteering with Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador. The group discussions provided a chance for participants to reflect on these themes and their experiences through conversation and by sharing stories. Three of the group discussions were recorded and used as data for this study. All interviews and group discussions were transcribed verbatim using the Trint transcription platform, with the first author also examining the data for what went unsaid during the interviews.

The IEL trip included two home-builds over 17 days in-country, with the first in the town of El Paisnal in Cuscatlan, and the second in the capital city of San Salvador (for build-site and study locations, see Figure 1: El Salvador Build-site regions – San Salvador and Cuscatlan).

Figure 1. El Salvador Build-site regions – San Salvador and Cuscatlan

The trip included in-depth cultural excursions and community-integrative events such as a cooking class with village women-elders, hikes and talks by local experts and survivors associated with the civil war in El Salvador, community-oriented painting and music evenings with local artists and students, museum and art gallery visits, etc. These were in addition to the two separate home-building events involving the student participants, local masons, workers, and recipient family members all working together on-site. The program, entitled "Shelter & Social Justice in El Salvador," required in-depth readings and pre-trip presentations on context-specific history, politics, and culture associated with El Salvador, and importantly, on race, privilege, and gender themes in IEL (e.g., Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017; Schwartz, 2015).

Data Collection and Analysis

The information collection processes followed those outlined in the Methodological Components section quite closely, though we remained open to the reflexive nature of this kind of case-based study and the occurrences that suggest directions perhaps not anticipated. We focus our case study on what we consider to be a "catalytic moment" during the trip, and the impacts in awareness that it held for the participants around issues of race and privilege, as well as for the Habitat personnel. It is important to note that as we share our findings, we remain cognizant of essentialism issues that can sometimes emerge in the use of voices of the White and PoC participants here.

A Catalytic Moment on Site

> Today was not a good day. It started out fine, I got over my fears of the unknown as we stepped off of the bus at the worksite. The house's structure was halfway built, probably around five feet tall. We had three relatively simple tasks: straining out dirt for concrete,

> flattening the dirt in the house for the floor foundation, and sorting the piles of bricks for the walls. The work was hard – we worked in the overarching, blistering heat for hours. We made progress on the build site which was reassuring.
>
> At lunch, we sat with the lady who will be living in the house we are building. She thanked us and said "We were all sweet, especially the White people." Her comment made me so angry. I didn't want to eat anymore. . . or speak. . . Or work. Why am I giving my money and time and labour into a project when this lady only acknowledges the white students on my trip? I know racism exists. I deal with it every day. The systemic micro-aggressions and barriers which I defy every chance I get. Yet, here I am, wanting to break down barriers with people who would prefer to have them up. I know people aren't always like this – they appreciate multiculturalism, they are not ignorant to a heterogenous population, yet still, it hurts. It's discouraging. It makes me insecure to branch out, merge, attempt to create new connections. In a country which is not white, I am disappointed. I am disgusted. People still assume that white = privilege and dark = not. . . How can I break barriers and change stereotypes when people are so ignorant? Why was I born into societies in which I need to constantly prove myself? Why was I born to the "bottom"? And why, as disgusting as it is, do I consider it to be so? [participant #1 – journal entry]

The HFH-GV translator was caught off-guard by the homeowner's comment, asking her quietly if this was really what she wanted to say, and then translated. Among the participants, the comment elicited nervous laughter and some looks of uncertainty. Although not raised as an issue at that moment, this remark generated a catalytic opening for commentary around race, whiteness, and privilege throughout the remainder of the trip, in written journal entries like the one above, personal interviews, and group discussions.

Let us pick up on the impacts of this catalyzing moment. During an evening circle focused on race and participation and facilitated by the first author, participant #9 stated that she felt that the homeowner comment noted above required a response from the group, though as a White woman, believed she was not the appropriate person to do this. The participant-observer and facilitator, a WoC, responded by speculating "that the homeowner's remark could have something to do with internalized racism," a view by a person that is a product in this case of a Latin American context where Whiteness is privileged and engrained (Hernandez, 2015). The facilitator went on to suggest that the comment was not meant to offend the racialized participants, but rather represented perspectives held by many members of the "south," based on intergenerational legacies of colonialism in these countries where Whiteness remains a symbol of power, expertise, and progress (DiAngelo, 2011; Kothari 2006b). Ngugi (1986) would refer to this as an example of "colonization of the mind," and Lough and Carter-Black (2015), from their work in Kenya, as an "internalized and inter-generationally embedded view" that elevates "whiteness." This moment and the discussions that followed are instructive, though we are careful regarding the issue of "insularity" associated with one Salvadoran member's voice, i.e., imagining a monolithic South versus a universal northern quality of openness and knowledge (Tiessen et al., 2018; Heron, 2007)

In that same circle, participant #3 commented on how the discussion of race recalled for her a question raised by the same homeowner who, when told by the translator that all of the home-building participants were Canadian, exclaimed, "How could she be Canadian, she is Chinese." This raised questions for this participant about the homeowner's understanding of Canadian culture and

ethnicity, and triggered memories for her of being adopted from China and brought up by a White-Canadian family. She shared how she grew up wishing at times to be White out of a deep sense of exclusion from the dominant White culture. Her personal experience of race and racialization in her home country provided an opening for the other participants to see race in both personal and structural contexts, and in association with this experience in El Salvador. As Delgado and Stefancic (2001) have noted, these kinds of distinct stories illustrate how racialization can be differential in character across the diverse minority groups outside of White culture.

A third WoC, participant #4, shared from her journaling in-country how she sees herself occupying a complex positionality. That is, at the historically oppressed intersections of being female, a PoC, and having the privileges associated with being from the North. Apparently drawing on the concept of White privilege raised in pre-trip preparation (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017), she wrote:

> Recently I have seen that the White Savior complex doesn't always have to do with the color of our skin but can still be a part of you because of where you grew up! If you grew up in Canada regardless of what your background is the media is regularly teaching us the white way (right way). The North American culture is taught to us and ingrained in us, we are given what is known as "invisible white privilege," though it may not apply to us when we are in Canada, but when we go to "third world countries" it comes out to shine. We are taught that our privilege means that we should help fix other peoples lives.

These three WoC voices just shared elevate race in this study in interesting contextualized ways, mirroring for us how Delgado and Stefancic (2001) frame differing though parallel social stories, i.e., "perspectivalism" and/or "multiple consciousness." The ripple effects of the "catalytic moment," in association with specific interview questions around race, came out in the voices of other participants and in the commentary shared by the Habitat personnel as well.

We begin by noting that going into the study, we anticipated that race would not likely appear on its own, meaning specifically that White women would not likely recognize their privilege(s) and positionality. And that, in some contrast, race for the PoC would more readily be raised though we were uncertain of how it might appear. Interestingly, all of the participants – White and PoC – early on reported a sense of comfort and/or of being welcomed by members of the host community. When asked about how they felt different from the host community or what kinds of differences they noticed in general in El Salvador, most participants cited privileges such as access to clean water, good accommodations, and access to more resources in general.

It is useful in this context to observe that though White participants in El Salvador are potentially quite notable because of their race, they are not generally conscious of that racialization, as DiAngelo (2011) might attest. In this case, geographic context likely plays a role. Similar to the findings of this research, Vrasti observed that in Guatemala, "race was never an issue, despite the fact that both Ladinos and Indios are heavily racialized bodies, because locals did not overtly bring up the subject" (2013, p. 110). It can be inferred that the White participants were less likely to think about race because it was not made visible to them by the Salvadoran people.[8] White participants

[8] This observation parallels Crew and Fernando's (2006) notes on how race and racialization can change or have their own national forms based on historical, economic, and political contexts.

unaware of their whiteness, i.e., not seeing race, is a common theme in this realm of research (Thomas & Luba, 2018; Mitchell, Donahue, & Young-Law, 2012; Endres & Gould, 2009), attributable to what Bonilla-Silva (2010) might submit is part of their "dominant identity" status.

However, raising race the way it was in the catalytic moment, and in interview prompts by the WoC participant-observer, helped to disrupt the "invisibility" of this privilege, leading to stronger recognition of the role of race in IEL (Kothari, 2006b; Pease, 2010). For example, participant #7, a White woman, came to acknowledge her white privilege beyond the "code words" of hair and eye color that participants in the Thomas and Luba (2018) case study used for example. She noted following the incident and when prompted:

> I don't walk around with race being at the forefront of my going out into a community. I don't really even put a lot of thought into my own race, and so that was something that I became more aware of from other people's perspectives and hearing that for some people it is at the forefront of going out or travelling. I guess this is where my privilege comes in, I can go to any country and say I'm Canadian . . .

And another White participant, who we understand to be the focus of the homeowner's "catalytic" comment, emphasized how her physical appearance or race was very different from the members of the host community, obvious for her from the fact that El Salvador's population and the host community members, meaning families and HFH-GV staff, are PoC. Like Pease (2010), who notes that White people sometimes only notice their race when visibly in the minority, participant #10 shared

> Well I am of a higher privilege, not by my choice but because of the way I look, being White with blonde hair. And I've always known that I'm lucky enough to be a part of that group. I also come from a middle-class family and I haven't really ever had to worry about money.

This participant addressed both race and class difference. That is, that being a White, middle-class woman puts her in a position of privilege in El Salvador as well as, in some respects, in her home country Canada. The comment by the future homeowner helped to catalyze this attention, and we infer that this elevated awareness was supported by pre-trip readings on race and whiteness for these participants (e.g., Schwartz, 2015; Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017; Tiessen & Epprecht, 2012).

The PoC participants clearly were more conscious of their racialized identities. These participants, most of whom shared that their families originated from countries considered part of the "Global South," reported connections along the lines of language, food, religion, and family, including coming from similarly poor backgrounds, kin dynamics, and even with respect to specific practices like communal hand-washing of clothes. One PoC saw this as the reason she did not experience, in her words, "culture-shock,"[9] and all except for one felt that they fit in, and felt comfortable and connected to El Salvador because of similar physical appearance (i.e., having darker skin) or another similarity they believe they shared with host community members. We see in these voices, as we did earlier in those catalyzed by the homeowner comments, a more direct awareness of what being racialized looks like and of "seeing" race, in some contrast to the White participants who

[9] See Schein (2015) for an in-depth discussion and history of the development of "culture shock" terminology.

at some pre-prompt stage consciously or unconsciously saw themselves, as Crewe and Fernando (2006) label it, as neutral or unraced.[10]

The HFH-GV key informant interviews provided some useful reflections on the study theme. First, diversity in either race or gender is not a requirement of HFH-GV in El Salvador, as host country partners have little influence on international group team selection. HFH-GV informant #2 shared this about racial diversity on teams: "I would say that it is not really [important], it's more on the program in your country, we just accept the [international volunteer] teams." However, though HFH-GV informants believed they had not experienced overt race issues from their Canadian volunteers (or other northern countries as far as they knew), they did note that race sometimes impacts how the volunteers are perceived in El Salvador, especially when the teams are more visibly diverse. HFH-GV informant #2 recalled the incident in this study, what we referred to earlier as the "catalytic moment":

> I mean for us [Habitat translators and coordinators] it doesn't matter, but with the families. . . I don't know if you remember the first day that Teresa[11] was saying "everyone's so pretty, especially the white skinned girls" but it's because people here are used to seeing people with the same color skin, so maybe it's a shock for them as well to see. So, the interaction is different as you can notice, but it's mostly because the families are living in extreme poverty and they don't have the opportunity to understand it from an academic point of view, and they might not have had the chance to learn about it in school. . .

And significantly, given the context of this study, another HFH-GV informant #4 offered that though their in-country office does not have any determining influence on team composition, there might be potential in working with diversity more openly:

> I think that Habitat does care and that there is a movement in Habitat international to promote everyone to build, but as a national program . . . we're what is known as a hosting program. We don't send teams international we just receive international teams so we really don't have any type of influence over the recruiting that a team leader does. . . . I think it is really valuable though, we really appreciate it whenever we have teams of different ethnicities – I think it really helps the conversation.

HFH-GV informant #2 recalled another similar incident on a different team-build that adds to this discussion regarding knowledge and perceptions about racial diversity from the host country families and communities:

> I had one homeowner once, who said, "Where is she from?" and I told her she's from Canada and she said, "No she's not from Canada. . . she doesn't look like she is." And it's because they expect [volunteers from Canada and the United States] to be white, because it's the stereotype that they get, because we are so influenced by the United States and a little bit

[10] Although not explored in this paper, it is important to note that racial politics are present in El Salvador and the rest of Central America, and race is one of the most important factors in the access, or lack of access, to opportunity and economic advancement. Namely, White and Chele (light-skinned) people are primarily in positions of power and have more access to resources than Indigenous or Trigueño (dark-skinned) people (Morrison, 2015).

[11] Name has been changed.

> from Canada as well. So even if teams are from the Netherlands and you have fair skin and blonde hair they think that you are from the United States.

HFH-GV informant #4 built on the racial diversity theme they commented on earlier. That is, that they see value in diversifying international team composition and what this might suggest regarding learning for and with host country communities and families:

> Because of] our history, you'll notice walking down the streets that most people are Mestizo (mixed-race). There is a very big history of how that happened . . . Similar to the United States and Canada we had a lot of problems with slavery and genocide in El Salvador. So that kind of did hurt the diversity of El Salvador, so whenever we have volunteers from other ethnicities it really does help . . . because people [in El Salvador] are very curious – I think it's incredibly valuable.

These reflections on diversity and race shared by the HFH-GV informants suggest some interesting departure points for educational possibilities in these north-south partnerships. That is, as a means of shifting host-family and community perceptions of northern members as stereotypically White, and what this might mean for diversity-awareness in this host country.

Critical Reflections and Recommendations for Scholarly Practice

A poignant and insightful voice from one of the participants provides an appropriate opening to this section where we draw on theory and previous research as means to develop recommendations for enhancing IEL in light of what we have learned from this case study exemplar. Participant #11, a WoC, shared this from her journal:

> We the privileged Westerners have played the role of saviors for decades and will most likely continue to do that for years to come. At the same time, among those who demean and push the people in the South and third world countries down there are people who truly make a positive impact on others as they equally do on us. . . I am a colored female [sic] with a disorder I have to deal with for the rest of my life with parents who are both immigrants. I fit every single category except for my sexuality labelling me as a minority in Canada. In El Salvador, I am a privileged tourist university student from a dominant Western country here on an exchange opportunity. Everything from who we are and what we do and the impact it has on ourselves and the people around us is really about perspective.

Acknowledging the complexity of her position and social location as a woman, differently-abled, and a PoC, juxtaposed with her privileges as a northern IEL participant in the South, recognition of how her identity can fluctuate in this kind of IEL context (Curry-Stevens, 2007) captures in a compelling way some idea of the significant character of this case study exemplar. We use the findings from this study to propose directions for enhancing IEL development, specifically around issues of race and participation, and do so by emphasizing "the agency of participants in the ways they present themselves as exemplars" (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012, p. 385).

What first comes to mind from our results is the potential that lies with "difference" as a pedagogical tool (MacDonald & Tiessen, 2018). Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) ideas about narrative and "the power of stories" within CRT suggests compelling means by which to build learning processes for IEL around the theme of race and White normativity (Park, 2018). As Martinez (2014, p. 20) observes, the role of "counterstory" in CRT demonstrates that "people of color have

experiential knowledge from having lived under such systems of racism and oppression . . . [and this can] raise awareness of issues affecting people of color that are often overlooked, not considered, or otherwise invisible to whites." Further, when facilitated carefully (Shah, 2018; Thomas & Luba, 2018; Endres & Gould, 2009; Curry-Stevens, 2007), such experientially framed stories, "counter-stories," can help to reveal such difference and act as "oppositional ideologies," helping to disrupt and denaturalize the majoritarian stories of White culture (Bonds & Inwood, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Always at play in such pedagogical work is the exercise of sensitivity and caution around compelling any person to be the "voice-of-color," premised on a presumed sense of competence or interest – the "minority expert" or "minority status" role problem (Sleeter, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Building on this, we believe that the "catharsis" Crabtree (2013) writes about that can occur during on-site reflection and the sharing of stories resonates closely with our own study results where "narrative reflection" helped to make more visible themes like fluid positionality and personal racialization encounters by participants (Willis, 2015; Drolet, 2013). In this sense, we see the narratives shared by the participants, most notably with the PoC who shared how they see complex shifts in their identities as they move North to South in IEL, as having close alignment with Shah's (2018) CRT notions of "multiple consciousness" and "intersecting identities" and with Curry-Stevens's (2007) "pluralized sites of privilege."

Emphasizing the role of "counter-stories" and "narrative reflection" in such experiential learning might in turn enable and empower PoC to see the value of their distinct social locations (Willis, 2015). This could mean both PoC participants from the North, as well as community members from the South when feasible. In this vein, though HFH-GV partners may at this point have little control over the composition of the international volunteer groups that they host, their view that racial diversity might play a role in such global engagements suggests potential for their own in-country learning hopes, and their partnerships with international teams.

We build on the above learnings by noting from this case-based exemplar that carefully-facilitated discussions during the program in-country helped mediate, to an important degree, racialized tensions, assumptions, and stereotypes. That is, the bridging role of the WoC participant-observer proved significant along with all of the steps incorporated into the pre-during-post-trip learning steps. However, it is necessarily the case that struggle with whiteness and racialization is risky work, and prone to discomfort and white fragility (Sleeter, 2017; Schwartz, 2015; Curry-Stevens, 2007), if not some form of color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). DiAngelo (2011) sees this risk as vital for real movement in the realm of race:

> The continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement in a culture infused with racial disparity limits the ability to form authentic connections across racial lines, and results in a perpetual cycle that works to hold racism in place. (p. 66)

Let us explore this. As was anticipated, White participants did not "see race" (Martinez, 2014; DiAngelo, 2011; Kothari, 2006b) though when prompted or catalyzed, most became more conscious of the ways that race permeates such engagement. Hence, even though there was some awkwardness and discomfort, the emergence of distinct views and "lived experience" stories assisted other participants in thinking through their own taken-for-granted perceptions and beliefs. This is a

poignant outcome of this study, and as race is "relational" (Heron, 2007), the catalytic moment and prompts helped simultaneously to make White privilege more visible, and White and PoC participants see their own racializations more clearly (Pease, 2010; Sweeney, 2013). Such learning aspirations require that facilitators carefully assist participants in such engagements in order to develop increased awareness of racialized practices, attitudes, and perspectives. This kind of consciousness would help White participants, for example, to internalize understandings of privileges that might then be harnessed for engagement in anti-racism learning.

The above, coupled with Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) "classroom exercises," thoughtful scenarios, questions, and processes at the end of each chapter of their book on CRT, suggest interesting avenues for engaging participants in thinking about race, confronting discomfort, and aligning with IEL enhancement. And the implementation of such practices, by those equipped and empathetic in their facilitation roles (Willis, 2015), can ensure that the hard work is carried out, with a sensitivity to the awkwardness and social contentions that are pervasive therein.

Furthermore, processes emphasizing independent reflection such as journaling on privilege, encouraged by Shah (2018), and activities advocated for in Curry-Steven's (2007) work on "pedagogy for the privileged" suggest important considerations and instructive ideas for enhanced work on anti-racism and whiteness. In this sense, conventional IEL learning processes can gain from emphasizing "the necessity of reflection in service learning that takes serious positionality, inequality and how all participants are imbricated in these processes" (MacDonald & Tiessen, 2018, p. 8).

In this vein, IEL preparation that actively engages with race can help participants elevate consciousness of their positionality (Latta et al., 2018), including the "social cleavages" among White participants (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), and do so in the context of colonial and racialized histories of both the host country and their own (Sweeney, 2013). This would aid participants to more effectively position their individual and collective presence wherever this local-global learning might occur, and work with their commonly unacknowledged privileges (Kothari, 2006b; Power, 2006). We see this aligning with Hodgetts and Stolte (2012) who hold that there

> is a need to prepare students for contexts and locations that are nominally more 'safe' . . . but also for environments that place a researcher in the midst of the very real crises that many of the world's peoples face on a daily basis. (p. 387)

The voices of the two PoC regarding the fluidity of their own positions in IEL engagement suggest learning moments and paths that can address these shifting forms of privilege and oppression associated with different contexts, while also examining the underlying structural factors of whiteness and privilege that prevail in north-south relationships (Shah, 2018; Curry-Stevens, 2017). Additionally, these moments raise the possibility for acknowledging how complex intersections and entanglement for PoC in White culture might even lead to their own forms of "color-blindness framing" (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) – what one of the PoC labelled her "invisible white privilege."

Most broadly, privilege and social location awareness provide steps towards understanding the systemic character of inequality and injustice in the racialized construction of the Global South (Drolet, 2013; McGehee, 2012; Andreotti, 2006). In this sense, the kind of "analytic transferability" potential to which Hodgetts and Stolte (2012) refer in their examination of case-based exemplars

resonates with our study. That is, our IEL program preparation was shaped to help see issues of poverty, inadequate housing, lack of mobility, etc., as issues associated with current in-country elite consolidation of colonial systems of poverty and racial discrimination – in other words, as political and structural factor issues (Mitchell, et al., 2012; Duncan, 2000) and not as cultural and character flaws of the people (Bonds & Inwood, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

These paths of course require closer attention around implementation, and though we cannot provide in-depth exploration here, we need to suggest some direction. Though we stress that IEL must more effectively incorporate concepts of race and privilege writ large, the systemic nature of oppression in the Global North and South, and participant positionality and agency both broadly and within team dynamics, such learning requires facilitators with significant abilities and commitment. Boylan (personal communication, December 20, 2019) calls this a key blind spot – the "elephant in the room." For example, in the case of the university that hosted this program, there is a lack of expertise available for instruction and facilitation that can effectively engage in critical race theory and anti-colonial, anti-racism, and whiteness pedagogies for both students and faculty. This has until recently meant calling on the work of the lone coordinator from the Centre for Student Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion on the campus – a position that though more common at Canadian universities as of late is seriously under-resourced and over-stretched regarding roles and responsibilities like this. And such expertise needs to be specialized in themes including decolonization and anti-racist pedagogies, unpacking internalized biases and reflection practices around privilege – and the discomfort in doing so. Furthermore, we need to instruct participants, and faculty, importantly, on the nature of social positioning as it relates to the broader context of race and power imbalances (Kishimoto, 2018), along with issues of ethnicity, racial prejudice, and systemic and institutional racism, and how these categories of experience manifest in IEL programs. In these north-south contexts, such preparation must include histories of colonization, racism, and discrimination relative to the country of destination.

We also see the importance of the partner organization in the South potentially stepping into some forms of anti-racism learning and reflection associated with their local NGO/voluntourism sector during the program in-country. The growth of the "engaged university" in Latin America, with the "Social Justice Model," and especially its unique "Social Responsibility Approach" (Appe, Rubaii, Lippez-De Castro, & Capobianco, 2017) suggest opportunities for north-south partnership and collaboration potential in this realm of IEL. This would help to position anti-racist pedagogies within the pre-departure context of students' everyday life and in the post-trip debriefing, helping them to compare the *situatedness* of race at home and abroad. These are difficult and complex issues, so it is vital to highlight the importance of the ability to work with them pedagogically, while also ensuring their treatment in all phases of IEL programming: pre-departure, in-country, and post-trip reintegration.

Concluding Thoughts

This study recognized the tension between the increasing presence of IEL in post-secondary institutions, and its lineage within the colonial and racialized construction of the north-south world. From that nexus, and in light of the increasing racial diversity of IEL participants in our work in El Salvador, we saw potential for enhancing IEL around the theme of race. Our case-study findings highlighted that White and PoC participants shared distinct racialized perspectives related to their

IEL. Though all participants claimed some sense of being welcomed and comfortable in El Salvador, we saw how a simple though deeply-felt remark catalyzed heightened recognition of race and privilege among all the participants. The heartfelt stories shared by some of the WoC in response and reflection on this incident were deeply moving for both the participants and the HFH-GV staff, and helped to disrupt what have often in the past been commonly normalized views and silence around race.

Though we consider that our case-study results align in important ways with service-learning beliefs that hold on-the-ground activism and confrontation with real-world issues as key to ensuring that theory and practice inform each other, we are not overly sanguine. That is, about the difficulties attached to such IEL enhancement aspirations and the courage and skills that it takes to create the processes for facilitating learning that could empathetically grapple with race and participation in IEL. This would include the ability and insight necessary for recognizing key moments and shifts in such programs, and drawing on them in ways that acknowledges that voices and experiences shared are not monolithic, that they be treated with sensitivity and care, and that though discomfort is awkward and difficult, it is a critical aspect of learning. At the same time, the bigger picture informs us of the gravity and need for such work, regardless of the difficulties. We aspire to the lofty belief that both the privileged and the oppressed gain from "collective solidarity" and "collective action" in movement towards global social justice and that education à la Paulo Freire is best positioned as a political act.

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