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Race and Participant Perceptions: A Case Study of Canadian International Service learning Students in El Salvador

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KENZIE PULSIFER

RACE AND PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF CANADIAN
INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING STUDENTS IN EL SALVADOR

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Abstract

International service learning – ISL after this, has grown in volume and interest across the post-secondary educational landscape in the last two decades in the ‘North’. In attendance with this growth, has been an increasing concern regarding its capacity to be an effective and progressive set of learning and engagement practices. Most broadly, are the concerns with the neo-colonial character and legacy associated with current ISL presence in the South – the content of participant values and beliefs – how they perceive and practice their roles in these experiences. This research investigates most specifically, a concern associated with these North-South encounters of the perpetuation of the ‘other’ and racialization issues associated with such global engagement. Critical race and post-colonial theory frame an exploration of a case study of 21 volunteers and their participation views relative to a partnership developed between Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador, their Canadian university, and the host-community. The results tell us that the white participants were less able to recognize their racialized presence than the participants of colour; the participants of colour were more able to see similarities with the host community; Habitat key informants note the importance of diversity, and though have little control over this, see its benefit for learning; and finally, there was a notable gendered component that arose in this inherently intersectional experience. The results suggest some appropriate processes associated with race and privilege themes, to help ISL incorporate critical global citizenship ideas more effectively.

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Introduction

International service learning (ISL) is a diverse set of experiential learning processes that has become increasingly popular over the years in post-secondary institutions, and it tends to involve members of the so-called Global North travelling to the Global South. International service learning combines community service and academic instruction in a setting outside the student's home country (Crabtree, 2008). These international engagements are referred to in many different ways including: "helping initiatives", volunteer tourism, voluntourism, study abroad, international internships, or global citizenship learning (Feagan & Boylan, 2016). In this research, I have chosen to refer to these programs as international service learning (ISL) as it captures the specific type of program and university-international non-profit partnership that my research will be addressing.

International service learning refers to organized trips to different countries taken by students (and usually with faculty or administrators of their university) where they work with local organizations to serve the host community and engage in an exchange in a culture that is distinct from their own (Grusky, 2000). These initiatives include activities such as building or fixing homes, schools or other public buildings, among a variety of other activities, along with a diversity of goals under the umbrella of global awareness, intercultural understanding and communication, (see: McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Grusky, 2000; Crabtree, 2008; Lough et al., 2014).

Although the increase in popularity of these types of international volunteer service engagements has mostly been within the last couple decades, there are some early forms of this kind of encounter including for example the US Peace Corps which was one of the first institutionalized organizations to send citizens to the "Third World" for aid and development

work back in 1961 (Vrasti, 2012). Since 1995, Canadian universities have expanded opportunities for students to travel, study, volunteer and work abroad in exchange for academic credit, particularly in countries in the so-called Global South (Heron, 2011). According to Heron (2011), the expansion of these types of trips within the university traces back to when the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) implemented a framework of action to go forward with the internationalization of post-secondary education in Canada. Due to the increasing interest by both universities and students in some form of international service learning, there is also a growing body of research on this topic, with a wide range of foci, some that praise these types of international engagements and others that are more critical (Feagan & Boylan, 2016).

The focus of this research is on race and particularly the racialized aspects of ISL. ISL is a fundamentally racialized practice. At one level, this is reflected in the fact that the majority of volunteer participants are from the North and white and the members of the host communities in the South are black or brown. (Bandyopadyay and Patil, 2017). At another level, the lineage of this kind global engagement is closely associated with centuries of colonization and the ‘othering’ narrative that supported the domination of those worlds (Bandyopadyay and Patil, 2017; Kothari, 2006b). Despite the racialized nature of ISL experiences, discussions of race are often a blind spot and left out of much of the literature on ISL (Lough & Carter-Black, 2015; Bandyopadyay and Patil, 2017). The main question that will be guiding this research is this: What role does race and privilege play in the perceptions and behaviours of Canadian university students who participate in ISL work in El Salvador? And a corollary objective following this, is to imagine what this research might then suggest for advancing the progressive aspirations of ISL. A qualitative approach will be used to collect information about the participants’

perceptions through the use of interviews and group discussions. Both postcolonial theory and critical race theory will be used to interpret and understand the findings of the research data in terms of race and these ISL experiences between members of the Global North and Global South. As a woman of colour, I am always drawn to looking at how race impacts different social situations which is why I am particularly interested in how the notions of race relate to these global engagements. In order to do this research, I have chosen to do a case study on the perceptions of Canadian students who take part in ISL trips to assist with the building of homes with Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador.

The following literature review will examine studies which seek to address the critiques of international service learning but also to provide a look at the potential that they can offer when done with thoughtful preparation (Grusky, 2000).

Literature Review

The following section will review the literature on the somewhat limited work that highlights on the role of race in these global engagements, as this is the focus of this research. Then I will discuss some of the research pertaining to privilege and how it plays into participants' behaviours. Following this, the idea of global citizenship through ISL and some of the potential benefits of ISL when done effectively will be discussed, as a departure point from which to conduct my research effort. Lastly, will be a brief overview of Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador, the international non-profit organization which plays the partnership role with the university with whom I am conducting my research.

The racialized aspects of international service learning

I begin by examining the key critiques in ISL, and ones that are at the center of the case study research question. It is important for us to recognize that there is a ‘racialized’ aspect to ISL, one that starts with the fact that the majority of volunteers from the Global North are white and the recipients of their volunteering in the Global South are mostly black or brown. At a base level, it can be said that race is rarely a conscious consideration in such participation, to the point where Bandyopadhyay and Patil (2017, p. 645) in their study of the racialized and gendered politics of volunteer tourism, stated that “talking about race in volunteer tourism is like breaking a taboo”. These authors sought to open a new discussion to acknowledge that both race and gender play a large role in these engagements and therefore they need to be a more conscious part of the conversation when analyzing ISL. And in this vein, an even more elemental critique using a postcolonial theoretical lens, emphasizes the importance of recognizing how colonial and imperial mechanisms of oppression can be perpetuated through this kind of learning experience (Bandyopadhyay and Patil, 2017).

A closely associated concern in ISL as it relates to the racialization theme is, the ‘white saviour complex’. The “white saviour complex”¹ is a term that was coined by Nigerian-American Teju Cole (2012) and refers to the idea that white people from the Global North often participate either consciously or unconsciously with a belief system that they know more than those in the Global South. And this mindset guides their beliefs/perceptions about the superiority of the values and contributions that they bring to these countries under the guise of providing ‘help’. This attitude has deep roots in colonialism where there was an emphasis on notions of

¹ The full term coined by Teju Cole was the “white saviour industrial complex”. In the term “white saviour industrial complex”, Cole (2012) uses the word industrial to refer to organizations such as Invisible Children, which often ignore the agency of people in the Global South and instead perpetuate the idea that they require a white savior to come in and help.

‘progress and development’ positioning Europeans as the ‘educators’ and the *racialized* others imagined as children who need to be taught and controlled (Said, 1979; Lough & Carter-Black, 2015). This concept emphasizes the view that continues to be perpetuated within Global North-South relations today, which portrays images of ‘sad’ and ‘helpless’ black or brown children who need saving by Northerners (Kothari, 2006b). In this vein, Sardar (as cited in Pease, 2010, p. 42), notes that, “the greatest power of the West is not economic or technological supremacy, rather it is the power to define what progress looks like and ultimately what it means to be human”. However, these beliefs are not only perpetuated by Northerners, they can also be perpetuated by members of the host communities in the South in what Ngugi (1986) refers to as ‘colonization of the mind’ where whiteness is associated with high cultural values and the North with progress. For example, in research on development work in Kenya by Lough and Carter-Black (2015), it was found that black community members held preference for white volunteers because they believed that they 1) had more access to resources, 2) were more knowledgeable and 3) were more trustworthy – whereas it was difficult for black volunteers to receive the same degree of respect from community members. They found that regardless of a volunteer’s level of skills and ability, “there appears to be an internalized and inter-generationally embedded view within the black Kenyan culture that white opinion and actions are elevated” (Lough & Carter-Black, 2015, p. 214). This carry-over from centuries of colonial creation of the ‘other’ has significance for understanding ISL in its current forms, and in this research effort. There is limited research that looks at what these critiques focused on privilege and race might mean for how participants perceive themselves, those in the host community that they are visiting, and how this impacts their ‘contributions’ and presence in these experiences.

Of course, there is some complexity and context and questions that arise with this

critique. For example, what happens when the groups who take part in ISL are of diverse racial backgrounds? How does that fit into the concept of the white saviour complex? Does it then just become the “Northern saviour complex”? Given what Pease (2010), states regarding how Northern culture is primarily white, which describes a prevailing set of axioms and beliefs that are historically tied to the larger story of white privilege, how then might we recognize the experiences and opinions of Indigenous peoples and people of colour who have grown up in the Global North and who are increasingly engaging in these kinds of international experiences? Representation matters, and as ISL continues to gain popularity it is necessary that all voices be heard and represented, and seen to be part of this changing context of the North – at least in Canada. For my specific case studies, the notion of the Global North as white overlooks a significant population of Indigenous and participants who are people of colour and whose presence in ISL would be very valuable to include in this area.

Participation and privilege

Examining ISL programs requires us to address the existence of *privilege* that often permeates such learning experiences. Bailey (1998) defines privilege as unearned advantages which are given systematically to members of the dominant group and which are usually not visible or recognized as such, by those who have them. Sidanius and Pratto (1999, p. 31-32) describe the main benefits of privilege as the “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”. There are many privileges that those with the ability to take part in international service

work have, starting with simply the ability to be able to spend time and money to volunteer in another country. Once in the host country, it is also the case that the international partner will try their best to make sure that volunteers also have the privilege of access to clean water, adequate living conditions, nutritious food, and transportation along with many others, privileges that often are not available to the host-communities with whom the participants are working.

In research by Schwarz (2015) for example, it was found that some participants who engaged in short term volunteer work in Sub-Saharan Africa were aware of their privileges, and felt discomfort with their ability to maintain their privileges or that these were accommodated while abroad. One example that a student shared was the discrepancy in the accommodations that were provided to the participants (in gated suburban communities) where they were hosted by white and affluent South African families, in comparison to the shanty homes of the black South Africans in the villages where they were volunteering (Schwarz, 2015). This could suggest that these students are not encouraged to gain knowledge about where they will be going to volunteer nor to think critically about their privilege and positionality in relation to the host communities in terms of privilege before engaging in these trips. These feelings of discomfort could also be in part due to the invisibility of privilege for them, as many volunteers might not be aware of the unearned advantages that come with their position as members of the Global North, that is until it is made clear from their experiences volunteering in conditions of extreme poverty (Pease, 2010). In effect, although, volunteers might have good, altruistic intentions, they are not participating in a way that promotes social justice if they are not recognizing the systemic inequalities that are present which exacerbate the oppression of poor communities, and how they are complicit in that global system (Kothari, 2006b).

Another common feature or perception associated with unacknowledged participant privilege raised in the ISL literature is that the volunteers perceive the host community members to be ‘poor but happy’ (see variously Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011; McGehee, 2012). In research done by Simpson (2004), she found that many international volunteers reported the members of the host communities in the South as being ‘grateful and happy’ despite having so little. This includes remarks on water access, technologies of various sorts, transportation, food diversity, education access, etc. Simpson (2004), argues that these assumptions trivialize poverty and allow material inequality to be overlooked and justified because those who are impacted by it ‘do not mind’. For example, in a study of six Canadian participants who took part in volunteer work in Sub-Saharan Africa, it was found that in order to reduce feelings of discomfort with exposure to material inequity, they relied on two defensive strategies: 1) seeing poverty as simply a cultural difference, and 2) framing African people as ‘poor but happy’ (Schwarz, 2015). Without engaging participants to think critically about perceptions such as these, they may not be willing to see that poverty is not limited to these ‘distant’ Southern countries but also prevalent in their own countries while also continuing to perpetuate the idea of the ‘Other’. This does not encourage volunteers to think critically about how and why countries in the Global South have come to be so impoverished and the fact that the North continues to benefit from the exploitation of poorer countries (Pease, 2010).

In addition, as Tiessen (2012) points out in her work on global citizenship education abroad, the demand for opportunities to learn and volunteer abroad is much greater than the capacity for colleges and universities to offer programs at a reasonable price. This by extension means that only those students who have the means (or privilege) to fund the trip are given the opportunity to participate in these types of global engagements – usually white and middle-class.

The main obstacle that prevents larger numbers of interested students from participating in these trips is the cost.² Having access to subsidies available at more institutions could likely help to provide opportunities for more diverse participants in terms of both class status and racial backgrounds. This would also help to provide a more accurate representation of Canadians who visit countries in the Global South, being that we are a more culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse country than extant participation in such ISL would suggest.

Global citizenship through international service learning

As a corollary of concerns about ISL and its unacknowledged racial character, the ideas and concept of global citizenship can benefit from building into their aspirations, the importance of incorporating the elemental race concerns that accompany ISL. The term global citizen is often used in the literature on ISL to refer to what someone can or will become through their participation in international service experiences. However, though it is still not always clear how to define the objective and the character of the processes for achieving this kind of citizenship, Oxfam defines a global citizen as “someone who is aware of and understands the wider world - and their place in it. They take an active role in their community, and work with others to make our planet more equal, fair and sustainable” (Oxfam, 2018, p. 1). This definition provides some idea of what ISL participants might achieve through their participation in international volunteer or work initiatives. However, despite strong literature on this concept, it is also important to note that for some, it is contentious and ideologically constructed in relation

² Even though for instance, some institutions such as Dalhousie University, have started to offer monetary support for students who cannot pay the entire cost of the volunteer abroad program (Tiessen, 2012). Similarly, Wilfrid Laurier University also offers cost coverage of \$6000 for students to participate in international internships in Ghana over a 100-day period, working with Ghanaian governmental and nongovernmental organizations (WLU, 2018). It is also often the case that people of colour generally have less access to resources and could be a reason for their lower rates of participation in ISL.

to particular ideas about humanity and national identity (Matthews, 2013). For example, global citizenship is often defined by those in the Global North, and therefore emerges from a worldview that can be biased in its application to other cultures or communities. To counter this kind of bias, Matthews (2013, p. 108) believes one could package such learning such so that “good” global citizenship “might be concerned with producing opportunities for dialogue across difference” as well as to learn and be aware of our own limits of the self and the Other.³

Andreotti (2006) offers two types of global citizenship: soft global citizenship and critical global citizenship. Soft global citizenship sees issues such as the lack of ‘development’, resources and education as being caused by poverty and helplessness and presents universalism as the basic principle for change (Andreotti, 2006). In other words, soft global citizenship does not recognize the complex structures, systems and power relations often involved in global engagement. Andreotti (2006, p.48) problematizes universalism in ISL as a “non-negotiable vision of how everyone should live, what everyone should want or should be”. In soft global citizenship, universalism is held as the most effective way to provide ‘help’ in these international engagements. And of course, this is contentious, as it promotes the idea that everyone should want to or should live in the same way. This author’s ‘critical global citizenship’ on the other hand, holds that injustice and inequality are the result of complex structures and systems which maintain the exploitation and disempowerment of countries in the Global South. And, Andreotti (2006) believes that this form of global citizenship will compel participants to critically engage with global issues and address these complex power relations. Through the use of critical global engagement, ISL programs can encourage participants to not simply participate in these trips but

³ In this paper, ‘Other’ or ‘Othering’ refer to Edward Said’s (1979) concept which refers to the artificial and constructed binary of the East and West (or North and South), which positioned non-European peoples as the subordinate ‘Other’, a concept that is in some ways at the center of this research.

to fully engage with both the positive and negative outcomes that can arise from their participation – and the learning inherent in doing so. Global citizenship, if addressed as a critical concept, could help to bridge the gap between the idea of global citizenship and its practice.⁴

Potentials of International Service Learning

Although it is important to be cautious and critical of the range of issues that can arise through ISL, it is also important to be open to figuring out ways in which these critiques can be combatted and/or approached. For example, Marullo and Edwards (2000), suggest that for service-learning to be successful we must take a social justice approach and they believe that university-community engagements afford us invaluable opportunities for this kind of work. They go on to suggest that these experiences can lead to 1) student service volunteers becoming social justice activists and 2) transforming institutions of higher education into vehicles of social transformation (Marullo & Edwards, 2000). Coghlan and Gooch (2011), suggest transformative learning, in which emphasis is placed on students sharing their experience with others through discussion and self-reflections, as a way to promote critical thinking around the practice and processes of ISL.

Another point that is critical to effective learning and relationship-development in these types of global engagements is good facilitation of theoretical and experiential knowledge and learning processes throughout ISL. As Grusky (2000, p. 861) puts it so well, “the real power and potential of ISL is...where experience meets study, critical analysis, and reflection”. Feagan and Boylan (2016) in a similar fashion, espouse more thorough preparation for such endeavors and experiences, emphasizing pre, during and post-trip readings, reflections, and relationship

⁴ Cameron (2013) suggests a parallel way of thinking about global citizenship, drawing on the terms ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ citizenship which in our reading, is in close alignment with ‘soft’ and ‘critical’ global citizenship.

building exercises.⁵

As part of the broader hopes, it is also important to recognize the role of the members of the host communities as central to decision making regarding alignment of the volunteer programs with their expressed community needs. As Sweatman and Tirone (2010) suggest, international community experiences are more likely to be mutually beneficial to the local host and volunteers from the North, and less likely to consciously or unconsciously push neo-colonial beliefs when the experiences are developed in unison with the host community members, as opposed to the long-fraught problems associated with the imposition of ‘Northern’ notions of progress. In order to find out the needs of members of the host communities, this will require the creation of and maintenance of trusting relationships, which we should strive for in international service work. These international experiences can lead to better international understanding and personal connections with people of different cultural, political and economic backgrounds when conducted effectively (Feagan & Boylan, 2016). However, it takes time for the relationships between the sending organizations and the project leader in the community to develop, hence the importance of continuity in order to create the moral economy of trust.

Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador

The international volunteer organization that is the coordinating partner in this research is Habitat for Humanity in their *Global Village* status in El Salvador. Habitat for Humanity has been providing housing ‘solutions’ in El Salvador since 1992 (HFH-GV, 2018). In El Salvador,

⁵ The participants involved in the May trip to El Salvador with Habitat for Humanity were provided numerous readings and journal articles pre-trip to prepare them for their ISL experience and to provide some historical information about El Salvador. Some of the sources that were provided to the participants included: Feagan & Boylan (2016), Stoddart & Rogerson (2004), Tiessen & Epprecht (2012), Schwarz (2015), Bandyopadhyay & Patil (2017), Palacios (2010) and Grusky (2000).

one third of the population lives in inadequate housing, including a range of different housing conditions such as issues of overcrowding and homelessness (HFH-GV, 2018). Habitat for Humanity Global Village seeks to address the material needs of Salvadorans by offering financial and housing support services, including completing home improvements and constructing new homes (HFH-GV, 2018). As the name suggests, the aim of these volunteer experiences is to create a *global village* through the connections and relationships formed between participants and members of the host communities where the work occurs. The Salvadoran program works with 1500 international and 2500 local volunteers each year (HFH-GV, 2018). El Salvador, like many countries in Latin America, has housing issues which are directly associated with the country's history of colonialism and structural poverty, related to civil war and violence, and natural disasters among other concerns (Duncan, n.d.)

International volunteers who work with Habitat for Humanity not only take part in helping with the construction of a home for a local family but also donate a significant amount of money which is given to the Salvadoran Habitat affiliate (Feagan & Boylan, 2016). Although the monetary donation is likely an important aspect regarding alleviating housing issues in these communities, the very participation of volunteers on the home-build allows potentially for other positive outcomes – some of these directly related to ISL aspirations. In this case for instance, it aspires to create closer cultural contact between the student participants, family members and other host community members during the build-event which would not otherwise be possible (Feagan & Boylan, 2016). Another important point that Feagan and Boylan (2016), address is that there are local masons present at all times who supervise the work of the volunteers and who are trained in providing guidance and support to the student volunteers, most of whom often have little to no experience in construction. This dynamic helps to address a concern that is often

brought up in the literature, which is that inexperienced volunteers from the North go to countries in the South being seen as (or viewing themselves as) experts simply because of their perceived or real privileges (see Palacios, 2010).

Theoretical Approach/Framing

The topic of ISL is an important area of study because of the opportunity to create a more socially and environmentally just world through the connections made between participants and the communities with whom they engage. It is also important because the increasing popularity of these types of global engagement initiatives compels organizers and educators involved to create conditions for fostering cultural competence and creating a positive and reciprocal exchanges of knowledge between the volunteers and members of the host communities. By reciprocal, I mean an exchange of knowledge in which participants are willing and open to ways that they can learn from the culture and people that they are visiting, and move beyond the still-too-common set of beliefs that volunteer participants are teaching people in the South how to live 'better'. Through the use of critical global citizenship education approaches to ISL, participants can take more informed, responsible and ethical actions and attitudes as participants in these initiatives (Andreotti, 2006). This can also help to ameliorate issues that can arise in ISL work associated with the white saviour complex which perpetuates an infantilization perspective of the Global South.

I chose a theoretical framework that would help me to analyze the field of ISL, especially in terms of its often-racialized character. Although there has been much research focusing on the topic of ISL generally in the last two decades, there is limited research on the racialization that is in some ways inherent to this kind of engagement. And most specific to this case, particularly,

research which allows us to deconstruct and discern the experiences of people of colour within these more diverse participant groupings. This research can examine first whether there is understanding or acknowledgement at some level of the racial character of this kind of international learning, and associated with this, whether the race of participants is a significant indicator in how they experience and/or perceive these types of volunteer trips. The theories I have chosen to frame this research are critical race theory and postcolonial theory.

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged in the mid-1970s after the realization that the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s had receded and that many of the gains made during that time were being diminished (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). The groundbreaking works of legal scholars Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman were the beginning of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Although it began with a focus on law and the way race impacts how people are treated within the legal system, CRT now has a presence in the disciplines of education, psychology, political science, cultural studies, and philosophy (Crenshaw, 2011). CRT is not so much one theory but a set of theories and its origin is one of both scholarship and activism (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018). The set of theories that make up CRT rely on intersectionality, a critique of liberalism, the use of critical social science, a combination of structural and post-structural analysis, the denial of neutrality in scholarship and the incorporation of storytelling or ‘counter-narratives,’ to analyze and challenge dominant discourses (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Intersectionality was introduced as a theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and it denotes the various way in which social categorizations such as race, gender, class and sexuality intersect or overlap to impact one’s life experiences and circumstances (Crenshaw, 1991). Further intersectionality is,

“a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. . . when it comes to social inequality people’s lives and the

organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 11).

Critical race theory builds on both the previous movements of critical legal studies and radical feminism. CRT borrows the idea of “legal indeterminacy”, which is the idea that each legal case does not have one correct outcome. From feminism, it builds on the insights about connections between power and the construction of social roles (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Critical race theory most broadly looks at how power structures of white supremacy and white privilege perpetuate the marginalization of people of colour (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This theory provides a helpful lens when examining ISL because these organized learning experiences tend to involve mostly white participants from the North going to the South to “help” mostly brown and black people. We need to recognize that ISL itself emerges from inherent racial construction of the North-South world. Critical race theory will allow me to unpack the types of discourse used by volunteers regarding their perspectives on the host country and their roles there. Given the increasing numbers of non-white participants, or participants of colour in these case studies, this research should be able to provide some nuance to the prevailing understanding of critical race theory as it applies to these specific experiences.

In addition to critical race theory, I have chosen to draw on postcolonial theory because it highlights the legacy of colonial and imperial mechanisms of oppression which are based on beliefs in the superiority of Western cultures (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017). Postcolonial theory is the body of work which focuses on the issues that have been caused by colonialism and its lasting effects (Pease, 2010). Edward Said and Frantz Fanon are two of the original and most notable postcolonial theorists. In Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), he describes the concept of Orientalism as “a body of ideas, beliefs, clichés, or learnings about the East” (Said, 2003, p.

205). Said then goes on to address how Orientalism creates a divide between what he refers to as the Orient and the West and how the process of ‘othering’ supports and upholds unequal power relations throughout the world (Said, 2003). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon looks at the colonized world from the viewpoint of the colonized. Through his research as a psychiatrist he addresses how colonialism leads to a number of mental health issues including depression and anxiety, importantly in both the colonist and the colonized (Fanon, 1991). The work of these authors and others have shaped postcolonial theory and how it can be applied to better understand the relationships between countries of the Global North and Global South – and in my case, how it might apply to the relationships between the Northern Canadian participants and the host communities in the ‘South’ – El Salvador.

Postcolonial critiques challenge the dominant discourse surrounding this type of volunteer work, where terms like “underdeveloped” and “the Third World” disregard the heterogeneity of people and countries and deny or ignore the social construction and complicity of the North in their creation (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017). Another important aspect of postcolonial theory is that it recognizes the need for making heard the voices of all marginalized people who have historically been silenced and made to be seen as Other (Khan et al., 2007). A postcolonial approach can help to identify how deep-rooted Western/Orientalist views can shape the perceptions of the participants in volunteer tourism and in ISL experiences, which in turn can impact their behaviours in the host country – and what they ‘see’. Postcolonial theory provides an approach that considers how ISL is situated within, and potentially reproduces, unequal power relations and a devaluing of the host country’s knowledge/culture (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017; Kothari, 2006).

Critical race theory and postcolonial theory are combined to provide a helpful conceptual framework for critically analyzing ISL. Both theories offer an approach that acknowledges the importance of recognizing how power relations of whiteness and white privilege continue to prevail in society and shape how organizations perpetuate problematic representations and treatment of members of the Global South through these engagements. Both theories can inform sending and receiving organizations regarding how they structure their initiatives and programs such that communities in the South are not perceived as simply classrooms, or as peoples who are dependent upon the help of those coming from the North. Specific to this research, it is also important that volunteers learn about the complex socio-economic and political issues in their ISL context so that they are aware of the cause of inequalities particularly in the racialized host communities that they visit (McGehee, 2012).

Methodology

Research Question

To iterate, the research question that will be guiding my information collection and analysis is this: What role does race play in the perceptions and behaviours of Canadian university students who participate in ISL work in El Salvador? And a corollary subset to this objective is to then examine ISL for how we might enhance on its ability or methods so as to incorporate the results of this work on race. My research will use a qualitative approach to collect information from and learn more about the participants' perceptions, through the use of interviews and group discussions.

Research Design

For my research, I will use several different qualitative research methods including one-on-one interviews, group discussions and reflective journaling. According to Mason (2002) “qualitative research is characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible, data-driven and context-sensitive (p.24)” I will use qualitative research methods in order to obtain information on the thoughts and feelings of participants who take part in these types of engagements. I believe interviewees should have freedom and control of the interview situation (Mason, 2002). I would likely not be able to receive the same kind of reflective and detailed responses through a quantitative research approach. It is also a useful approach to my research because I will be discussing topics including race and privilege which can be quite uncomfortable for some participants to discuss, and effective interviews can ameliorate some of that potential awkwardness or discomfort. By conducting qualitative interviews, I aim to allow participants to critically reflect on their responses as well as ask any questions they might have of myself, the researcher.

During the two ISL experiences in El Salvador, my position will be to work as a participant-observer by engaging as a volunteer with Habitat for Humanity as well as conducting my research. Barbara Kawulich (2005) refers to participant-observation as the process in which researchers are able to learn about the activities of the people under study in a natural setting by observing and participating in those activities, i.e. learning through exposure.

Participants

To build on the above, for my research, I will include data from two groups of participants. The first group of participants in this study will include Canadian students who attend Wilfrid Laurier University and who will take part in a field-course to El Salvador with Habitat for

Humanity. The second group of participants, who will be referred to as key informants, includes Salvadoran Habitat for Humanity affiliates who work as both program coordinators and English translators in El Salvador. The key informants will be asked to voluntarily participate in individual interviews and facilitated group discussions. The participants will be of various ages, genders and racialized identities. Student participants will be asked to participate in person and by email prior to the trip, and Habitat partners will be contacted by email and in person in El Salvador. Only those participants who express interest in taking part in the research will be interviewed.

Interviews

To collect information for the individual interviews, I will conduct qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviewing “is usually intended to refer to in-depth, semi-structured or loosely structured forms of interviewing” (Mason, 2002, p. 62). The interviews will follow an interview guide but participants will be encouraged or allowed to feel open and able to elaborate on anything they want and can add or enhance their thoughts on what might stand out to them during the trip. The interviews will be flexible around the participants’ schedules while in-country. That is, I will conduct the interviews whenever the participants have free time to sit down and meet during the trip, with some possibility of doing interviews post-trip if this is appropriate, and the participants agree. The interviews will be recorded, with participants’ consent using a handheld audio recorder. I will take detailed notes during each interview. The interviews will likely be between 30 minutes to an hour in length. The interviews will be similarly structured for the Canadian students and for the Habitat partners who will be interviewed in El Salvador, though somewhat different questions will be asked of the two participant groups.

Focus Groups

During our time in El Salvador the participants will be encouraged to attend group discussions multiple times throughout the trips. The topics that will be covered include ones on privilege, student's goals, race and gender, and general reflections on working with Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador among others. Each discussion will likely be about 30 to 45 minutes in total though this will depend on the circumstances of course. The discussions will be recorded on a handheld audio recorder with the consent of all participants.

I have chosen to include data from the group discussions that will take place because it is another data collection opportunity which provides a different forum where participants can collectively assemble and be with others to discuss this ISL experience. This means, not only to have them thinking critically but also offering them a chance to learn from one another and share their experiences with one another. The discussions will offer a chance for students to interact with one another in a relaxed atmosphere that will encourage participants to be critically engaged in what they will be doing and learning while in El Salvador. Although it is possible that the data collected through the focus groups may not be as in-depth as the individual interviews, the discussions will provide helpful insight into some of the themes that might come up for many of the students, and a character of response related to group-learning. They will also provide a chance for participants to exchange stories and experiences that might help to foster their cultural competence.

Journaling

Lastly, journaling is the third form of data collection that will be used in this research. The journaling will help to provide context for findings. The journal will be used to take notes on

any observations that I notice throughout the research process, before, after and during my time in El Salvador. For example, this could include, how participants interact with members of the host community, how participants interacted with one another, any feelings that come up or any challenges that are faced. Reflective journals in research can be used to engage with the notion of creating transparency in the research process and can have concrete impacts on the research design (Ortlipp, 2008). Journaling will provide me with a place to put down any thoughts and observations that I have throughout the research process as well as helping me to position myself within my research.

The journal will also provide a place for me to self-reflect on my own experience and perspectives before, during and after taking part in the ISL trips to El Salvador. Self-reflection will be a very important aspect of my research because I am not only a researcher but also a volunteer who is participating alongside the participants that will be interviewed and with whom I will share in the discussion circles. This position of 'self-reflexivity' in journaling will allow me to acknowledge and be cognizant of the limitations in my ability to grasp and understand a much different reality than my own (Saukko, 2003). According to Saukko (2003) self-reflexivity should be done critically as a way to allow for different interpretations of other people's realities as well as our own. However, if self-reflexivity is done without critical interrogation, "it may end up lending emotional or existential credibility to [the researchers] preconceptions" (Saukko, 2003, p. 64). Through journaling I will be able to acknowledge and reflect on how my own position shapes how I understand and interpret the information collected through the interviews and group discussions. Through my self-reflection I can better understand perhaps how my life experiences shape my perceptions and beliefs relative to those of the student participants and the key informants who work for Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador. As Andreotti (2006, p.49)

suggests, this is important, as she talks about reflexivity in research in terms of critical literacy, which is

“...based on the strategic assumption that all knowledge is partial and incomplete, constructed in our contexts, cultures and experiences. Therefore, we lack the knowledge constructed in other contexts, cultures and experiences . . . we need to engage with our own and other perspectives to learn and transform our views, identities and relationships - to think otherwise.”

My own worldview will impact/affect what I observe and how I understand the findings of my research. As a Black woman who has been raised in a middle-class family in Canada, my research will be shaped by my experiences as a person of colour and as a woman. I also know that my views will be shaped by my cultural background which is different than the cultural background of the host community in El Salvador. This is especially important because I will be interviewing people from different racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural backgrounds from my own. It is therefore important for me to acknowledge my own limitations when it comes to understanding and interpreting the perspectives of the participant's in my research.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data from the qualitative interviews and focus groups, I will first complete the transcriptions of the interviews. After completing the transcriptions and throughout the rest of my data analysis I will look for themes or patterns that come up in the interviews. I also aim to include or examine for what seems to be missing or goes unsaid during the interviews. This is particularly important to my research because I will be looking at race and privilege and how it shapes the participants experiences, and how they see these variables in their own perceptions and observations – or not. Since most of the participants who will take part in this international engagement will likely be white females it is possible that they will not recognize their privilege

and positionality in relation to others who take part in the trip or to the members of the host community (Pease, 2010). Through the analysis of my data I will make connections and/or comparisons between the experiences of white participants and participants of colour.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

There are several limitations with having chosen a qualitative research approach. One limitation has to do with the generalizability of my findings. Since this research is a case study of a specific group of students who have participated in a global engagement with Habitat for Humanity, it is not necessarily applicable to all ISL trips. However, it is important to have participants engaging critically in these experiences and I believe this research will add to the body of research in this area. At some level, what is found will have resonance and potential applicability to future ISL processes and practices.

In order to do my research, I completed a Research Ethics Board – REB, application in order to conduct the interviews and take part in the discussion in-country. All participants, who agree to take part, will sign an informed consent form before beginning their interviews. The data collected from the interviews and group discussions will be kept confidential and the participants names will be changed in the final paper. Apart from my REB application there are a couple of other ethical considerations that I will also keep in mind during my research.

One consideration will be that although the participants will be asked to keep the group discussions confidential, I will have to ensure they understand that this cannot be fully guaranteed as it is in a group setting. Due to the possibility of students' personal experiences being shared there is still a potential risk. However, the risk will be diminished or can be minimized if I am able to encourage the students to share their thoughts without judgement, and to ask that they keep these discussions confidential – even though this cannot be guaranteed.

Another consideration is that of the Habitat for Humanity affiliates who participate in individual interviews. Although the questions that will be asked within the interview are not associated with the organization, there could still be minor repercussions or perhaps some level of reluctance/hesitancy due to the key informants speaking about the organization for which they work. To ensure that the participants remain anonymous, the names of all participants will be changed in the final written document. Participants will also be informed before the interviews that they do not have to answer any questions that they do not wish to answer in case there are some questions that they do not feel comfortable addressing.

Results

The following section summarizes the findings of the research collected from the interviews that were conducted during the two ISL trips to El Salvador in February and May 2018. This section will include: a description of the ISL experiences to El Salvador with Habitat for Humanity, a description of the data collection process, and the key findings that emerged from this research. The four main findings that will be discussed fall under some categories that emerged with careful reading of the information collected during the trips. These include: 1) participant perceptions of ‘self’ in terms of race, 2) the invisibility of whiteness in participant perceptions, 3) perception of race from the perspective of Habitat for Humanity affiliates in El Salvador and 4) the impact of gender.

In terms of demographics, both of the trips included predominantly female volunteers, only three of the 33 total volunteers were male, one of them being the research supervisor and professor who was therefore not interviewed for the study. As is also common in ISL from Northern countries, the majority of the participants who took part in these trips identified as white, 21 of the 33 participants. Even though the majority of the participants were white, the

groups were still quite diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. The participants who identified as people of colour included several different racial and ethnic backgrounds including: East Asian, South Asian, Indigenous, Black, Biracial and Latin American.

The trip to El Salvador in February 2018 included a home build in the department/region of La Unión in the village of Yucuaiquín, while the group spent evenings in the city of San Miguel.⁶ While in San Miguel the students stayed in a hotel and were roomed in pairs. The students had breakfast and dinner served in a dining area at the hotel. The breakfast was served in a buffet-style and the food that was served was traditional Salvadoran foods such as: plantain, beans, papaya and tortillas. At dinner time the students were served by a server in the dining area at the hotel. The dinner meals usually also included common Salvadoran foods like: salad, rice, vegetables, chicken, beef, and beans. The hotel had a pool which the volunteers could use in their free time. There was also a bar and restaurant which was attached to the hotel that they could go to. The weather in San Miguel at the time that students were there was between 30 to 40 degrees Celsius. This was considered very warm by the Canadian participants and there was lots of discussion around the heat.

During this trip, five days were spent on the build-site, with a half day at the end of the week for celebration followed by two days of rest and relaxation (R&R) on the last two days. The build days started at 8:00am with an hour for lunch at noon. Break times were encouraged whenever students needed as the students worked on the home-build during the peak hours of heat. On the last full build-day all of the volunteers were able to visit the town plaza and see where the future homeowner worked and the Cathedral in the town. At the last build day on Friday the volunteers had a half day to build and the other half of the day was for the goodbye

⁶ For more information on the process of home selection for HFH home recipients, see HFH-GV (2018) page 38.

celebration which HFH holds for all teams who build in the country. The goodbye celebration was at the HFH office in San Miguel and involved a lunch and speeches from the families. The celebration included HFH translators and coordinators and the team leads from the team from Wilfrid Laurier University, along with another team from Guelph University. The celebration had music and lots of food and drinks. The volunteers had a chance to talk to the families, play games with the children of the homeowners, and say their goodbyes. Then everyone had lunch and it finished with the speeches and all of the volunteers received a certificate from the Habitat for Humanity affiliates in El Salvador as a thank you for their work. The celebration was emotional for many of the volunteers and the families who they had spent the past week working with.

The longer trip in May, developed as a senior-level field-course, included two home-builds. The first week was spent in a town called Suchitoto, with the home-build location in El Paisnal. While in Suchitoto, participants stayed at the Centro Arte para la Paz (Art Center for Peace) which is an art center that includes art, music, dance classes as well as other activities. This center was founded by Sister Peggy O'Neill - a woman who has spent 30 years in El Salvador. She created the center as a place of healing following the civil war in El Salvador. The art center also had a small museum, gallery and a cafe. Volunteers were served their breakfast and dinner in the dining area of the center which included common Salvadoran foods such as: rice, vegetables and pupusas. On the Thursday night the volunteers took part in a painting class with local art students from Suchitoto, and the following evening the participants also took part in an evening of performances by some of the music students and instructors from the art center. The art center was also located very close to the town plaza in Suchitoto so the volunteers were able to walk into the town in their free time as well.

The second week was spent in the capital city of San Salvador, with the home-build within the City itself. The students stayed in a small eco-hotel while in San Salvador. During this 2nd trip, participants took part in building for four days each week, again with a half day for celebration with the host community at the end of each week as well as one day each week for activities related to Salvadoran politics and culture.

Both of the trips were similar in terms of the home building portion component, however, due to the lengthier time and the additional experiences associated with the 2nd trip, the May field-course included more events associated with experiential learning regarding specific historical, cultural and economic facets of El Salvador. These additional events included: visiting museums, a cooking class, day trips to the site of a civil war massacre, a hike of the Guazapa volcano as a site once used by the ‘rebels’ during the civil war, as well as a couple of evenings where experts in Salvadoran histories and economics shared their knowledge. It is important to note that, the second trip activities provided a deeper engagement possibility, meaning that the two trips were distinct enough that the responses to the interview questions by participants in the 2nd trip, likely reflected this deeper learning experience. See Figure 1: El Salvador and the build-site regions of San Salvador, Cuzcatlan (Suchitoto) and San Miguel which highlights the three locations in El Salvador where the ISL work took place.



Figure 1 El Salvador and the build-site regions of San Salvador, Cuzcatlan (Suchitoto) and San Miguel. Source: <http://www.mapsopensource.com/el-salvador-map.html>

There were two ISL groups that were engaged with for the purpose of this research. All of the participants in both trips were either students or faculty at Wilfrid Laurier University. The first trip took place during the winter ‘reading week’ period in February 2018. The trip was 10 days long and there was a total of 18 volunteers: that is, 16 student participants, one student researcher (the author) and one professor. The second trip took place in May 2018 and was 16 days long. The May trip had a total of 14 participants, 12 students, one student researcher – the author of this research, and two professors. There was a total of 33 participants in the two trips and a total of 21 of those participants took part in the research interviews. The majority of the participants, with the exception of a few, took part in the group discussions which took place during the evenings of both trips. Additionally, four Habitat for Humanity translators and coordinators were interviewed as well during these two trips.

Before taking part in the first trip with Habitat for Humanity in February I did not know any of the participants except for one graduate participant. All of the other participants were

undergraduates at the levels between first to fourth year whom I only met briefly at pre-departure meetings before participating in the trip. During the second trip in May, though I did not know any of the students personally, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with them in somewhat more formalized pre-departure educational meetings, of which there were three. Throughout both trips I was also able to make connections with the participants as I was a participant, observer and researcher. My role as a participant-observer offered me the opportunity to form connections with those who I interviewed and I believe made the interview process feel more open and less structured. As a participant-observer I took part in all of the same activities as the other volunteers on the trip including helping to build the homes, visiting museums and any other additional activities that were involved in the trips. I was able to form relationships with many of the participants on the trip by being involved in all of the day-to-day activities and spending the majority of our time together. The relationships and connections I made with the participants helped to create a greater level of trust between the participants and myself which might not have been present if I were to interview the participants without having been involved in the home-build and other activities throughout the trip. Only the participants who had expressed interest in participating were interviewed, however this included most of the participants on the trip.⁷

The majority of the individual interviews took place during the trip, with the exception of nine interviews which took place just after the trip. The majority of the interviews that took place in El Salvador, were conducted on the work site and the rest were done at the hotel that we

⁷ Prior to the trip students were provided readings from their professor on themes related to El Salvador to provide them with some context of the history and politics of the country and they were required to do a group presentation on a chosen theme before the trip. This provided students' with some knowledge on the housing issues, history of colonization and information on the 12 year civil war that occurred in El Salvador.

stayed at. This allowed for participants to provide their perspectives on their experiences as they were experiencing it. The nine interviews that were conducted post-trip all took place within one week of returning to Canada in order to receive the most accurate sentiments from participants since they had just returned home and their experience was still fresh in their minds. There were also numerous group discussions which took place throughout both trips during the evenings. These discussions were a time where the team members were able to reflect on their experiences on the trip. Participation in these discussions was voluntary, however, the large majority of participants attended each discussion session.

Once all of my interviews were conducted, I completed my first interview transcription which was done manually. However, after completing the first transcription I was informed about an online transcription service called Trint. This is the program that I used to complete the remaining interview transcriptions in order to complete them much more expeditiously. After completing the transcriptions through Trint, I listened to each interview again in order to make any other notes about participant responses and to catch any mistakes that the program might have made. This was done with both the individual interviews and focus group discussions. This is also the process through which I listened for themes – those ideas and/or shared stories that signal or indicate some particular or specific themes that are most closely linked to the research questions. And, it is also here that I found themes that were not anticipated, and which added to the research process in important reflexive ways.

The following results section explores some of the emergent findings that came up during the individual interviews and group discussions from both the February and May trips. Ancillary and related information will be shared as it ties in with the central research question.

Finding 1: Participant perceptions of ‘self’ in terms of race

To iterate, a central hypothesis of this research, is that North-South ISL participation experiences like this, carry both latent and visible ‘racialization’ perspectives on the part of the volunteers – inherent in some ways to the deeply embedded colonization roots of this dynamic.⁸ The first key finding that arose in my judgement, had to do with how participants perceived themselves in terms in terms of race in El Salvador. All of the participants who were interviewed reported feelings of comfort and/or of being welcomed by members of the host community while in El Salvador. However, there were quite distinct reasons as to why participants felt that way depending on if the participants were people of colour or white. When asked to identify similarities that they saw between the members of the host communities and themselves, only two of the white participants interviewed identified specifically a cultural or appearance-related similarity to the host community in El Salvador. However, for the participants who identified as a person of colour, all except for one felt that they fit in, felt comfortable and felt connected to El Salvador either because of a cultural similarity or based on similar physical appearance (i.e. having darker skin). This makes sense, being that almost all of the Salvadoran people they encountered were also people of colour. The voices of the participants help to make this evident. For example, participant #11 who identified as a person of colour, when asked about similarities to the host community, stated that:

“I would say race wise, I felt a little bit more similar because I’m brown [skinned]”

Later in the interview when asked about how her race might impact her experience or how she is perceived in El Salvador she said,

⁸ See Duncan (n.d.) for notes on colonization in Latin America specifically with respect to housing inadequacy.

“I didn’t necessarily feel weird because I was similar in skin colour and I would say similar race.”

Participant #5, who was also a person of colour described numerous similarities between her background and family life compared to what she noticed while in El Salvador, stating:

“I feel like coming from an Indigenous background I can understand the poverty. The communities themselves like everyone kind of being close to each other and in a sense like even the housing how they're so grouped together. To be honest like I find that it's not that different from what I'm used to especially of my knowledge of other Indigenous communities, I feel like it's not that much of a culture shock to me [being in El Salvador]”

Participant #10 said:

“I feel like there wasn't much culture shock for me just because I've been to Jamaica and I've seen the non-resort part of Jamaica just because I went to go visit family and so seeing the poverty in El Salvador it was eye opening but not like a big smack in the face for me. And I think for me the most shocking thing on that trip was listening to other people's culture shock. . . because people were just shocked to see people washing their clothes in open water [for example] but people use what they have, if you don't have access to [running] water you find what you can use. But they [the other participants] were just like mind blown.”

Overall, the large majority of participants, both white and participants of colour, tended to focus more on the similarities that they saw in terms of their relationships/connections with the members of the host communities, than what they experienced in terms of differences.

When asked about how they felt different from the host community or what kinds of differences they noticed in general while being in El Salvador, most participants focused on things related to their most visible privileges that they had in-country relative to the host-community members, such as: access to clean water, good accommodations, and access to more resources in general. However, only two of the white participants mentioned their physical appearance or race as being different from the members of the host community, despite the fact that El Salvador’s population is mostly comprised of Mestizos (mixed-race: see Discussion for

more detail on this), and certainly the people most closely associated with our partnership, our host-communities and families, are people of colour. The rest of the participants did not address race or physical differences at all when discussing their differences relative to the host community. Participant #9 who was a white participant, was one of the few that did note her differences relative to race. That is, when addressing how she felt relative to members in the host community, she mentioned both language and physical differences, saying:

“Well there’s definitely the language barrier, they speak Spanish and I only speak English. And there’s also the physical differences, like I’m very white, with light brown hair, blue eyes and you don’t really see a lot of that, so when we were there [in El Salvador] there was a lot of staring”

There was only one other white participant who brought up physical differences from the host community in El Salvador, stating:

“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” (Participant #20).

This participant not only addressed how her race made her look different, but also how her position as a white, middle-class woman puts her in a position of privilege not just in El Salvador, but in situations beyond this context in El Salvador – namely in the North. Aside from racial differences, other differences that participants mentioned were largely cultural in form including: the language, lifestyle/way of life, clothing, religion, and food. The last important finding when it came to perceptions and understanding of race in these ISL experiences was that after engaging in discussions about race as a group and in the individual interviews, participants stated that race is something that they will think about more going forward and that it gave them a better sense of their own positionality.

Finding 2: The invisibility of whiteness in participant perceptions

The majority of the white participants when asked about race and how or whether they felt it impacted or played a role in their experience, said that it had little or no negative impacts on their experiences in El Salvador. Many participants did mention that they felt they stood out as a whole being in such a large group of Canadians, but few actually addressed race as being the reason that they believed they stood out. And in association with this theme, it is important to point out that several participants mentioned that race was not something that they think about at any time and therefore was not an aspect or attribute that they felt worried about going into the trip. An interesting outcome associated with raising this theme with those who agreed to participate in the research, was evident in the voice of one the white participants, regarding how she viewed the impact of raising race on the trip;

“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 . . .” (Participant #17)

Two other participants acknowledged that their whiteness likely had something to do with why they did not have to think much about race. Participant #1 stated:

“I think that comes with whiteness. It's like I don't... I feel unfortunately like whiteness is very powerful. So, I don't feel nervous to be here and I don't feel like I'm at risk [of racism or discrimination] being here.” (Participant #1).

Similarly, another participant who identified as Canadian as the key identifier rather than white, said,

“I’ve literally floated through life because of my race, obviously as a woman we have our challenges but race wise I will never have a problem. And here [in El Salvador] I was fondly accepted from what I could see, I never felt discriminated against, I mean I don’t think I felt different.” (Participant #6)

In total 15 of the 21 participants had little or no reflection on race in their responses to my questions. Although some of the participants acknowledged their whiteness, many of the participants did not make mention of their race as a privilege, or as having any impact on their experience at all. This is very interesting, as these types of ISL trips are often intrinsically racialized, being that the volunteers are mostly white and the members of the host communities in the Global South are brown or black (Borland & Adams, 2013; Bandyopadhyay and Patil, 2017)

Finding 3: Perception of race from the perspective of Habitat for Humanity Partners in El Salvador

When interviewing the partners who work for Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador, it was interesting to see how they described the impact or place of race in these ISL experiences. They all mentioned that diversity in terms of race (as well as gender) is not something that Habitat for Humanity Global Village (HFH-GV) in El Salvador requires or places a lot of emphasis on, however, it was also noted that this is mostly because they do not have involvement in the team selection of the international volunteer groups. When asked about the importance of diversity among the volunteers to HFH-GV, one key informant stated:

“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” (Key informant #2).

Another HFH-GV informant elaborated on this point and described why diversity is not something that HFH-GV in El Salvador has much control over for the international teams that take part:

“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 in the case of El Salvador were what is known as a hosting program, we don’t send teams international we just move our local teams and receive international teams so we really don’t have any type of influence over the recruiting that a team leader does. So, unfortunately that’s something we don’t really have any control of. . . 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” (Key informant #4)

Another HFH-GV informant pointed out that the diversity of teams is mostly dependent on who has the ability to take part in these types of trips, namely those in a certain social economic status,

“In terms of race, I would more think that if you think of the people who are mostly willing to become supporters of the program it would probably be a person from a certain social economic status. So that that would make the race thing a little trickier right. And also, the person who would be more who have more economic opportunity to do so” (Key informant #1)

When discussing the perceptions of participants in terms of race, the HFH-GV partners who were interviewed stated that race had not been an issue that any of them had encountered from the volunteers from Canada (or other countries in the North). However, they mentioned that race can sometimes impact how the volunteers are perceived, especially in groups which are more diverse. When asked if race plays a role in how volunteers are perceived, one HFH informant stated:

“I would say yes...with the families at least because 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 Teresa⁹ was saying “everyone’s so pretty, especially the white skinned girl” but it’s because people here are used to seeing people with the same colour 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...” (Key informant #2)

This same informant also added that;

⁹ Name has been changed

“I had one homeowner once, who said, “Where is she from?” [referring to a Chinese-Canadian participant] 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 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”

Another participant describes how members of the host community perceive more diverse teams and provides some reasons as to why this is the case:

“[Because of] our history, you’ll notice walking down the streets that most people are Mestizos (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...it helps the conversation, because people [in El Salvador] are very curious I think it’s incredibly valuable” (Key informant #4)

Both of these participants point out why some volunteers from the North might be perceived differently by the members of the host community depending on their race or ethnicity. They note that it is usually the members of the host community that will make notice or point out racial differences. As these key informants stated, groups that are more diverse stand out to the communities in El Salvador because of the stereotype that they have of what a Canadian (or American) person looks like. Therefore, when some volunteers do not fit that look, it can be a surprise or confusing to members in the host community.

Finding 4: Impact of gender

An additional finding, separate from the impact of race, was how the volunteers perceived the impact of gender on these ISL trips. As previously mentioned, between both the February and May trips to El Salvador, 30 out of the 33 participants were female. However, as previously mentioned this is not uncommon in ISL experiences. For example, in research by

Feagan and Boylan (2016), looking at the same university partnership between Wilfrid Laurier University and Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador over three years, they had 44 total participants, 41 of which were female. In both the February and May trips of this research, all except for one participant, reported some gender difference in terms of how they were perceived by the host community or how they perceived the host community themselves. The three differences that were noted most by participants had to do with 1) more stares and catcalls, 2) viewing El Salvador as a more 'machismo' country and to a lesser extent 3) clothing differences.

A total of 8 of the 19 female participants mentioned catcalls and/or stares as a noticeable gendered experience and another 8 of the 21 total participants mentioned El Salvador being more 'machismo' and/or having more traditional gender roles. When discussing the impact of gender one participant brought up 'catcalling' as the main thing that stood out to her, stating;

"I definitely feel like gender has a lot to do here especially as a foreigner. Because even just going down the street like the catcalls that is something you really don't have in North America. So, it can be a very intimidating being a girl especially from another country. But I feel like we haven't really been exposed to it that much because we're in an area where there isn't so many people. But when we're in town you hear so many catcalls" (Participant #5)

This participant noted that catcalls are something that she has not experienced in Canada, so it really stood out to her and made her feel intimidated. Another participant who also noted catcalling as one of the most notable gender impacts said;

"In terms of gender, I haven't personally experienced it but I mean like when we're walking down the street and we heard the catcalls the other day it's a lot different from home because I feel like probably that's more socially acceptable here and again because we haven't really learned, I don't really know [if catcalls are more acceptable in El Salvador]" (Participant #4)

Another one of the female students, when talking about the clothing differences stated:

"The first thing that comes to mind is just like dress code. Like what is acceptable to wear or not wear as a male or female. And then even going out in the town, what you wear as a female gets a lot different reaction than if you are a male" (Participant #11).

One participant mentioned both catcalls and that she felt that El Salvador was a very “machismo” country, stating;

“This is a very machismo country from my perspective . . . I see the female volunteers getting looked at and ogled by men in a way that is unacceptable in Canada, you could not look at somebody that way...so that’s the gender thing there, and then there’s also the catcalls” (Participant #15).

When travelling from place to place, many participants commented on the fact that the male bus drivers would not let the female participants help to put their luggage into the bus, whereas the male participants could. One participant describes how she felt about that particular situation;

“In terms of gender, definitely. I kept saying like “I can carry my own bags” but then somebody explained it to me that the men here don’t like making women work as hard. I don’t really know if it’s that they find women are weak or maybe it’s out of respect as well. But they don’t like women to work too hard other than housework or whatever . . . so I wasn’t sure if it was a positive or a negative, if it was out of respect for women that they were doing it or that they saw us as weak” (Participant #2).

One of the male participants found that he was approached more by members of the host community and on the work site than the female volunteers in the group, which he felt was most likely due to his gender. The participant stated;

“I found that workers would come and talk to me and [the other male volunteer] more, the men there, and even the women would have no problem approaching a guy, but I felt like they were a little more timid with the women. That was just my perspective, maybe you had a different one. But that was just one thing that I noticed, was that I would always get approached by the Habitat for Humanity people, they would always come and shake my hand. I didn’t see them shaking hands with all of [the female participants]. And I would say absolutely that was related to my gender” (Participant #21)

The key informants for HFH in El Salvador also provided some information from their perspectives on how gender plays a role in these experiences. Key informant #2 when addressing whether gender plays a role in how the participants are perceived by the members of the host community stated;

“Maybe with the masons, because we have some masons that think that having a team of just women won’t be the same as having a team of just men because they will say “hey we’re not going to give the girls heavy stuff to carry or heavy jobs because they won’t be able to do it or they’re going to feel tired really quickly”. And if they see a guy they can easily say “can you ask him to bring a bag of cement” or something like that. . . it’s really shocking when they don’t have the experience [working with volunteer teams that are mostly women] and they will say “oh my god, they work really hard” whenever they see the women working, because they’re surprised” (Key informant #2)

Another HFH informant indicated that;

“When it’s a [volunteer] group that’s mostly women, people are [very surprised] and the masons will say ‘they’re going to build too?’ and I say ‘yes! They’re going to build too - everyone has the same skills’” (Key informant #4).

This same informant expanded on this thought later in the interview and noted how the teams of mostly female volunteers can help to change the mindsets of some of the members of the host community about what women are capable of;

“I think that in the case of El Salvador, masons will be more surprised when it’s all women [on the volunteer teams] and even the managers, when it’s mostly women teams most people will be more amazed. And that’s part of the job that we [Habitat for Humanity] would like to do is to break down these stereotypes because sometimes I’ll have three houses and three volunteers and a mason will say, “send me only the men because they’re harder working” and I’ll say “no, no, no everyone’s a hard worker” and then they will see how hardworking the women volunteers are and it will help change mindsets” (Key informant #4)

One of the HFH affiliates also noted a difference between the gender make up of volunteer teams from the United States and Canada as well as the perceptions of the members of the host community in El Salvador as follows;

“You can see that the US actually has closer to [evenly] mixed gender and Canada has more women than men and we’ve always wondered why . . . to be honest I feel there are not too many differences [when it comes to a participant’s gender] I feel like the differences are mostly felt by the people in the [host] community, like the family. Because for example, you have men who are mostly working like the masons, and they may see a group of all women which is very uncommon [in El Salvador]. And probably in the 7 years that I’ve worked for Habitat, we’ve only had 3-4 women from the community or family owners who have been directly involved as construction helpers and no women

masons ever . . . one thing that I have noticed, and this is just an observation, is that while the volunteer teams are not here [on the work site] women sometimes have been working prior to the team coming but when the team comes they don't work . . . but in some cases I have seen the woman [in the community] get involved, but it's not the norm” (Key informant #1)

These findings indicate that gender tends to be more of a factor in how participants are perceived by members of the host community than vice versa. Particularly, how female participants are sometimes viewed as less capable of the hard labour that is required on the work site, that is until they are seen by the masons or other community members doing the work just as well as the male volunteers. Interestingly, only three of the 21 interviewed volunteers from Canada brought up similar gender differences related to work. One of these participants stated that;

“We've noticed that there's no female workers on the work site aside from us. But I feel like you would see this at home [in Canada] too. Like in trades, it's a male dominated [field]” (Participant #4).

Although this participant noticed a gender difference in that none of the masons on the site were woman, she also made the point that this would also not be unusual for construction sites even in Canada to mostly have male workers.

Discussion

The following section provides an analysis and discussion of the findings of this research. This section starts with my positionality as researcher and participant in these two ISL trips to El Salvador. Then a brief description of the racialized politics of El Salvador followed by a discussion of a particular occurrence that took place on the May trip which had much relevance to this research area and how students understood the impact of race in their participation in ISL. Then the analysis and discussion of each of the findings including: participant perceptions of themselves in terms of race, the invisibility of whiteness in participant perceptions, the

perception of race from HFH affiliates in El Salvador perspective and lastly, the impact of gender.

At the start of my research, I was mostly focused on the critical side of ISL experiences, particularly towards the types of trip which are often referred to as volunteer tourism or “voluntourism”. I had not participated in any international volunteer trips before so I had some skepticism about how much good could be done in such short periods of time. As a woman of colour, I also had my worries about how these international trips can continue to perpetuate colonialism and a dependency of countries in the Global South as well as the white-saviour complex. Hence my decision to apply post-colonial and critical race theories to my research. One of the main reasons I had doubts about ISL experiences was because whenever I had seen any advertising for these trips it almost always showed a white person, helping a sad or sickly looking black or brown child. Being a part of the trips to El Salvador with Habitat for Humanity, allowed me to be a part of two ISL experiences and see how these trips, organizations, and participant dynamics and relationships really work on the ground.

Through my participation in these ISL experiences, I believe it helped me to avoid what Lois McNay (2014) calls “social weightlessness”. McNay (2014, p.4) defines social weightlessness as “an abstract way of thinking that is so far removed from the actual practices and dynamics of everyday life that, ultimately, its own analytical relevance and normative validity are thrown into question”. To avoid this kind of separation of my research and the theoretical constructs or framing used, and what really happens on the ground I tried to be conscious of the types of experiences and connections that could only be possible through my own participation. Through my role as researcher and participant I was able to become more aware of the positives and benefits that are possible in ISL work, when it encourages and allows

for critical engagement among the volunteers. And from this position as participant, to personally observe and speculate on what processes and shifts in the learning might occur so that ISL could more effectively respond to its critics.

When looking at race and its role in ISL experiences it is not only important to consider the perspectives of the volunteers coming from the North but also to recognize the distinct racialized politics of the host country, more specifically in this case study, El Salvador. In El Salvador the racial demographics include 86.3% Mestizo (meaning mixed-race), 12.7% White, 0.2% Indigenous (these being: Lenca, Kakawira, and Nahua-Pipil), Black 0.1% and 0.6% Other (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018). According to Statistics Canada (2018), there are more than 200 ethnic groups in Canada, and 19.1% of the population is a member of a visible minority. Although, the majority of Canadians are white, it is still important to note the difference in ethnic diversity between Canada and El Salvador in order to understand the different racialized politics of the two countries. In El Salvador, because the majority of the population is Mestizo (mixed-race), people are commonly identified by the racial categories of *Chele* (light-skinned) or *Trigueño* (dark-skinned), as is the case with much of Latin America (Barrios, 2017). Due to the lasting effects of Spanish colonialism, there is also still the prevailing privilege of Eurocentrism and whiteness that continues to exist in most Latin American countries as well (Quijano, 2000).¹⁰ These distinct racialized politics are important in understanding how race is perceived and/or addressed differently by volunteers in Canada and members of the host communities in El Salvador.

¹⁰ In the 1930's laws were put in place in El Salvador which prohibited the immigration and settlement of Blacks, Asians and Arab people in the country and those laws were not removed until the 1980's (The American School of Tegucigalpa, 2013)

In the type of qualitative research that took place on these trips, it is important to be attentive to the possibilities and occurrence of unique events that can provide input and some kind of window into the types of things that are significant to the research being conducted. The reflexive nature of the information collection process for this work means that one takes advantage of moments which provide important insights into the theme of interest. The following section helps to elucidate this kind of moment and its impacts, and also has special significance relative to the research question.

A particular incident occurred early in our work on one of the work sites of the home builds while in El Salvador. When a homeowner recipient was introducing herself and sharing some information and context for herself, her family and lived situation, one of the things that she shared with the group of volunteers from Canada was a comment and observation about the prettiness of the female participants, with a specific reference to one of the white volunteers as being the prettiest because of her light skin. The comment caught the translator by surprise and when it was translated to the group, the listeners were also surprised and not sure whether or how to respond to it. There was some nervous laughter among some of the participants, and some looks of uncertainty, but no one in the group reacted further at that moment. What was interesting about that particular occurrence, was that this ‘racialized’ comment created a space for further discussion – both later in group discussions, and in individual interviews with the researcher. In a way, this comment created an important departure point for more conversations directly addressing the research question regarding race.

To build on this point, one of the main points that occurred due to this moment on the build-site, is that it opened up an awareness about the role of race in participant perspectives and observations. Of key interest in this research and notable in the literature on the racialization of

participation in North-South engagements like this, is that the groups are primarily white volunteers, who are also largely female (Bandyopadhyay and Patil, 2017). And key to this work, is that the theme of race usually does not arise directly from the participants on their own, if at all, when asked about their perceptions, beliefs, and understandings regarding their motivations in doing this kind of work (Bandyopadhyay and Patil, 2017), and probably useful to point out, a theme not raised by white people generally (DiAngelo, 2011).

It became evident that the comment opened up a dialogue for the theme of race to become more accessible in the thinking of the participants on that trip. Particularly, with respect to the various kinds of things that they were observing, taking part in, and sharing during the second trip in this case study – a more carefully developed field course. This is a crucial observation or situation as the research up to this point shows that there is a reluctance around raising the theme of race without a specific push/prompt to do so. Even when it is prompted, race is still a theme that most participants, especially white participants, are unclear or uncertain about regarding how to approach and discuss. Some of the reasons why that is will be discussed shortly.

It is important to note that this group of participants, distinct from participants cohorts working previously with the same partnership in El Salvador, had preparation time prior to the field-course, which included readings dedicated to North-South engagements and learning experiences like this. And specifically related to this theme, participants were provided journal articles which looked at critiques of white female participants from the North participating in experiences like this and addressed the topic of the white saviour complex (Bandyopadhyay and Patil, 2017), among other things.

This comment, regarding the beauty of a white participant, made by a Salvadoran woman of colour, played a large role in helping to show/raise the importance of this theme in the discussion of global engagement. I will highlight some of the moments in the discussions that occurred in the following two weeks of the field-course that demonstrates the new awareness of the participants. But I would like to start with a longer quote that had deep significance for Participant #11 in terms of how the comment made by the home-recipient affected them:

"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 for? 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?"

This participant's response is indicative of the importance of this incident in thinking about race and participation. Now I want to share some other moments that have their root in this comment by the homeowner. During an evening group discussion focused on race and participation facilitated by the researcher, the first person to speak in the discussion stated that

she thought the comment made by the soon to be homeowner was something that the group needed to address, but she felt as a white woman she was not in the right position to make that judgement. Myself, the researcher, responded to the comment by giving my interpretation, which was that I felt it could have something to do with internalized racism, because as noted earlier whiteness is still privileged over non-white and colourism continues to be engrained in Latin American countries (Hernandez, 2015). To me the comment was not meant to offend the non-white participants but rather represented feelings that are deeply ingrained in many people of colour, because of the lasting effects of colonialism and Eurocentrism. This type of internalized racism or colourism is due to the lasting impact of colonialism which has led to internalized and inter-generational views within the minds of peoples of previously colonized countries where whiteness is seen as a symbol of power, expertise, and knowledge (Kothari, 2006; Lough & Carter-Black, 2015).

During the same group discussion, another participant, who is Asian-Canadian, shared her thoughts about how the discussion of race directly tied into her own experiences. She noted that as an adopted child growing up in a white-Canadian family, she often wished to be white throughout her childhood, because she always had a sense that she was not part of the dominant group. The discussion on race and racialization, allowed her to share her personal experience and to reframe it relative to the experience in El Salvador. Another student of colour brought up how women of colour from the North in some ways have intersectional baggage by being female, women of colour, and yet having the privileges associated with their Northern lifestyles. Both of these students show the type of conversations and discussions that are possible through ISL when there is a direct confrontation with these kinds of social justice issues. Though it is also incumbent that these discussions be effectively facilitated.

Participant perceptions of themselves in terms of race

Although it might not be surprising to find that most of the participants who were people of colour (POC) felt comfortable being in El Salvador, it is still a noteworthy finding. All of the POC participants who said they felt similar to the members of the host community reported feeling similar based on similarities like food, family dynamics and/or their appearance. This could be because they are more aware of their racialized identity than the white participants.

Participants who are POCs, most of whose families were originally from countries considered part of the 'South', reported similarities along the line of language, food, religion, and family background. This included things like families coming from poor backgrounds, and even as simple as the way clothes are washed communally by hand. This could be because in Canada, the majority of the population is white and therefore some of the participants of colour who have darker skin might feel that they fit in more than they do even in their own country. There were also numerous participants who described their own family backgrounds as being very similar to those that they saw in El Salvador. As quoted in the results section of this paper, a couple participants related this as to why they did not experience "culture-shock". For example, Participant #10 related it to her experiences travelling to Jamaica to visit family and Participants #2, 3, 5, and 14 related it to their own upbringing and family dynamics.

Only two of the white participants interviewed mentioned having a cultural or appearance similarity related to the members of the host community in El Salvador. Interestingly though, when asked about differences from the host community members, race was only addressed by two of the white participants. Most of the white participants only brought up race when it was asked about directly in the interviews. This is interesting considering that the white participants were in a country where the majority of people looked very different from themselves whereas in

Canada, as a white person they would usually be in the majority when it comes to race. This is not to say that white participants should feel uncomfortable, but that the lack of discomfort speaks to white privilege on some level. In his book, *Undoing Privilege*, Bob Pease (2010) identifies this idea that most white people have little awareness of their own racial identity and when asked about what it means to be white the most common response was that they did not really think about it. According to DiAngelo (2011, p. 55) this lack of racial awareness among white people exists because “white people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress”. Additionally, Pease (2010) notes that the lack of racial awareness is because being white is simply seen as the norm in Northern countries. Therefore, many of the white participants likely did not think about their race during their time in El Salvador, because they do not have to think about their race the large majority of the time in Canada.

The invisibility of whiteness in participant perceptions

The results in this research showed that the invisibility of whiteness was true for most of the white participants who took part in these two ISL experiences in El Salvador. The majority did not see their race as having any impact on their experience in El Salvador and as previously mentioned only two white participants mentioned their race as being a difference from the host community. As well, multiple participants mentioned that race is not something that they think about ever, so it was not something that they were thinking about before or during the trip in El Salvador. This is an interesting finding because it could mean that not only did some of the participants not think about their race at all but that maybe they were not even aware of who they are in a racialized world.

Contrary to the findings of this case study, in other literature on race and development work and ISL experiences in Zambia and Ghana, it was found that white volunteers noted that their whiteness made them stand out and it was an uncomfortable experience for the volunteers (Heron, 2007; Vrasti, 2012). One of the authors notes that this discomfort is likely because the members of the host community (in that particular study, Ghanaians) made the white participants uncomfortable by racializing their whiteness and making it visible to them, something that they were not used to. This was also the case for another study which involved white Canadian volunteers who had participated in ISLs in Kenya, Uganda and South Africa where some volunteers reported that they felt uncomfortable as a white person because it was like having a ‘spotlight’ on them and it was assumed by the locals that they were financially affluent (Shwarz, 2015). It is interesting therefore, that just two of the white participants on the ISL trips in El Salvador noted that their whiteness made them stand out from the host community members, and none of the white participants noted feeling uncomfortable about their whiteness while in El Salvador. So although in El Salvador white participants stand out because of their race they are rarely conscious of that racialization (DiAngelo, 2011). However, these differences could also be in part due to the shorter duration (10 days and 16 days respectively) of the May and February ISL trips in El Salvador (Heron, 2011).

Similarly, to the findings of this research, Vrasti (2012, p. 110), observed while taking part in an ISL in Guatemala that, “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. Although they referred to [the volunteers] as ‘gringos’, [the volunteers] usually (wrongly) assumed the term meant American or foreigner, not white person”. Like the findings in this study which took place in Guatemala, a country which borders El Salvador to the North, it can be inferred that

most of the white participants, did not have to think about race because it was not made visible to them, at least not overtly, by the majority of Salvadoran people that they encountered during the trips. This was particularly the case in the first trip in February where the topic of race did not come up among participants until prompted by the research in the individual interviews. During the trip in May however, as was previously noted, there was a comment made by one of the future homeowners which led to much more discussion of race. These findings indicate that the invisibility of whiteness is not only experienced in the Global North but even in the Global South, where the majority of the population are people of colour. Although not explored in great detail in this paper, it is important to note that these racial politics are very present in El Salvador and the rest of Central America and race is one of the most important factors in the access to opportunity and economic advancement (Morrison, 2015). 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).

Some might argue the fact that participants did not feel the need to bring up race is a good thing because it means that they do not see race (colour blindness) as a negative thing. However, these trips are inherently racialized and therefore by not bringing race into the discussions with regards to these ISL experiences we might be missing a crucial point of reflection among all participants in these trips. The quote from Participant #17 in the results section of the paper provides a good example of a shift in awareness which came about through discussions on race that she had with other volunteers on the trip. This participant had said that she does not walk around with race on her mind at all times, but that she found through the discussions and hearing other participants experiences and perspectives that she acknowledges that her whiteness affords her privileges that she did not realize or think about before.

As indicated earlier in the results section, it was found that many participants mentioned standing out in El Salvador being in such a large group of Canadians, however, few indicated race as being the reason that they felt they stood out. This is likely in part due to a lack of awareness among volunteers about how their race affects dynamics of privilege and power in ISL experiences (Kothari, 2006b). This also has to do with what Pease (2010) referred to as the ‘invisibility of privilege’, where those who have privilege may have a hard time seeing it as such. However, the quotes from participants 1 and 6 in the results section reveal that some of the white participants were in fact very aware of the privilege that their whiteness brings, both participants describing that looking different from members in the host community was not an issue because their whiteness afforded them the privilege of not being made to feel different or discriminated against. Although a few participants did acknowledge their whiteness, the majority of the participants did not make mention of their race as a privilege, or as having any effect on their experience at all. The fact that white participants were not consciously thinking about their race is likely because whiteness is often not recognized by white people. As DiAngelo (2011, p. 66) notes, “when whites only notice “raced others,” we reinscribe Whiteness by continuing to posit Whiteness as universal and non-Whiteness as other”. White people are considered just people, whereas people of colour are never just people and are always characterized by their racialized identities as black people, Asian people, Indigenous people et cetera. (Dyer, 1997). It was interesting to see that because race was not something white participants thought about in their lives in Canada, many also did not think about it while in El Salvador until it was directly addressed.

Perception of race from Habitat for Humanity Partners in El Salvador Perspective

The findings from the interviews with the Habitat for Humanity Global Village (HFH-GV) partners suggests that race is not something that HFH-GV has a lot of control over and therefore it is the role of the sending organizations in Canada to do their best to encourage diversity among their teams of participants and to prepare all volunteers for what their volunteering experience will involve. As Key informant #4 suggested, having diverse teams helps to start conversations and share knowledge among the Salvadoran community members. It is interesting to note that although the volunteers will be working in communities in El Salvador, the program coordinators in El Salvador have very little control over the composition of the volunteer groups that come and therefore in some ways, less ability to encourage learning on the part of the volunteers. Therefore, the composition of the teams is decided by the sending schools or organizations in Canada, who are then also in control of preparing the students for the trip. As is expressed by Key informant #4, having more diverse volunteer groups helps to create discussions around race and allows for shared knowledge between members of the host community and the volunteers. These encounters and discussions can help to reduce racialized assumptions and stereotypes and instead open dialogue and reflection about racialized encounters (Kothari, 2006b; Lough & Carter-Black, 2015).

An important point that was noted by Key informant #1 regarding the lack of diversity of the teams was that the HFH-GV teams are primarily made up of participants who are in a specific social class (usually middle to upper class), as those are the people who have the opportunity to offer their time and money to participate in these international volunteer experiences. This is an important point because it ties in with the privilege that is associated with being able to participate in these ISL experiences. As noted in the literature, the foundation of

ISL exists in a commodified environment and serves as an opportunity only for the privileged (McGehee, 2012).

These findings are significant because they emphasize that the majority of the responsibility when it comes to preparation for volunteers is on the sending organization in the North (in this case, Canada). This preparation should not only involve preparing participants for the weather, food and proper clothing for the country they will be visiting but also what the racialized politics of that country look like compared to where they are from and how factors such as their race, ethnicity and gender may impact how they are perceived in that country, and how they perceive things themselves. This is helpful in making volunteers aware of the curiosities that might be directed towards them in questions or comments that could be perceived as offensive (e.g. racial comments or catcalls) and that they might not be used to. It is also important for sending organizations or group leaders to discuss the privilege that is inherent in participation in ISL, given how expensive some of the programs are. However, even though the teams might not always be diverse, this should not stop them from engaging in topics related to race and racialization throughout the process of ISL participation.

Impact of gender

As the results from this case study show, it is clear that gender played a role in these ISL experiences in El Salvador, starting with the fact that 31 of the 33 participants were females. This gender difference aligns with the findings in the literature in this field. Mostafanezhad (2013) states that ISL experiences and volunteer tourism are a gendered practice, with 80% of volunteers being women. In research by Mostafanezhad (2013), she discusses the focus that is

placed on care work in volunteer tourism and how it reflects traditional cultural norms about women's role in Western society. The ISL experiences working with Habitat for Humanity however, did not fall into traditional gender roles as the trips involved assisting in the build of homes for families. What is interesting though is that the nature of the trip (constructing a home rather than doing care work) did not change the fact that the teams were still 90% women. This is despite the fact that in Canada women make up just 6.4% of those who work in transportation, trades and construction work (Statistics Canada, 2017). This gender difference is interesting because it shows that although home building/construction in Canada is still a male dominated profession and follows traditional gender norms, when it comes construction which takes place in a country in the Global South, in a volunteer experience it switches to being female dominated.

As noted in the results section, in terms of how gender directly impacted participants trips during their time in El Salvador many female participants mentioned the 'catcalls' and stares that they experienced. Some participants also reported El Salvador to be a 'machismo' country, while other participants viewed the behaviour of the Salvadoran men to be more chivalrous. As previously mentioned, Grusky (2000) emphasizes the importance of discussion around the topic of gender politics and the female student experience. Due to historical and prevailing stereotypes in Latin America of North American women, there is the chance that female participants could be disrespected or demeaned while in the host country (Grusky, 2000). Most of the female students who mentioned these gender differences did not express anger or fear about their experiences, though, a couple of participants did express frustration over how the men in El Salvador reacted to the female participants. Participant #5 in particular described feeling 'intimidated' by some of the catcalls, which she was not accustomed to coming from Canada.

Grusky (2000, p. 862) states, “the female student has distinct challenges in the environment of Latin American gender politics. Faculty advisors and both male and female students in the delegation need to be sensitive to these issues”.

As Participant #15 mentions, she noticed that El Salvador was a very machismo country and that the female participants were often stared at and catcalled in a way that would not be acceptable in Canada. This participant noted the distinct cultural differences of how men interact with the women in El Salvador in comparison to what is the norm in Canada. According to Grusky (2000), females are often highly sought after due to cultural stereotypes about the liberated North American women, which can lead to the female volunteers being disrespected because of the double-standard that permeates male-dominated societies. The gender differences noted by Participant #15 directly speak to challenges and discomfort that can be experienced by female ISL participants if they are not informed about some of the different stereotypes that might exist in the country that they are visiting.

One of the two male participants, when asked about any gender impacts or differences that he noticed during his time in El Salvador spoke about how he noticed the HFH partners and host community members positive reception to him. This participant noticed that the masons and other HFH partners (both male and female) were more likely to talk to himself and the other male volunteer than to the female volunteers. Although this may not have been simply due to his gender, it is interesting that he took note of this as the biggest gender difference that he experienced.

The findings gathered from the information collected from the key informants for HFH in El Salvador show that gender also plays a significant part in how participants are perceived by the members of the host community as well. Key informants 1, 2 and 4 all reported that

community members in El Salvador and the masons in particular were surprised or confused by teams comprised of mostly female volunteers. As Key informant #1 noted, in the seven years that he has worked for HFH in El Salvador he has never seen a female mason and has only had experience working on 3-4 build-sites where Salvadoran women in the community helped with the build. All of the key informants reported that the masons are often amazed by the hard work of the female volunteers and in some instances the masons will directly request to work with male volunteers, implying that traditional ideas of gender roles are still quite ingrained in Salvadoran society. This is in line with findings from Sliwinski (2018) in her work on post-disaster aid in El Salvador, which noted that machismo attitudes are still quite present in El Salvador and in poorer parts women continue to be subservient to men. It remains the expectation that women take care of the household and children and that men are the providers and many men were disconcerted by seeing women doing traditionally male jobs - in this case constructing homes (Sliwinski, 2018). However, as noted by Key informant #4, once the masons and other community members in El Salvador see the female participants working they are often amazed by how hard working the volunteers are and can have a change in mindset.

Although there were no distinct differences between the reports of gender impacts on white participants and POC participants, it is still important to keep in mind as previously mentioned that there could potentially be a difference of treatment or perceptions of the participants depending on their race, gender or other characteristics. This involves an intersectional approach to understanding ISL experiences and how they vary for different participants. An intersectional approach allows for a way to analyze the complexity of factors such as gender and race and how they work together to influence one's experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2016). It is important when taking part in or organizing ISL experiences to consider not

only the experiences of the most privileged group members, but also the experiences of the participants who have multiple intersections impacting their experiences while in the host country.

Recommendations

The lack of literature on the topic of ISL experiences which focuses on the impact of race indicates that there is much room for growth in understanding how the perceptions and experiences of volunteers from the Global North and members of the host community in the Global South are impacted by race. Based on the information that was gathered through this research, there are several recommendations for ISL trips to enhance the knowledge and preparation of their future participants. The first recommendation is similar to recommendations suggested by numerous other scholars in the field of ISL, which is to give volunteers good comprehensive preparation before the trip and to engage students in discussions before, during and after their trip which encourage critical analysis and reflection (Feagan & Boylan, 2016; Grusky, 2000). To add to this, I would recommend that those in charge of the trip preparation, make sure that there are discussions which specifically address race and privilege (and gender) and the ways in which they play into the North-South relationships involved in ISL. In this vein, it is important to acknowledge that intersectionality always plays a role in ISL. Whether it has to do with race, gender, socioeconomic status, nationality or religion each participant will have numerous social categorizations that will shape their experiences. Therefore the discussions that take place before, during and after the trips should include recognition in some manner of the importance of intersectionality in ISL.

It will also help to have discussions with students regarding the racialized politics of the host country, which could be very different from what they are used to in their home country.

This will also help to prepare participants as best as possible for any racial or gender comments and/or questions that could come up during their trip, that without preparation could be construed in a negative or offensive way. The importance of these kinds of discussions was illustrated during group discussions in the May field trip where the topic of race was raised in a significant way after the incident on the build-site. ISLs can generate many questions and can offer many teachable moments for participants, it is important to take advantage of those opportunities to ensure that volunteers are engaging in these trips with as much knowledge as possible about what they are getting into.

Racial politics are inherent in Central America and therefore discussions of race and relationships between Canadian volunteers and the host community is a unique and important space that is created in ISL exchanges. They allow for a deeper consideration of how power, knowledge, and injustice are entwined with race and can help improve ISL to be a more effective pedagogy of global engagement (Kothari, 2006b). Having these conversations before, during and after the trips will be useful in helping to make ISL more effective and can raise awareness for both Northern volunteers and Southern host community members. One way that this could be done is through critical global citizenship as proposed by Andreotti (2006), in which participants are informed about the injustices and inequalities present as a result of the complex systems and structures that maintain exploitation of the host communities in the South. This can encourage participants to be more critical in their engagement and understanding of their experiences in terms of factors including race, privilege and gender. However, it is also essential to include the responses of members of host communities in the South (Kothari, 2006b).

Another recommendation which was suggested by one of the Habitat for Humanity partners that was interviewed in El Salvador was to provide future participants the opportunity to

speak to past participants who have experience and knowledge that they can share regarding what the volunteer experience is like. The key informant specifically suggested that;

“If participants don’t know what they are there for maybe they can talk to people that have been [to El Salvador] before, have experience volunteering [internationally] or people who have volunteered in their hometown because they have a little bit more experience. . . because in that sense it won’t be such a shock, and they will also know what to expect and what kinds of clothes to bring, what kind of activities they are going to be doing, the weather and things like that” (Key informant #2).

This could involve dedicating some time before the trip to have a small group of past participants come to speak to the future participants and share their experience and stories from their trips as well as any advice or suggestions they have for first time volunteers. This could give future students the chance to ask any questions that they have and to have an idea of what they are there to do. In these pre-trip discussions, the topic of race as well as privilege should be addressed in order to make participants more conscious of their racialization behaviours and perceptions going into the trips, as well as how they may be perceived by members of the host community. Lastly, through more carefully developed relationships, sending organizations and the project leaders in the community could be encouraged to develop ways to prepare participants to be more conscious of the perspectives they may carry and make more transparent their hidden racialization narratives.

Conclusion

Participation in ISL has become increasingly popular among Canadian post-secondary students who wish to volunteer in the Global South. These ISL engagements combine academic instruction with community service internationally (Crabtree, 2008). These engagements usually have goals to increase economic, environmental or cultural well-being (McGeehee & Andereck, 2009). The origins of global engagements such as ISL experiences are closely linked to centuries

of colonialism (Bandyopadyay and Patil, 2017; Kothari, 2006b). Despite the inherent racialized aspects of ISL, which primarily involves white volunteers from the North going to volunteer in the South, race is not often addressed in research related to ISL. This research study aimed to address what is missing in previous literature, which is the racialized aspects of ISL. More specifically this research focused on how race and privilege impacted Canadian participants perceptions and behaviours in two ISL trips in El Salvador with Habitat for Humanity Global Village. Being a woman of colour myself, I was drawn to looking at race and the impacts it has in global engagements.

This research consisted of two case studies of Canadian volunteers in El Salvador. The research benefited in an important way from critical race theory (CRT) as a framework to address race in ISL. The findings of this research showed that race not only played a role in how participants perceived themselves in their ISL experience but also how the volunteers were perceived by members of the host community in El Salvador. It was found that the white participants and POC participants had distinct ways of viewing themselves in terms of race while in El Salvador. All except for one of the POC participants reported feeling comfortable in El Salvador because of a similar physical appearance or cultural similarity to the members of the host community. The white participants all reported that race played little to no role in their experience in El Salvador and felt welcomed and comfortable while in El Salvador, which closely aligns with previous research on the ‘taboo’ of race in this kind of work. The experience of the white participants when it came to race has to do with the ‘invisibility of whiteness’ due to the fact that white people are not often racialized and therefore do not have to think about race in most situations (Pease, 2010; DiAngelo, 2011). It is notable that postcolonial theory was considered a useful framework at the beginning of the research, but in our experience it proved

somewhat less appropriate as a way of understanding participants' perceptions in this specific ISL work.

The findings that were reported by the Habitat for Humanity affiliates in El Salvador showed that diversity (in terms of race and gender) is not something that is considered often by the organization. This is not because it is not important to them, but rather because the coordinators in El Salvador do not have any control over the international volunteer groups that are sent by the Canadian organizations. Despite, there being a limited amount of diversity of the volunteer groups, HFH noted that the groups which are most diverse help to start conversations and share knowledge among the Salvadoran community members. However, it was also addressed by one HFH affiliates that race has less to do with who is able to participate in ISL and rather socioeconomic status is mainly what determines who makes up the volunteer teams. Lastly, it was found that gender also played a significant role in how participants experienced their trip as well as how they were viewed by the masons and other community members in El Salvador. Female participants reported catcalling and viewing El Salvador as a 'machismo' country as the main gender differences that they noticed. HFH affiliates in El Salvador noted that gender does often play a large role in how participants are perceived by Salvadoran community members. In particular, mostly female volunteer groups surprise the community members, especially the masons who do not expect women to take on that type of work. However, it was also reported that their perceptions are often changed once the community members see how hard working the female volunteers are.

The findings of this research show that race plays a role not only in Canadian participants experiences and perceptions in ISL but also in how they are perceived by members of the host community in the El Salvador. In order to ensure students are aware of the racialized nature of

ISL, discussions should be facilitated before, during and after these trips to encourage volunteers to be engaging in critical global citizenship. Through good facilitation and the use of critical global citizenship such as the specific histories and economies of the ISL host country - in our case El Salvador, participants will become more aware of how the larger systems that are in place cause the inequality and injustice that exists in many parts of the Global South (Andreotti, 2006). Through the awareness of the racialization in ISL it will also allow participants to understand how their race might impact their experience or how they are treated and/or perceived by members in the host community in the South.

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Appendix

Ethics - Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

Laurier-Habitat Partnership in El Salvador – 2018: Kenzie Pulsifer, Graduate Student Investigator

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to survey the participants on the interests, aspirations, and experiences of their volunteer efforts with this Laurier-Habitat build in El Salvador.

The project is directed by Kenzie Pulsifer a graduate student at Laurier, who is also taking part in this build with Habitat's *Global Villages* program. I am interested in the perceptions and ideas of the participants associated with this international volunteer experience.

The study has two parts. One is the collection of ideas from individual participants about their roles and perceptions of this experience for them. This interview will take perhaps 15 minutes. And the other is based on group discussions during the experience while in El Salvador. Those discussions may take an hour or so. As a potential participant, you choose whether or not to take part in either the individual interview, and/or the discussions.

All of the participants in the El Salvador home-build are being given the opportunity to participate in this research study. The information being collected from the individual interviews and the facilitated discussions will be digitally recorded where permitted. There is no deception about the manner in which the information collection occurs, and/or with regards to the kinds of questions asked. Participants in the facilitated discussion(s) will be asked permission for use of the data collected at these sessions. I ask all participants in those discussions to keep the information that is shared, confidential, though cannot guarantee that all participants will do this. And I ask us to keep in mind that the kind of collective experience we will have in El Salvador can be powerful and emotional, and that the discussion sessions will be facilitated with this in mind so as to create an appropriate and conducive atmosphere.

There are no foreseen risks associated with this research study. This study will help build on Laurier's understanding of these kinds of volunteer efforts in international experiences, contribute to the participants' self-awareness around assisting with such efforts, and may assist the partner – Habitat for Humanity, with its hopes to understand more clearly the experiences had by its participants.

The confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be ensured. The information collected – audio-recordings of the facilitated discussions and interviews, will be held solely by the researcher Kenzie Pulsifer, and securely stored. The data will be retained for approximately three years – enough time for the MRP to be completed, after which I will dispose of it safely and securely by either deletion of the digital recordings, and/or shredding of any notes that I take while doing the interviews and facilitating the group discussions. The materials will all be stored securely in my office. No names will be associated with the information used in the research publication(s) like my graduate research paper, journal article or conference proceedings, or at conferences where summaries of the research may be presented. If and when quotations are used in the research writing, the participants will not be able to be identified. Further, if the participants choose, quotations from their contributions will not be used.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact me the researcher, Kenzie Pulsifer puls8200@mylaurier.ca or Robert Feagan, the supervisor of this research, at

rfeagan@wlu.ca .My telephone number is: (289) 489-4392. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study, every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

I hope to publish this research in an international experiential learning journal, and may present my findings at professional conferences. You are invited to keep in touch with me about the publication of this research, and I will make every effort to keep in contact with you if you would like to obtain summaries of the results of the research. It may be a year or more before I have completed analysis of the survey data and submitted it to academic forums.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form, and have signed below which aspects of the research with which I agree to participate.

Note that each participant will be given the opportunity to agree or not to the use of quotes of theirs in the research, and that I will provide them with such writing beforehand in order to make that decision.

	Participant Signature	Date
Group Discussions in El Salv.	_____	_____
Individual Interviews	_____	_____
Group discussions post-trip	_____	_____
Audio recording of interviews	_____	_____

Investigator's signature _____

Date _____

Interview Guides

Student Volunteer Interview Questions:

- 1) Can you describe some benefits you think you might gain from participating in this trip?
- 2) Can you describe any challenges you might face by participating in this trip?
- 3) As a person coming from Canada, how do you think your privilege might be able to help those you are working with in El Salvador? How might some privileges create issues?
- 4) What kinds of things would you like to learn while participating in this trip?
- 5) What knowledge would you like to pass on during this trip? After the trip?
- 6) For my own research, I am very interested in how race and gender can play into the relations we have on these types of volunteer trips...Can you tell me how your race might play a role in how you communicate with Salvadorian people or if you think race will not play a role at all?
- 7) What kind of impact do you think your gender has? If any?

Final question: Is there anything you would like to add? Do you have any questions for me?

Habitat for Humanity Partners Interview Questions:

- 1) What qualities would you say are most important for volunteers to have when participating in volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity? Why?
- 2) What qualities can be problematic? Why?
- 3) In what ways does Habitat Global Village promote cultural understanding among volunteers and members of the host community?
- 4) In your experience working with groups from Canada, would you say there tends to be a high cultural understanding among participants, a low cultural understanding, or it really depends on the group?
- 5) How important is diversity among the volunteers in terms of race and gender to Habitat for Humanity?
- 6) Do you feel that racial difference between volunteers from Canada and members of the host community in El Salvador play a role in interactions and perceptions during the trip?
- 7) Do you notice any difference in the impact that the gender of the participant has on the relationships or perceptions of members of the host community?