Pedagogical Encounters and Volunteer Abroad in Nicaragua

by

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Abstract:

In this dissertation I examine encounters in volunteer abroad programs in Nicaragua from a transnational feminist perspective. Focussing on these programs as *pedagogical projects,* I examine the distinctly different pedagogical logics that inform Nicaraguan hosts, North American volunteers, and volunteer-sending organizations, respectively. I suggest that several factors are at stake in these encounters. Thus, I argue that by focusing on encounters of both Nicaraguan hosts and foreign volunteers, we can begin to see the possibilities in volunteer abroad encounters that the critical and well-established literature often overlooks.

Drawing on my in-depth interviews of Nicaraguan and North American participants as well as analysis of institutional structures and discourses of volunteer abroad, I look at the differing motivations and experience that hosts (those who work with the volunteers) and volunteers bring to these encounters. Distinctly different social, material, and historical contexts structure how hosts and volunteers encounter each other in volunteer abroad programs. The hosts are shaped by the historical context of the Nicaraguan Revolution and the country's historical commitments to solidarity the revolution produced. Hosts envision volunteer abroad as a pedagogical project with the potential for the political transformation of the volunteers. Volunteers, on the other hand, bring a neo-liberal and individualized perspective to volunteer abroad, which means they are primarily interested in a transformation of the self and the accumulation of resume-enhancing social capital.

I suggest that, for both hosts and volunteers, these transformations of others and the self are imagined as occurring through *proximity.* Thus, while hosts and volunteers are differently motivated, they both see being proximal as a pedagogical tool for transformation. For volunteers,

this occurs through *approximation*: in trying in their everyday lives to *live like* Nicaraguans, they imagine learning about Nicaragua and its culture. For hosts, on the other hand, it is through *conviviencia* or *living alongside* that hosts imagine volunteers are will learn about the struggle of Nicaraguans and, in turn, begin to place this struggle in a wider geo-political context. I suggest that these gaps between ideas of transformation and proximity present pedagogical possibilities.

The creation of intimate relationships across cultural differences is central to volunteer abroad. I look at two specific case studies of intimacy in the everyday experiences of volunteers; living with a host family and volunteer experiences of being catcalled on the street. I suggest that an analysis of these forms of intimacy demonstrates how inequity surfaces for volunteers, even when inequity is obscured. Thus, an analysis of intimacy reveals not only how inequity structures encounters in volunteer abroad, but such an analysis also shows how experiencing differing spaces and intimacies can be conducive to the participants' learning. I argue that, for volunteers and institutional programming, the home space with the host family is conceptualized as safe and, thus, good for learning, while the street is imagined as dangerous and, therefore, not productive to learning.

Finally, I suggest that hosts are invested in volunteer abroad programs because they view them as hopeful pedagogical projects that offer the possibility for a politically different future. However, the burdens of caring for volunteers, together with being denied recognition as pedagogical authorities within the practices of the volunteer abroad apparatus, makes it difficult for hosts to find the time and space to enact this hopeful pedagogy. The contrast between the narratives of volunteers, wherein they recount their experiences of intimacies, and the hosts' narratives about their hopes for the pedagogical possibilities of volunteer abroad programs, further extends our

understanding of the gaps between the expectations and experiences of both Nicaraguans and volunteers.

This dissertation adds to the literature through its conceptualization of the encounter. This conceptualization is informed by transnational feminism and critical pedagogy to attend to relationality and learning. I argue that encounters reveal the ways in which dominant narratives are upturned. I argue that hosts must be centred in our research on, and practice in, volunteer abroad programs. Through looking at everyday encounters between hosts and volunteers, we are able to see not only the struggles and difficulties of volunteer abroad but also the possibilities for both teaching and learning.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Katie MacDonald. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Dis-Orienting Encounters: Social, Political and Affective Contours of Volunteer Abroad in Nicaragua", No. 00040719, 07/29/2013.

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This dissertation is not a project I can claim as my own. It is a project that took years to build and one that emerged through conversations, interviews, reading, writing, course work, countless drafts and through the not-so clearly connected tears, laughter, joy and grief that marked my connections with others. The project could have been many other things, and also nothing, but only what it is now with the guidance, support and fierce love of so many.

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Introduction

I am sitting with two volunteers at their host family's table kitchen. They live in a dusty, rural community outside of Leon, Nicaragua. This community has been significantly impacted by a drought and is struggling to supply enough water for the local families, their animals, the international volunteers who live with the host families, and the local school's garden project. The volunteers have been here for two weeks; one week remains of their stay. While the program is independently run, the volunteers heard about it at their university in the United States, but they will not receive a university credit. Programs like this one are growing exponentially in universities throughout North America (Tiessen 2008; Crabtree 1998; McGehee and Wearing 2008).

As we chat at the kitchen table, the volunteers' host mother offers me juice and asks me about my research. As the volunteers and I prepare for the interview, I ask her if I can return the next day to interview her. She agrees and asks me to come before lunch. This is one of the most rural communities I have visited for my research. While the family these volunteers are living with is relatively well off, they struggle with water access, and sharing space and material goods, such as food, electricity and water, with the two temporary new additions to the household. The next day, the volunteers' host mother tells me that, due to increasing prices, the family is struggling to pay for food; this is in addition to the time and cost associated with transporting it home from the nearest urban center, which is 45 minutes way by bus.

As the volunteers and I talk, I learn that they came to Nicaragua to learn Spanish and to study Nicaragua's agricultural practices. The heat and the language pose challenges for them. Nevertheless, they enjoy learning Spanish and getting to know their host family. They tell me about the dynamics between their host mother and father. They explain to me that one of their host siblings really wants to learn more, but there isn't much support for them at the school. They then tell me they paid to have their host family's kitchen tiled as a present and a thank you for their hospitality. Through my interviews I learn that for host families, it is common for volunteers to leave presents, but not always of this size. We talk about the difficulties in arranging this tiling project and how little they knew about tiling a kitchen (especially in rural Nicaragua). They tell me how, for them, this has felt more like learning a lot about the challenges

of international development, such as working across languages, not understanding the context within which this type of work takes place in this country, and their inability to foresee all of the costs involved. As our interview draws to a close, the host mother returns and asks me if I would mind translating a few things for the volunteers, before I catch the bus back to the city. I agree. After all, this isn't an unusual request for me, and it might help my research. She wants me to ask the volunteers if they feel happy in the house and how they like the food. As I translate this for them, I am struck by the simplicity of these questions. Communication between the volunteers and this host family is so limited that their host mother is unsure of how they are feeling in her home and whether they like her cooking.

This seemingly benign moment between the host, the volunteers and myself is deeply fraught with communication and cultural difficulties, power inequities and the changes in a household while hosting. This story, and others in the dissertation, provides insight into the practices of volunteer abroad; I understand volunteer abroad as programs that bring people from what are often referred to as "developed" countries to volunteer in "developing" countries. Specifically in this dissertation I consider experiences of young people volunteering in social programs such as education or art. In my research, I am concerned with encounters like this one and the troublesome presumptions and impasses that structure relations between hosts and volunteers. While this encounter and other similar ones I share in the dissertation are experiences of only specific volunteers and hosts, they are shaped by systems and structures that interpellate participants in particular ways.

I use the term "encounter" to describe the multiple and fragmented ways in which social relationships are made and remade in volunteer tourism. I am interested in the everyday and intimate encounters that take place in volunteer abroad programs. These encounters can reveal the processes and practices on the ground, and how these processes are implicated in the broader histories and institutions of transnational encounters, such as international development, colonialism and study abroad. Recent literature points to problems found in the "outcomes" of volunteer abroad. While it has debated whether volunteer abroad programs transform volunteers and local communities, there has been little inquiry into the lived reality of the volunteer and even less research on the experiences of hosts (Mostafenezhad 2014, Vrasti 2013). As critiques of volunteer abroad programs have been gaining traction, programs that offer volunteer abroad

experiences are increasingly promoting themselves as being pedagogical rather than as developmental projects. This dissertation is an inquiry into the pedagogical logics of volunteer abroad and what it looks like on the ground specifically in Nicaragua. I critically examine the operation of the pedagogical logic, through an examination of the relationships of encounters, in order to see both the pedagogical possibilities and also the contradictions inherent in volunteer abroad.

 In the fieldwork scene I opened with, the volunteers each felt quite confident in their ability to "know" about their host family's everyday lives, despite the difficulties in communication. Their host mother, on the other hand, felt unsure about the volunteers' experience; she did not know whether they liked the food or were enjoying themselves. In this brief interaction, we see volunteers enacting their interpellation as "knowers" within the pedagogical logics of volunteer abroad. Volunteer abroad programs ask this "knowing" of their volunteers, when they return home (Roddick 2013), in spite of the limited communicative abilities and other skills they bring with them.

In addition to studying the experiences of volunteers, I also explore the experiences of the Nicaraguan hosts. I highlight the desire many hosts expressed, namely that the volunteer abroad experience be a site for a transformational pedagogy that is informed by political goals. The hosts express the hope that volunteers will learn about the specificities of Nicaragua's revolutionary history and how it shapes the country's contemporary social, cultural and political context. They would like to see such learning transformed into structural and systemic change. A focus on the encounters and the experiences reveals tensions within the motivations and desires of volunteer abroad participants, as these motivations and desires do not accord with those of their hosts. This demonstrates the differences between the expectations and experiences of both. I argue that, while both hosts and volunteers understand the volunteer abroad program as a pedagogical and forward-looking project, their respective investments vary because of the different contexts and politics of those involved.

The story that opens this dissertation highlights some of the common criticisms of volunteer abroad programs– the shorter stays, the difficulties in communicating, and the questionable benefits. In addition to the criticisms of the practicalities of these programs, Mostafenezhad (2014), Vrasti (2012), Mathers (2010), and Heron (2007) all offer important insights and

critiques of volunteer abroad that highlight how these programs are focused on the experiences and professionalization of volunteers, such as in the students going to learn about Nicaragua's agricultural practices. While the volunteers felt they were learning much about Nicaragua, themselves and their host family (what they are "supposed to learn"), these benefits are in contrast to the minimal benefits and the relatively greater difficulties experienced by the hosts. However, this dissertation deviates from the critical literature because it also includes the outcomes of the host families. That is, this study places a dual focus on the desires and experiences of both Nicaraguan hosts *and* volunteers. More precisely, the focus is on what happens when each party's respective desires and experiences connect.

The story I cited above is an example of how this dissertation's approach differs from a volunteer abroad literature that frequently separates out host experiences from volunteer experiences and looks at one or the other, but seldom both together. Most literature that does consider both hosts and volunteers, which I will discuss below, focuses disproportionately on the latter. Instead, I center my study on *encounters* between hosts and volunteers. I argue that when we look at encounters, we find moments where the ground becomes shaky and volunteers and hosts lose perspective on who they are and who they imagine themselves to be in the larger world. Thus, I argue that when we focus on the volunteer abroad encounter, we can begin to see the possibilities that are often overlooked in scholarship that is both critical and celebratory of volunteer abroad.

I take the concept of the encounter, informed by transnational feminist theory (Mohanty 2003, Swarr and Nagar 2013) and critical pedagogy (Freire 1968, Alexander 2005), to provide insight into the distances between hosts' and volunteers' expectations and experiences. Thus, I look at the ways in which the revealed differences between expectations and experiences in encounters can reveal gaps in understanding between hosts and volunteers. I argue that an analysis of the encounter as it is lived not only provides for windows into the problematic pedagogical formation of volunteer abroad, but also potential moments for transformative possibilities.

Volunteer Abroad Programs

Volunteer abroad is a rapidly growing field, both as a practice and a field of scholarship. Institutions that run these programs are largely located in what is often referred to as the Global North. North Americans constitute the majority of the volunteers in the programs I am interested

in. However, while in Nicaragua, I also met volunteers from Germany, Australia, Japan and Israel. Although there is a trajectory of volunteers moving South-South (such as from Mexico to Honduras), this is rarely talked about in the literature. At times, however, this trajectory did come up in my interviews with facilitators. In North America, universities are moving toward providing more opportunities for international experiences. For example, the University of British Columbia has made global citizenship one of their key academic mandates (Jefferess 2008). Yet, this era of increasing internationalization is also occurring at the same time as an increased focus on risk management and downsizing in neoliberal universities. This means that while universities are calling for international experiences, they are not supporting these experiences with the necessary labour to organize programs, and as such volunteers are meeting their desires to work and study abroad through outside organizations. While volunteers are often university students, they are not limited to this pool. Companies and organizations that facilitate volunteer abroad experiences are now reaching out to high school students, seniors and families; even corporations, such as WestJet are, using these programs as a demonstration of their "social responsibility" (Holme and Watts 1999).

Volunteer abroad programs and organizations are finding homes at liberal arts colleges in the U.S., which often have in their mission statements commitments to social justice or equity (Crabtree 1998, 186). Further, these initiatives are often seen as a piece of universities' drive for internationalization (Tiessen and Huish 2014; Shultz and Jorgenson 2012). Yet, in an era of risk management, budgetary restraint and the contracting out of labour, these programs are becoming increasingly independent of universities' purview and are now run by outside organizations that include for-profit companies. While many students in programs such as International Development Studies, are required to have international experience, volunteer abroad programs also appeal to a wide swath of students interested in travel, volunteerism and boosting their resumes. The volunteers I interviewed were university students majoring in topics from music to environmental studies, Spanish and photography. Volunteer abroad programs have grown so much that there are now associations and organizations, such as the International Volunteer Program Association, which recognizes leading organizations in the field and offers a list of best practices to aid these organizations (http://volunteerinternational.org/).

As the practice of volunteer abroad grows, so does the associated academic literature. Nevertheless, it is difficult to parse the wide range of literature on volunteer abroad/international service learning because scholars, volunteers and communities are participating in projects that are spread across an incredible range of foci. That is, some programs include small medical teams that travel abroad for a short time, often to develop professional skills (Huish 2013); other programs last for one or two weeks at most; still others, such as CUSO, are longer-term projects that involve volunteers with specific skills (Heron 2007). The sheer range of possibilities for volunteer abroad is significant in that it offers young Western people the ability to match their experiences to *their* needs. What volunteer abroad programs do have in common is that they offer the opportunity to learn by volunteering through an 'immersive' cultural experience by going to and being with local people and communities. As Heron (forthcoming) shows, these volunteer abroad programs are increasingly tied to discourses of global citizenship and are seen as a rite of passage. Many of the organizations in my fieldwork are developing ways to make these (often very expensive) experiences more accessible to those who are unable to afford them.

This push for accessibility demonstrates that programs are conceptualized as something all Northerners should have access to, while rarely bringing people "the other way." Thus, the word "exchange" is often a misnomer, when applied to these programs, because the mobility of volunteers abroad follows a trajectory of Northern bodies moving to the South and then back to the North again, but not the reverse. However, while it is easy to imagine Northern youth travelling to Nicaragua to work on development projects (much like it is imaginable for a young, white Canadian academic to travel to Nicaragua to conduct research), it is significantly less plausible– and possible – to imagine Nicaraguan youth travelling to Canada to work on development projects (or to do research).[1] This highlights the positioning of Northern (usually unskilled) bodies as being presumed to have the ability to give and learn, thus travelling to and staying in Nicaragua, while Southern bodies are not presumed to have the same capacity. That is, Northern bodies are not required to possess skills or capacities because they are presumed to already have these capacities, simply by virtue of their having the ability to travel. We might begin to wonder, then, what is the point of volunteer abroad.

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[1] Canada World Youth is a notable exception here. It facilitates exchanges between Canadian youth and the youth of other countries, wherein students volunteer in groups in the local country for three months and then in Canada for three months. This program deserves more research.

"Volunteer abroad" is, thus, a term that can encompass a wide range of different experiences. The direction of volunteer abroad travel follows international development trajectories, i.e. volunteers from the "developed" world travel to the "undeveloped" or "developing" world. For the purpose of this research, I am interested in volunteer abroad programs that appeal to volunteers who are generally unskilled in relation to the labour for which they are volunteering, who are between the ages of 16 and 40, and who are participating in social volunteering. By social, I mean that they are not involved in construction or medical projects, but rather in projects explicitly aimed at social relations. Placements are often in educational settings or involve working with children or on art projects. Experiences in this kind of programming are particularly interesting because they explicitly compel volunteers to think about inequality, social relations and ideas of "helping" in work that often mirrors the helping professions.

In these programs, volunteers typically spend between two and eight weeks in the host country. Generally, they do not speak much of the local language and often arrive knowing very little about the social, historical and political context in which they will be working. As these types of programs have been increasing in popularity, they have shifted from talking about their work as "development work" to framing volunteer abroad as a self-making pedagogical project (Simpson 2004). Thus, while the term "volunteer abroad" assumes that the focus of programming is on the labour the volunteers provide, the rhetoric and practice of these programs increasingly emphasizes what volunteers will gain, i.e. that volunteers will "get more" than those with whom they will be working.

Volunteers replicate these narratives when they talk about "finding themselves," "building their resume," or "getting international experience." In her research, Tiessen (2008) found that volunteers were likely to report reasons of self-making as motivating them to volunteer abroad. Similarly, Vrasti (2012) suggests that the focus on volunteers and their experiences—rather than on the actual *work* of the volunteer—means that projects were geared for volunteers rather than for the community. Vrasti concludes that, in order for participants to feel they are "successful" and recognized for being "good" volunteers (i.e. to gain social capital), they did not really need to volunteer. For example, while many volunteers in Vrasti's research left their placements for travel either because they felt useless or because they were dissatisfied with their assigned work, after returning home they still received the same social capital as other volunteers for having

participated. Thus, it is not the actual labour or the product of volunteer abroad that produces the social capital, it is the image of having participated. For volunteers to gain this capital, there is no need for "proof" of the outcomes.

I situate volunteer abroad programs in the continuum of modes of transnational helping. I see volunteer abroad emerging out of a multiplicity of histories. These include the histories of education where global citizenship and internationalization are becoming popular at universities. These understandings of global citizenship often rely on colonial, racist, and sexist imaginings of the world (deOliveira Andreotti and de Souza 2012). Volunteer abroad also emerges out of histories of international aid. Like Mostafenezhad (2014), I see volunteer abroad as having emerged from older, more established programs, such as the Peace Corps. I also draw on literature that situated international aid as following a trajectory connected to colonialism. Barbara Heron (2007) shows how these programs continue colonial modes of subject formation. She notes the "helping imperative" allows contemporary white, bourgeois women expand their ability to participate in public life. Working with post-colonial scholarship (Stoler 2002; Mills 2005; and McClintock 1995), Heron found that white women who were working in international development in Africa felt a newfound freedom, and new gender roles. As Fridell (2007) argues, in the contemporary moment, building the social capital of being a caring global citizen is often accomplished through multiple practices, from using a travel mug, to buying fair trade coffee, to volunteering internationally. Angod (forthcoming), in her work in elite schools, suggests that volunteer abroad can be imagined as a technology that is unevenly used by non-white students to prove they belong in the white majority. Thus, volunteer abroad is a tool with which volunteers can accomplish many things— from freedom from gender norms, to techniques of belonging— regardless of the actual outcomes of their volunteer labour.

The focus of this dissertation is on the lived experiences of volunteer abroad encounters on the ground. This is different from many of the current studies of volunteer abroad programming that seeks to understand programming. The impetus of most work on volunteer abroad is to discern whether (and why) initiatives in volunteer abroad, and similar projects, are good or bad. There is an additional growing body of literature that critically assesses volunteer abroad. For example, drawing on research in Ghana and Guatemala, Vrasti (2012) suggests that volunteer abroad is both a neo-liberal and a colonial-type project that affirms volunteers' neo-colonial identity and

does so on the backs of hosts in the Global South. Similarly, Mathers' (2010) study of volunteers in South Africa argues that volunteers, "become American" in Africa. In this context, she illustrates how encounters secure for volunteers an imperial American identity. This critical body of literature has been dismissed by some for being too pessimistic of the potentials of volunteer abroad, because they merely outline the "bad" practices and outcomes of volunteer abroad rather than looking at the programs' potentials (McGehee and Wearing 2013).

Despite this range of evaluation of volunteer abroad, most of these studies focus on the experiences and subjectivities of volunteers. These become the data and the bases upon which programming is evaluated. Only recently have scholars begun to ask about the experiences of hosts. These include Mostafenzhad (2014), Tiessen and Heron (2012), MacDonald and Vorstermans (2015), and a new anthology edited by Marianne Larson (2015) on hosts' experiences of international service learning. Additionally, while scholars have been interested in the practices and outcomes of volunteer abroad, this work is often too focused on what happens "after" the experience in the field has been completed. In so doing, these studies neglect to consider the complexity of both the experiences of hosts and what occurs during the program. My approach differs as it makes two interventions into this field through a study of the encounter. The first is through the inclusion of hosts; the second is a focus not only on the program structures and outcomes, but also on the processes and the attachments of volunteer abroad.

My interventions are nonetheless related to this critical body of literature in that I see volunteer abroad as emerging from a colonial past in ways that can (and often do) work to reaffirm the paradigm of colonial subjectivity in terms of the experiences of both volunteers abroad and those "back home" (Roddick 2014). This project differs from the existing literature in three aspects: in its thematic focus, its method, and its theoretical framing. First, my thematic focus is on volunteer abroad as a *social-justice issue*. I believe that there must be possibilities for transnational coalition and that in the *everyday encounter* of volunteer abroad there are possibilities for learning that depart from the neo-colonial model. In my research, I am interested in the "outcomes" of and the "motivations" behind volunteer abroad. However, this research is also engaged with the volunteer experiences *as they are lived* and with the specificity of the contexts within which these experiences take place. Secondly, my research methods include interviews with volunteers and with host families and facilitators. I center hosts in this

dissertation as participants in and experts on volunteer abroad. While volunteers often only spend two to eight weeks volunteering, host families and facilitators have been working in the field for years. This centering means that, unlike some of the work done with host families that seeks to improve programming for the sake of volunteers (such as Schmidt Rinehart 2010), I am interested in the expert analyses hosts offer. Finally, my research adds to the literature by way of its theoretical orientation: I work within a transnational feminist approach that is informed by critical pedagogy. This combination is not found elsewhere in the literature. Transnational feminist analysis attends to the relationality of encounters in volunteer abroad, allowing me to pay attention to possibilities for coalitions between volunteers from the Global North and hosts who live in the Global South. Furthermore, critical pedagogy complicates the understandings of "learning" that are deployed in volunteer abroad. I explore these approaches in later sections of this introduction. For now, it is sufficient to say that, together, these approaches prompt me to look for ways in which colonial subjectivities can be both challenged and reinforced in encounters between hosts and volunteers.

In sum, many of the recent studies of volunteer abroad criticize the project "outcomes" and conclude that the actual work of these projects is generally not very beneficial. I, on the other hand, am interested in the pedagogical logics of volunteer abroad, in how knowledge and knowing operate in everyday encounters. This research questions the logics of programs that are now promoted as "pedagogical," insofar as they are positioned as experiences for volunteer self-improvement (Simpson 2005). Considering together the experiences of hosts and volunteers in encounters of volunteer abroad offers an opportunity to assess what is often difficult to critique in experiential learning, which is the value of encounters, the possibility of knowledge creation, and the tensions inherent in learning across geographic, linguistic and cultural differences. This study looks at what happens in encounters. I investigate the processes and practices of volunteer abroad as it is being lived. The purpose of this project is not to tell coherent stories about experiences, but rather to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of the lived experience in volunteer abroad, from both host and volunteer perspectives, and to open up conversations grounded in the lived reality of these programs.

My approach to the study of this topic is similar to that of many development scholars; I wish to contextualize and conceptualize how intimate and everyday encounters are not simply

reiterations of systems of oppression, but are also tangible moments that provide insight into the ways in which these systems are made, remade, and undone (and often recovered). Arturo Escobar (1995), a key critic of mainstream development, emphasizes the need to politicize the actions that are taken in the name of development. He asserts that actors and actions, in the field of development, are not solely benevolent, giving, or selfless. Rather they are situated within systems such as capitalism that favour some over others. Ferguson (1994) suggests it is crucial to "analyze (development) – not in terms of its own proclamations, but as a social institution in its own right, supported and maintained not by 'capitalism' in the abstract, but by historically specific political and economic interests in each case …" (14). An examination of programs that position volunteer abroad as an historically specific social institution enables us to look at the specificities of programming and analyze it not only in relation to the purported goals but also according to the *idea* of volunteer abroad. Such an examination also calls for paying attention to the specificity of these experiences as they occur *within* Nicaragua.

Conceptualization of the Encounter

I use the term "encounter" throughout the dissertation. In the context of this study, the term "encounter" directs our attention to the various aspects at stake when subjects meet each other, which is what they are intended do in volunteer abroad programs. My interest, here, is in the moments in which subjects are brought together and also in the kind of relationality that emerges in these meetings. Attending to the encounter also means attending to how subjects make meaning during encounters and also what they take away from them. Encounters are pedagogical because they are about meaning making, which is central to learning. Drawing on transnational feminist theory, post-colonial literature, and critical pedagogy, I argue that looking at the encounters that take place in volunteer abroad programs directs our attention to interactions between actors (both as they occur and how they are influenced by the historical context). Studying volunteer abroad only after it has happened indicates a linear understanding of learning as only "outcomes-related." Encounters can also reveal moments of possibility that are not often captured in the research because meaning making is an ongoing, iterative and non-linear process.

My research captures the unpredictability of meaning making that is central to the encounters that are at the heart of volunteer abroad and the attachments that are produced in the process. My theorization of the encounter draws from scholars of tourism who are interested in the ways

tourists make meaning from their travel experiences and the interactional nature of tourism (Crouch 2000, Babb 2011). I also draw upon Pratt's (1992) understanding of the "contact zone," by which she means the co-production of space and the understanding between colonizers and the colonized. I use her work to gain insight into the co-presence of actors in volunteer abroad encounters. Finally, I draw on Faier's (2009) work on "cultural encounters," which extends our understanding to include the emotional factors at stake in encounters.

In her book *The Tourism Encounter*, Babb (2011) argues that the encounter is an important analytic mechanism through which to understand tourism because "it foregrounds the intimate relationship of those coming together from different cultures and societies and it does not already assume the outcome of any given engagement, granting agency to players who may be historically disadvantaged on the global stage" (p. 5). Babb (2011) also suggests the importance of not assuming the outcomes, emphasizing that the encounter is iterative and unpredictable. Crouch (1999) is a tourism theorist who suggests that the encounter is

> … a process in which the subject actively plays an imaginative, reflexive role, not detached but semi-attached, socialised, crowded with contexts… This combination contains meanings of landscapes, fragments, spaces, whole and abstract places, abstractions of the city and the country, street, nation, gender, ethnicity, class, valley, arena and field, through which human feelings, love, care and their opposites may be refracted (12).

Looking at the encounter in these contexts enables us to consider how it constitutes the people within it and how the encounter is constituted by them, how it is inflected by history and space and, ultimately, how its qualities and outcomes are indeterminate. Crouch's interpretation of the encounter is central to my own analysis of the encounters observed in volunteer abroad experiences. Encounters in volunteer abroad are over-determined by the multiplicity of expectations and hopes participants bring to their experiences. Consequently, meaning making is refracted through multiple frames. These frames include broad factors, such as culture, theories of learning, and experiences of intimate relationships. However, while Crouch's work on encounters in tourism (1999; 2000; 2005) remains focused on the experience of the tourist, my conceptualization of the encounter draws on Pratt's (2007) contact zone, and as such, it necessarily includes hosts.

Pratt's (2007) idea of the "contact zone" developed through her examination of 19th Century travel writing, where she describes it as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (p. 8). Here, Pratt is concerned with foregrounding the agency of marginalized people. These people's influences and resistance are central to the contact zone. In addition to looking at the writing that took place at the time of "first contact," Pratt argues that the voices of marginalized peoples and their agency are also important to facilitating conversations among privileged students engaged with classroom learning, where the connection between the student and the text is considered another "contact zone." Similar to Pratt (1992), I am concerned with the lack of attention to the less powerful actors that participate in the meetings and clashes that take place within the contact zone– in Pratt's case, the colonized, and in my research, those who host the volunteers. Nonetheless, three crucial differences between our work exist: First, my focus is on the encounter as it is pedagogically imagined; both the hosts and the volunteers I interviewed had pedagogical hopes tied to their participation. Second, Pratt is interested in "first contact" and so argues that those in the contact zone have been "geographically and historically separated" (p.8). In my work, the encounter also tends to the relationality of histories. In this case, relationality of histories means that the histories of the subjects who enter into encounters are not distinct but must be understood as connected. Thus, in my research, it is necessary to attend to the historical connections between Nicaragua and the United States (where most volunteers come from) and how these histories not only make encounters possible but are enacted and challenged at the same time. Third, I am concerned with encounters as they occur between bodies, and how participants make sense of their own encounters rather than trying to make sense of them according to how they are represented in the literature. This desire for interpretation of what happens between bodies is influenced by transnational feminist thinking, where the use of the term "transnational," rather than "international" or "global," aims "to problematize a purely locational politics of global-local or center-periphery in favour of . . . the lines cutting across them" (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 13). Thus, the encounter, influenced by transnational feminism, looks for social, historical and material connections.

The term "encounter," here, is particularly important in the way it signals theorizations about encounters with others as being pedagogical (cf. Kirby 2009; Simon 2005 Todd 2012; and

Britzman 2012). In her work on intimate encounters between Philippine women and the community members where they live, in rural Japan, Faier (2009) asks,

> [h]ow can we leave room for the contingent and not entirely predictable ways that discrepant sets of meaning and desires engage in such a way that new desires and understandings are produced through their encounter? A methodology of cultural encounters asks us to attend to the broader political-economic inequalities that shape relationships… Yet, it also leaves room for considering the distinctive quotidian forms these relationships can sometimes take (21).

Here, Faier is signalling the need to attend to the ways in which encounters are multiple and undetermined, yet remain connected to the inequalities that give shape to them. In her view, these encounters can produce new desires and meanings and, thus, are pedagogical in that they are central to learning. Ahmed (2000) suggests we are called to attend to what encounters produce and how to understand this production as being located within wider and more specific political-economic contexts.

While each of these writers understands the encounter as being a meeting, inflected with history, between differently positioned subjects, what is central to my conceptualization of the encounter is an attention to its relationality, not only as it relates to the subjects involved, but also to their respective histories, and the processes and understandings of the meaning-making that are at stake during these moments. This concept calls for paying careful attention to the meetings that take place between subjects as they are lived and made sense of in the volunteer abroad experience. This requires focussing attention on an under-studied area and, as such, provides insight into the possibilities for learning that are missed in an evaluation of programming that relies entirely on the "outcomes" of volunteers. That is, by including hosts and their experiences, the encounter will then be seen as a meeting of differently positioned subjects who arrive at their meetings with different hopes, expectations, and histories. Thus, the encounter I conceptualize leads to questions of the examinations of volunteer abroad that exclude hosts. Attending to what I call "the encounter" is central to understanding the volunteer abroad experience. Understanding learning as a process, rather than as a set outcome, centers the interactions between multiple actors and considers the possibility of unpredictability. To examine the encounter is not only to look at what is happening as it happens, but it is also to consider the constellation of investments

that motivate the participation of both hosts and volunteers. Such an approach also asks us to attend to how different understandings of pedagogy may result in similar desires for closeness. It also asks us to question how different actors understand everyday intimacies in the encounter.

Two central terms in my conceptualization of the encounter are "learning" and "experience." In what follows, I outline how learning and experience are generally represented in volunteer abroad programs. I then discuss how critical pedagogy and transnational feminism complicate these understandings. Importantly, transnational feminist theory attends to both the material and cultural realities of the encounter and to how we are co-implicated in and through these realities. In this context, transnational feminist theory centers "the ability to make connections between the lives of people based in the North and those who live in the South" (Carty and Das Gupta 2009, 97).

Learning

Volunteer abroad programs assume volunteers will be transformed through interactions with what we might describe as "difference." By this, I mean these programs specifically imagine wealth, poverty, and culture as sites of difference, although, at times, race, nationality, ability and language are also articulated. Volunteer abroad programs tend to define learning by way of set "outcomes." In this approach, learning is framed as being transactional and linear. We might say that the set learning objectives of volunteer abroad programs are about learning about the self and about global inequality, both of which are supposedly measurable. For example, on its home page, Global Glimpse notes that "99% of our alumni report that Global Glimpse was the most powerful experience they had in high school" and that "97% of alumni said they have a clearer understanding of global interdependencies because of Global Glimpse" (www.globalglimpse.org). Here, we can see that the concern with learning outcomes focuses solely on the volunteers, who are referred to as alumni, indicating graduation from a pedagogical program. The experiences of the volunteers are quantified in terms of both their impact and the kind of understandings volunteers gained from them.

The concept of volunteer abroad presents an image of participants' encounters with subjects of difference, which can be host families, host facilitators, and/or co-workers who are, then, pivots for the volunteers' transformations. While in some ways, this conceptualization of learning may

seem to be anti-foundational (Butin 2010) and anti-colonial, in that it relies on other ways of knowing and learning, I show how the pedagogical logics of volunteer abroad, in fact, reinforce privileged volunteers as knowers, while Nicaraguans remain relegated to the experiential and the bodily.

In contrast to the transactional and linear understanding of learning that informs many volunteer abroad programs, I draw from critical pedagogy to consider learning as a process of meaning making. And, while volunteer abroad learning is often seen to reside in the experiences of the volunteer, I also consider the narratives of hosts.

Critical pedagogy politicizes the way we think about teaching and learning. Embedded in this body of work is an analysis of power and relationships. Critical pedagogy requires a "confrontation with discontinuities, particularities and the narratives that embody actual life stories" (Luke and Gore 1992, xi). Emerging from a Marxist trajectory, critical pedagogy centers ideas of liberation, counter-hegemonic practice and "conscientization" or a becoming aware of inequality in one's life (Giroux 1983, Freire 1967). Critical pedagogy, paired with feminist and post-colonial and transnational work, troubles Western, masculinist, colonial ways of learning. This requires the resituating of the volunteer abroad experience as a source of knowledge. More recently, feminists have critically engaged with critical pedagogy to trouble the positioning of the subject as knower, the masculinist nature of critical pedagogy and its singular option of liberation (Luke and Gore 1992). I take up critical pedagogy throughout the dissertation as I examine the pedagogical logics of volunteer abroad as they are understood both at the institutional and participant level.

Additionally, I draw on psychoanalytic approaches to education (Todd 2012, Britzman 1992, Simon 2005) that trouble learning as a linear process from ignorance to knowledge. This work attends to the difficulty of learning and the ways critical learning challenges not only already accepted knowledge but also the ego. For this project, psychoanalytic theory helps me to attend to the affective difficulty at stake in a learning model that asks volunteers to consider differently the world, their place in it, and their relation to global inequity. In this dissertation, I suggest that learning is a process of meaning making that cannot be easily coded, that changes over time and is unpredictable. The connections between learning and experience are important to this

dissertation. Participants in institutional representations of learning, in volunteer abroad programs, learn through their experiences with difference.

Experience

Experience is central to both the institutional imagining of volunteer abroad and my research process. Feminist debates about experience include three main matters of contention for this project. The first concern is the role of experience in relation to "truth." The second concern asks whether there is such a thing as epistemological authority. The third concern considers the relationship between experience and justice. These three contentions are hotly debated in the feminist literature that seeks to understand how best to include the stories and experiences of those who have been kept from being seen as "experts" or "knowers," and how this inclusion is important and/or conducive to justice. These contentions have implications not only for the consideration of experience as a conduit for transformation in volunteer abroad, but also for how I consider the narratives of my participants. This means, for example, that I position the experiences of hosts and volunteers differently. Another implication asks what the inclusion of experience means when placed alongside of a theory that sees the encounter as emergent, unfinished, and unpredictable.

Drawing on insights from transnational feminist theory (Stone-Mediatore 2003; Mohanty 2003; Nagar and Swarr 2012) and Third World feminism (Mohanty and Alexander 2005), I position the narratives of hosts as providing particular insight into the operations of volunteer abroad institutions and programs. This is not a new concept to this line of enquiry. Indeed, the above-mentioned theorists (in citations) draw on other standpoint theories, such as those of Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Nancy Harstock (1998), Sandra Harding (1991), and Dorothy Smith (1987), who suggest that the knowledge that emerges from marginalized experiences offers insight which, in turn, can help us transform contemporary relationships of ruling. This positioning of marginalized experiences is often justified in two distinct ways. The first is to consider that marginalized experiences contain epistemic authority and enable a "less partial" knowledge about the world (Harding 1987). A second way sees the inclusion of marginalized experiences and multiple narratives as being more democratic and just (Janack 1997). Both of these ways of understanding rely on the inclusion of marginalized knowledge as a counter to the dominant ideology.

Other epistemologists, such as Donna Haraway (1988), argue that all knowledge is formed through ideological processes. However, perhaps the most well-known critique of epistemic authority comes from Joan Scott (1991), who suggests that experience is a "linguistic event" and that although feminist poststructuralists take up the experiences of marginalized people to counter dominant knowledge, their use of experience works to reify identity categories as fixed and to position these experiences through a positivist lens, where they become "more true" than the accounts of others. More recently, theorists such as Stone-Mediatore (2002) and Mohanty (2003) suggest the adoption of experience as an insight into the world in a way that values experience but refuses to reify identity or to appeal to a "truth."

In this dissertation, I understand experience in relation to the encounter and, thus, as contingent and fragmented and only accessible through narration. Participants tell me of their experiences through their own interpretations of how they lived them and what their effects have been on them. This is a recognition of what Scott (1991) and others talk about as the ideological processes that frame experience. Using the experiences and narratives of the encounter is "not to pin down the truth of the individual subject but … a critical effort to open up ideological contradictions" (Weed 1989, xxv). Thus, in looking at experiences as told to me by the hosts and volunteers, I seek to investigate the contradictions and complexities of the competing pedagogical logics of volunteer abroad and the ways both types of participants negotiate these experiences and making meaning from the pedagogical encounter that is at the heart of these programs.

While I understand that the experiences hosts and volunteers, respectively, narrate as a moment of reflection, I give different weight to those of each one. I position hosts' narratives as having more epistemological weight, and I do so for two reasons: First, while volunteers often only have one experience with volunteer abroad, hosts often have worked in the industry for years and, at times, with multiple institutions. Second, drawing from Mohanty (2003) and Alexander (2005), I see the experiences of those who live at the intersection of the power relations inherent in these encounters as more able to provide insight into the operation of power. Specifically, I understand hosts who participate multiple times in volunteer abroad as offering more insight into the institutional logics, despite being positioned as being without much authority in these programs

while at the same time being subject to its rules, regulations and promises. As Stone-Mediatore (2003) describes:

> …people in socially and culturally marginalized positions daily endure the uneven, contradictory effects of a society's accepted beliefs and institutions. Thus, their everyday lives register the biases – that is, not simply partialities but politically significant partialities – in beliefs that have been so widely disseminated that they seem "normal" and institutions so entrenched that they seem "natural" (179).

Central to this formation is the duality that renders obscure the experiences and hopes of the hosts, in this institutional work, while the expectations and hopes of volunteers are continually centered. Thus, it is not only the case that hosts offer critical insight into the operations of volunteer abroad programs, but also that their perspectives provide productive contract to the centered experiences of privileged volunteers. Stone-Mediatore (2003) takes up this work of thinking through the lives of others, not only to give a wider sense of "reality" but also as a political project. This project is not only about learning of others' lives as gaining insight into the world from a perspective other than our own, it is also about the "enlarged thinking" through which we might see our own lives differently.

By situating hosts not only as participants, but also experts and people with epistemic authority, I assert that they are both "knowing subjects and socially situated beings" (p. 183). As Stone-Mediatore (2003) describes, criticism from standpoint theory is "enabled by [revealing] gaps in received beliefs, gaps that are symptoms of social contradictions that ultimately manifest themselves in subjective experience" (p. 215). This is what Smith (1987) refers to as the "line of fault". It is to this line of fault that I look, as I draw on the narratives of both the hosts and the volunteers, so as to understand the gaps in the expectations, hopes, and worries concerning the pedagogical impetus of all volunteer abroad participants. Moreover, a study of what I call the "encounter" reveals how this dominant narrative is often in contrast to the experiences of the volunteers themselves, or what Hennesy (1993) calls "cracks" within the dominant beliefs.

Looking to the encounter reveals moments before the dominant beliefs about volunteer abroad "seal over" the social contradictions that lie at the heart of these programs. The social contradictions include the complexities of motivations, the hopes for and fears of proximity, the

complications inherent in the intimacies involved in participants' proximities, and the differential imaginings of the pedagogies associated with volunteer abroad programs. These contradictions highlight the lived realities of encountering others that are not given space in the dominant narratives. These cracks in the dominant ideology only become perceptible when we pay attention to the experiences as they are lived, both by the volunteers and the hosts, and before the dominant ideology can seal them over.

Why Nicaragua

That encounters between volunteers and hosts are taking place *in Nicaragua* is significant to this research. I took two different research trips to Nicaragua. My interviews took place in and around two urban centres – Leon and Estelí – and also included one interview in the capital, Managua. My interest in this project had originally developed in Leon, in 2009. While working as a mentor to Canadian volunteers,[2] I became curious about the ways these volunteers learned about the Nicaraguan revolution and the contra war,[3] given the newly burgeoning leisure-tourism culture in Leon. This rise in tourism has meant a growth in hostels to cater to travellers, in their 20s, with party-bus tours, "glitter dance nights" and volcano boarding.

Thus, this research is not only important to me because volunteer abroad is a rich site to think about transnational encounters and helping, but also because a significant portion of my work and thinking has been situated in this field. I am embedded in the work and have lived the tensions with both volunteers and hosts – thus, my research questions develop not only out of my interest in transnational feminism and international solidarity, but also out of my lived experience working with volunteers. I bring these experiences to the development of the questions I ask, as well as to my reading of the data. Thus, I could in some interviews ask specifically about some aspects of hosting that I knew were difficult, and ask specific questions

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[2] As their mentor, I was responsible for facilitating monthly reflections on their experiences, talking with them about their experiences and contextualizing their curiosities and concerns. I also worked as a translator and facilitator in their relationships with their work placements and their host families.
[3] Nicaragua lived under the dictatorship of the Somoza family from 1936 to 1979. In 1979 the Sandinistas—a revolutionary party named for Augusto Sandino, a revolutionary figure who waged a military war against the United States Marines in the early 20th century—overthrew the Somoza dictatorship. This party subsequently took control of the country. However, in 1980, oppositional forces began to fight the Sandinistas (funded by the United States government). This was known as the Contra war. It ended in 1990, when the Sandinistas agreed to hold democratic elections, and Violeta Barrios de Chamorro was elected.

about interactions that I knew would be sources of stories, interest and passion for those involved. This dissertation is not only an analytical critique of volunteer abroad, but also provides insight into what programming looks like on the ground for those of us working in the field who are interested in critical questions. This dual focus on analytical critique as well as the practice of volunteer abroad is a tension throughout the dissertation. I negotiate between the desire to improve programming on the ground and the conviction that it is only through critically examining the inescapable contradictions of learning across difference that we can even begin to imagine what "improvement" might look like. This is especially so in programs like volunteer abroad, where the unpredictable and unruly processes of learning are heavily managed or circumvented. The centrality of hosts *as participants as experts* also centers their needs, desires and experiences at the centre of improvement. The tensions of volunteer abroad are explored in depth throughout the dissertation.

For example, while in Leon I was struck by the contrast between the hung-over volunteers, in the morning, in a glitter-covered hostel, and their increasing attention to revolutionary history during the day before parties. I chose Leon and Estelí for my work because I had previously spent time in both of these cities. Each city is an important historical site of the revolution. Estelí was a stronghold for the Sandinista party; its mountainous range provided cover for guerrilla warfare. Leon was the site of many important battles. Leon, especially, has developed Sandinista focused tourism, with its museums, murals and tours dedicated to teaching Nicaragua's visitors about revolutionary history. Estelí is situated in the North and is attractive to foreigners because of its proximity to the mountains, its fresh air and its nature reserves. Leon is in the South of Nicaragua and is attractive for its beaches, has a growing tourist infrastructure, and is an important historical site of the revolution. This latter aspect is increasingly publicly memorialized and developed with an eye towards tourists. The volunteering that people were participating in mostly occurred *outside* of these two cities. Volunteers travelled daily – to rural areas, where they worked often on agricultural or educational projects or to the outskirts of these cities, where they primarily worked with street youth. Generally, the volunteers were unskilled. I was interested in volunteer projects that brought volunteers and community members together, rather than in the construction projects that tended to rely on the labour power of unskilled volunteers, alone. The problem, here, is (as many of my Nicaraguan interviewees pointed out) that Nicaraguans could complete these projects much faster and more securely; these projects

would also create jobs for the locals, and yet somehow volunteers seemed a crucial piece to these projects.

Volunteering in Nicaragua is becoming increasingly popular. Over the past six years of traveling to and from the country, I have noted an increase in the visible presence of foreign volunteers. Nicaragua is relatively new to the mainstream tourism market. After the end of the Sandinista revolution, in 1979, and the subsequent Contra war that carried on until 1990, it took time for the international community to recognize Nicaragua as a tourism destination rather than a place the Western media characterized as dangerous, violent and communist. Recently, tourism to Nicaragua has been increasing as other surrounding countries (such as Honduras and Mexico) are seen as unsafe for tourists. People are attracted to tourism in Nicaragua because of the relatively uncrowded beaches, the idea that it isn't "too commercial," and because of the abundance of opportunities for outdoor activities, such as hiking, volcano boarding and surfing. In fact, the country's official tourism website promotes Nicaragua as "unspoiled. uncommon. unforgettable.." (visitnicaragua.com). While this has led to an increasing presence of foreigners, and tourist activities and businesses in Nicaragua, for many of the volunteer participants in my research, Nicaragua was not a destination they had in mind when they were deciding on a program for volunteers. Many of the programs that volunteers signed up for are not exclusive to Nicaragua, but are part of larger organizations that facilitate volunteer abroad opportunities in many different countries.

The Nicaraguans I spoke to and the guidebooks I either read or that volunteers told me about tell of a history of United States intervention. The United States has a long history of interference in the country, from William Walker declaring himself president in the 1800s, to the United States government's support of the Somoza dictatorship, and their unofficial support of the Contras during the civil war in the 1980s. In the preface to his book *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of an Eagle,* Thomas Walker discusses the change of the subtitle for the fifth edition from *The Land of Sandino* to *Living in the Shadow of the Eagle*. He justifies this change because "for Nicaragua, there long has been – and probably always will be – an 'eagle' on the northern horizon" (Walker and Wade 2011, ix).

This interventionist history in Nicaragua stands alongside a strong presence of international solidarity with the struggle of Nicaraguans, throughout the revolution and the Contra war, with

people from the United States and many other countries, including Germany, Russia, Canada and Cuba supporting the Sandinistas. While the American volunteers I interviewed rarely arrived with an understanding of the complex interweaving of Nicaraguan and American history, the Nicaraguans in my interviews and whom I met in my day-to-day life were well aware of it. In Leon, a mural depicts the history of Nicaragua, noting various forms of intervention (from Spanish colonialism, to US intervention, to capitalism).

In Nicaragua, political debate and discourse are a part of public life. The conversations I have with people in my everyday interactions in Nicaragua may include any of the above topics. In addition to these, they include discussions on femicide, international policy, tourism, and development, to name a few. The Nicaraguans I spoke with largely grew up during the revolution. They told me that talking about this era is part of everyday conversation. The stories they shared often included the loss of a father or brother during the revolution and Contra war.[4] This is the politicized civic culture volunteers confront and try to make sense of. Volunteers told me that they had learned, at home, that it is not polite to talk about politics, particularly when one is a guest in another's home, and so they didn't. But during and after our interviews, they frequently would ask me questions about Nicaragua and Nicaraguans and, in so doing, they indicated an interest in learning more. Missing language skills and ideas about what were proper topics proved to be barriers in many of these conversations between hosts and volunteers. The host families did not speak English and the volunteers were not expected to learn Spanish until after they arrived. Thus, at the beginning of these experiences communication is often difficult.

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[4] While women were involved as soldiers in the revolution and the Contra war, there is a significant difference in the causality rate between men and women (Randall 1981).

Figure 1.1: Mural in Leon, taken by Katie MacDonald

In the center of the same city, two striking murals frame either side of an entryway. They depict Sandino, a revolutionary Nicaraguan hero for whom the Sandinista party was named, crushing two enemies of Nicaragua with his foot. One enemy is Somoza (the former dictator) and the other is Uncle Sam.

Figure 1.2: Sandino Mural in Leon, taken by Katie MacDonald

The U.S. is not the only nation with a hand in Nicaraguan history. Nicaraguans were quick to point out the ways in which mining companies from Canada currently have devastating impacts on the environment and are violating workers' rights by not responding to workers' demands for better working conditions, wages and environmental protection. Currently, a Chinese company (rumoured to be backed by the Chinese government) is partnering with the Nicaraguan State to build a canal through the country. While I was there, Nicaraguans talked to me about the role of other countries in Nicaragua, such as Canada, Germany and China. I often found myself having conversations with Nicaraguans that were attentive to the transnational influences in their everyday lives.

Looking to the specificities of the encounter in volunteer abroad as they occur *in Nicaragua* and *with Nicaraguans*, this dissertation concerns itself with the ways that encounters between hosts and volunteers can reveal the difficulties and possibilities of volunteer abroad as a pedagogical project. Thus, for this dissertation, it is important to understand the histories that frame

encounters in relation to the past between those from the United States and Nicaragua. The concept of encounter attends to the specificity of the ways in which subjects and places come together in these moments, thus enabling a broader analysis that not only considers experiences, but also the context within which they occur and are understood. This includes the political history, briefly outlined above, and also participants' attachments to and expectations for the program.

While this dissertation attends to how the specificity of Nicaragua and volunteer abroad currently takes shape, it also provides insight into the larger institutional practices of volunteer abroad. This analysis does not forego the systemic or structural aspects of these programs in order to look at how they function everyday; rather, it examines the everyday to determine the complexities and nuances of the system. In this way, I argue that an analysis of volunteer tourism, through encounters, allows us to see the ways in which desires for the future emerge and are remade in light of particular encounters and also the general and historical processes that have given rise to their very possibility.

Alongside of this systemic analysis, however, we can see that, in examining these moments of encounter as multiple, fragmented, and unpredictable, we can also see them as rife with possibility for a new learning. And perhaps this analysis is one in which my own fantasies about a different future are emerging and are brought to bear on the data. In spite of this, however, I believe that an analysis of the encounter also allows us to see the complex and uneven ways in which systems are operating—in particular, those that are gendered and racialized— in the hopes of discovering moments and fissures through which they may be undone.

 This analysis does not suggest that the volunteers in their narratives do not address the uneven benefits of volunteer abroad programs. It does not assert that volunteer-tourism encounters are the (only) mode through which to challenge the racial and gender inequalities that mark capitalist relations between North and South. Rather, its purpose is to begin to see moments in which these inequalities are challenged and encountered in new ways, so as to begin to imagine them not as all-encompassing systems but, instead, as flawed, uneven and frayed.

Using the analytical concept of the transnational encounter allows for a reading of volunteer abroad that is critical and attentive to the historical and contemporary power relations (including

capital) that are embedded and enacted in and through these encounters. However it does not assume the outcomes nor does it assume an easy oppressor/oppressed dichotomy. Rather, an analysis of the encounter as multiple and fragmented attends to the ways in which the subject formation is complex and unpredictable. It also attends to how subjects are done, undone, and redone in the face of others.

I examine encounters between volunteers (primarily from the United States) and the Nicaraguans who live and work with them. Specifically, I investigate how their ideas about learning and culture emerge in relation to the pedagogical purposes of volunteer abroad. It is important to consider the experiences of encounters within larger systems, such as capitalism and neo-colonialism in Nicaragua, and colonialism in the U.S. However, we must also look at experiences as being multiple, overlapping encounters that are shaped by multiple and competing frameworks and desires. While it is important to see the ways in which colonialism and capitalism shape these encounters (such as the encounters through which participants move, or their paid and unpaid labour) I am also interested in seeing how other frameworks (such as solidarity) are present.

The desires and imagined futures both Nicaraguan and volunteer participants bring to their encounters, and the ongoing discourses on volunteer abroad (both critical and celebratory), lead to encounters that are overburdened with meaning. Volunteers often strike out on these programs in order to find themselves, to learn Spanish, or to figure out their careers, while Nicaraguans see hosting as an opportunity to teach young, privileged people about their lives and experiences in the world. Taking these narratives as a starting point, I argue that encounters are structured through a lopsided transnational lens in that they are about meeting subjects of "difference"— often coded as cultural—in a global world. Further, they are mediated through an institutional pedagogical frame that takes encounters with difference as the moment of learning.

Contributions and Limitations

This focus in my research provides three main contributions to the current literature. The first is in the work I do in the dissertation to trace the move from development discourses to those of self-actualization and transformation through cultural immersion. I demonstrate that volunteer abroad programs imagine their efficacy through a neoliberal lens of individualized

transformation of the volunteer, rather than through location within and relationship to community. This neoliberal, individualized perspective of pedagogical transformation positions volunteers as those who are transformed, and hosts as objects that provoke this transformation. Second, I show that hosts and volunteers both emphasize the importance of "proximity" to volunteer abroad experiences, yet hold quite different understandings of proximity and its purported promise of transformation. The focus in volunteer abroad programming on volunteers, on cultural immersion and being close-to as a method for learning, and on the narrowly cast caring role of local hosts obscures the emotional and intellectual labour that hosts put into volunteer abroad. Finally, this dissertation draws on both critical pedagogy and psychoanalytic understandings of education to trouble the learning in volunteer abroad as linear and predictable. While much of the current literature concerned with learning in volunteer abroad traces "outcomes" of learning (i.e. knowledge about globalization of interdependencies), this dissertation troubles the idea of learning as that which we can easily plan for through encounters, or can easily predict. I draw both on volunteer and host experiences to demonstrate the ways that neat, neoliberal frameworks of transformation are troubled in the context of encounters themselves as they are lived. Importantly, this troubling of pedagogical frameworks was noted by both hosts and volunteers. Each of these critical interventions is made possible through the inclusion of hosts' voices.

This dissertation is shaped by my particular approach to interdisciplinary scholarship and by its focus on a specific location of volunteer abroad. While I engage with several bodies of theory throughout the dissertation, I do so by selectively drawing on relevant sources from several bodies of theory in order to build a conversation between these contributions, rather than by engaging deeply in one tradition. For example, I draw on both psychoanalytic and critical pedagogies even as these theories have very different understandings of transformation, subjectivity and consciousness. Bringing these sometimes contradictory bodies of thought into conversation allows for a troubling of volunteer abroad that takes seriously both the psychic difficulty of engaging with difficult knowledge, as well as the contextual difficulty of coming to terms with inequality. Where critical pedagogy is interested in the transformation of a subject through acquiring more knowledge about the world for political ends, psychoanalytic perspectives on education are interested in the interplay between the unconscious (both of individuals and of social groups) in relation to the conscious. While there is friction between

these two perspectives around the conceptualization of the subject, what they jointly add to the conversation in volunteer abroad are their troubling of accepted and neat frames of learning, as well as a generosity for the difficulty presented to the learner. Thus, these two theories brought together shed light on the difficulty of learning about difference, inequality and power in volunteer abroad, particularly as it is imagined through encounters with others.

This research is also bound, in some ways, to a specificity of place. I argue in the dissertation that Nicaragua is an important context because hosts emerge from histories of solidarity and transnationalism to ask more of volunteers than is documented in other sites of volunteer abroad (such as Mostafenezhad's work [2014] in Thailand). This is both a contribution to the literature as well as a limitation of the study in that it is not broadly generalizable. However, the findings of this dissertation suggest that context is, indeed, important for understanding what happens on the ground in volunteer abroad and should be attended ti.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One: *Towards a Transnational Feminist Methodology of Encounter* outlines the project's research methods. This chapter explores the feminist methodology that centers the concept of what an encounter that attends to the pedagogical and transnational intricacies of fieldwork might look like. In particular, I look at how I was situated as "between" the two groups (volunteers and hosts), and how this changed throughout the course of my research. I look at this through a feminist account of relationality that sees me as being situated in the very encounters that I study. This chapter begins to demonstrate how attention to the multiplicity of encounters, as they are lived, can reveal the complexities of volunteer abroad and our positions as researchers.

Chapter Two: *The Politics Motivating Hosts and Volunteers* looks at the ways my participants talked about their motivations for participating in volunteer abroad programs. This chapter sheds light on what motivates hosts and volunteers to participate. I argue that these motivations must be understood contextually. I suggest that while volunteers' motivations take shape in a context of responsibilization and neo-liberal individuality, we can also understand the motivations of Nicaraguan participants as characterized through their experiences of the revolution and international solidarity.

The Nicaraguans in my study were clearly motivated to participate because of their belief in the possibilities for structural and systemic change to arise as a result of these programs. This chapter shows that contexts shape why people volunteer abroad and what their expectations are for their experiences. This is crucial to both understanding the *specificity* of the encounters, but it also helps to see the transnational production of the encounter. This sets up the subsequent chapters that look at how these different motivations emerge on the ground. The differing motivations of the hosts and volunteers allow us to see further gaps between the expectations and experiences of both.

Chapter Three: *Transformation through Proximity* looks at how proximity, or being close to "different" bodies, is imagined as a "good tool" for transformation in volunteer abroad pedagogy. Here, I argue that, where both hosts and volunteers imagine proximity as a good tool for transformation, the conceptualization of "being close to" and the kind of learning it provokes are different for both. In this chapter, we see how the contextually shaped motivations, outlined in the previous chapter, play out around the fantasy of the proximity-as-transformative method, including its contradictions and unpredictabilities. This extends our understanding of the logics and possibilities of the encounter.

I argue that volunteers understand themselves as learning about Nicaragua and Nicaraguans through an approximation of "Nicaraguan lifestyles," while Nicaraguans understand proximity to be a learning that moves to solidarity. My critique of proximity as a good tool for transformation in volunteer abroad allows us to see the differing expectations and experiences that come into play in encounters; and proximity as a simple tool for transformation is problematized. We see the encounter as motivated by different pedagogies that take proximity as central. Yet, the different understandings of proximity for hosts and volunteers further highlight possible slippages in previous everyday understandings.

Chapter Four: *The Intimate in Volunteer Abroad Encounters* takes a closer look at interactions that occur in the everyday experiences of hosts and volunteers who are living with one another. In particular, I attend to the ways in which an analysis of intimacy, in volunteer abroad encounters, reveals the inequalities that are often obscured through a neo-liberal frame. I focus on two relevant case studies that I suggest are central to this experience. The first concerns the intimacy at stake in home-stay programs and how volunteers and hosts experience the intimacy

of the private space of the home. The second case study turns to "catcalls," which I consider as a form of public intimacy felt in the body.

In looking at the framing of gender and labour in the above two cases, I argue that the labour of the host mother is conceptualized as love rather than as the type of labour for which women are paid. Conversely, I argue that the danger imagined on the street is presumed to reside in the bodies of Nicaraguan men. These case studies are oriented around the ways safety and dangers are imagined at home and on the street. The presumed safety of the home space, through the asexual intimacy of the family, is assumed to be central to the learning this safe space facilitates. Conversely, the street is seen as dangerous, for volunteers, because of the evocation of sexual subjectivity and the possibilities of threats. While volunteer abroad is rife with fantasies about intimacy, I demonstrate that when these fantasies are disrupted, they often reveal the underlying power relations that enable these encounters. This chapter illustrates the surfacing of power relations in volunteer abroad encounters.

In Chapter Five: *A Hopeful Pedagogy*, I focus on my interviews with hosts and their desires for a transformational pedagogy. I describe the wishes hosts have for a pedagogical transformation of volunteers and contrast this with the lived realities. In particular, I look at how hosts talk about the challenges of working with relatively unskilled volunteers who come with little knowledge. These challenges keep the hosts from fulfilling their pedagogical fantasies and plans. This chapter focuses on the difficulties inherent in enacting a transformational pedagogy from the perspective of hosts. Here, I argue that the encounter presents alternative pedagogical possibilities.

Conclusion

This dissertation begins with me sitting at a dusty table in Nicaragua with two volunteers and their host family. It ends with me writing at a desk in Canada still trying to think about and understanding volunteer abroad. As I edit this conclusion, volunteers in a program I work with are boarding their flights for Dominican Republic and Ecuador. Transnational connections through volunteer abroad are ongoing. This is clear in my own work. Not only do I remain in contact with the Nicaraguans I interviewed, but also— for better or for worse— the memories, learning, and experiences live on with the participants..

While Butler (2004), suggests that grief tears us from ourselves in ways that allow us to be otherwise, it seems that volunteer abroad often protects us from being undone and instead programming often maintains our coherence. This seems especially true for volunteers. The practices of volunteer abroad can work to affirm our sense of self and our relationship to the world. Yet, this dissertation shows that there are moments where the shaky grounds of these affirmations are made clear, where volunteers and hosts lose footing of who they are in the world. The concept of the encounter is deeply informed by transnational feminist theory and critical pedagogy; it gives us insight into these slippages. In this research, I trace the ways in which subject making is enacted and challenged in everyday lived experiences. I look at how these moments must be understood as encounters between both subjects provide insight into the troubles and possibilities of volunteer abroad as a pedagogical process.

Chapter One:

Toward a Methodology of Encounters

Taking my experiences conducting research for this dissertation, I argue that a feminist methodology that utilizes encounters highlights the ways in which conducting research is a multiple and fragmented process. I suggest that using the insight of the concept of the encounter for methodology reveals how I am situated and implicated in the encounters that I study. A methodology of encounters attends to relationality, politics, and subject making. Drawing on transnational feminist theory and practice, I position my experiences interviewing as providing insight into the ways in which subjects are undone and redone through encountering one another. I also analyze how I was frequently brought into encounters as I was called upon to act as a "go-between" by volunteers and Nicaraguans, or to act at their respective "interlocutor". This work builds on methodological literature that troubles the idea of the epistemological authority of an outside knower (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Coffey 1999, Kovach 2009), and the relationship of self-other (Fine 1994, Hastings 2010, Cunlifee and Karunanayake 2013, Nast 1994, Kobayashi 1994).

When I began my project, I proposed that I would look at the encounters of volunteers and Nicaraguans to understand experiences of volunteer abroad. Throughout my interviews people often asked if I was trying to prove if volunteer abroad programming was good or bad – I answered that while I think we must be critical of programs it was not my intent to say they were good or bad, but rather to think about intimate and everyday encounters and the learning that happens in them. I said that I thought with the variety of programs available it was difficult to make such generalizations. One of the ways I talked about this difficulty was that my intention with interviews was not to pit Nicaraguan perspectives "against" those of volunteers, but rather to understand all interviews as important pieces to make sense of encounters – as voices that together give a better picture of volunteer abroad as it is lived. And yet, when I found myself in the Managua airport, surrounded by groups wearing matching T-shirts – each shirt proclaiming they were bringing something to Nicaragua that was missing or lacking, sometimes hope, sometimes religion, and sometimes medical treatment – I found it hard to maintain this desire to understand encounters of volunteer trips, and to remind myself of how varied programs were. I was, instead, infuriated at the implications that these things were lacking in Nicaragua. The

Nicaraguans I met described themselves as citizens in a country that fights for itself, while these T-shirts and their proclamations construed them as people without hope or heart. The memory of reading these T-shirts was intensely present when in interviews Nicaraguans insisted they want volunteers to not see their country as lacking.

Interviews with Nicaraguans have stayed on my mind, as they provided insight into the striking gaps between experiences and hopes of hosts and volunteers and into ways in which Nicaraguans were especially thoughtful about the impact of their work with volunteers. One of my last interviews involved a conversation with a Nicaraguan women's cooperative about the hope they associate with volunteers living in their community for seven days, namely that volunteers would understand directly the actual labour that goes into the products that many in the Global North consume so easily – coffee, in particular. The women I spoke with talked about how they learned from volunteers that in Canada we can spend as much as five dollars on *one cup* of coffee, while the cooperative feels charging five dollars for *a pound* of coffee is expensive. Having learned about Canadian coffee prices, they have decided to raise the price to seven dollars a pound in 2015.

Despite wanting to understand all of my interviews alongside of one another, it is hard to resist the urge to calibrate the distance between what I heard in my interviews with volunteers and what I heard in interviews with hosts. For instance, where the former complained about the lack of hot showers or the regular daily meals of tortillas and rice, the latter expressed concern about the drought in their community or the financial strain when volunteers refused to eat rice and beans. I find myself wanting to measure the distance between what volunteers and Nicaraguans said, like one can measure the price differential for coffee, because this distance presses on me; it is one I feel that I carry in the stories that I heard and in the data on my computer. This distance is not just between the participants in my interviews, but between people who live in a world structured by inequality – it is the difference of lived experience, of privilege and of differential mobility. The desire to calibrate and understand this distance is the desire to attend to and address this inequity.

Maybe this is the distance, I found myself thinking as I began analyzing my data, that *has* to be measured, that can show the ways in which programming can improve, or is lacking. But this is the fantasy of someone too invested in the programming of volunteer abroad. The fantasy of

getting it "right"- a fantasy prevalent in education (Britzman 1998) – that we can predict the time and methods of learning. Yet, this fantasy of measurement pulls me, the idea of "pitting" these interviews against one another compels me – as a move to action or to "fix". This measurement of distance, though, is one that does not attend to the co-implication of these narratives, and which would keep me from an analysis which attends to how the interviews are connected (both to one other and through histories and contexts) rather than separate, and how I am a part of them as well. It would not attend to what is "between" these narratives. This chapter is an attempt to situate myself in this distance between the narratives in my interviews, and to think about the ways in which I was often called into this "between" space.

As a white Canadian woman who has previous experience working with volunteers in Nicaragua and who speaks some Spanish I was often called into interviews (or often after interviews) as a mentor, as a connection to Canada, as a commiserater, a translator, and as an expert about volunteer abroad. In this chapter, I look at the ways in which I was called into the encounters of volunteer abroad in various ways and became situated "between" the narratives of Nicaraguans and volunteers as I was called to interpret, translate and explain. My frustration with volunteer declarations of lack situated in Nicaragua, or the stark reality of struggling to survive in communities that volunteers described as sustainable, or as "poor but happy" are positioned in a way that distances me from seeing myself in these narratives.

I write this chapter as a reflection on these histories and herstories that I carried with me throughout my fieldwork and that are with me and in the words that constitute this work. Sara Ahmed writes that our bodies remember our histories even when we forget them (2006). As I board a flight that will take me from Edmonton to Houston and then seven hours later to Managua, Nicaragua to begin my research I am thinking about what histories I carry with me. Certainly I carry the history of a white settler Canadian as I board a flight, am not stopped or questioned and look at the news on my iPad in the newly renovated international section of the airport. The history and present of global capitalism moves me through the obligatory duty-free section where I can purchase a variety of fragrances, chocolates and liqueurs. Global capitalism moves through me as I purchase a coffee at Starbucks and check to make sure the digital recorder (people would later ask me how much it cost) worked. My middle class history and heterosexual life invoke histories of heterosexism and classism that make the goodbye at the

airport smooth as my white, male partner at the time kisses me goodbye outside of our Ford truck that blends into the background in Alberta. My white, female body also carries with it the history of racism, the dominance of white women's writing in feminism and the call for white women to be cognizant of their privilege. Ahmed writes that bodies follow trajectories and the better worn they are, the easier they are to follow. A white academic traveling to the south is an easy line for me to follow. This chapter explores how those lines that my body followed brought me "between" participants, how my identities and histories were central to this positioning and the political implications of these positionings.

Methods and Methodology of the Research Project

Following insights from critical ethnography, I examine not only the making of the self for my participants, but also how my "self" as researcher was made in research encounters. This is not only to understand how I was positioned, but my relationship to participants and to their political commitments. Madison (2012) suggests that critical ethnography is about an orientation to ethics of responsibility and accountability. This practice is reflexive in that it asks about "our own positions of authority, and our own moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation" (8). Madison suggests that this reflection goes beyond simply looking at the self and our ideas, but rather thinking about self and ideas in relation to others. This includes a consideration of how self and ideas structure our research, interviews and analysis. Critical ethnography, for Madison, is "always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others, one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in others' worlds" (Madison 2012, 10). Critical ethnography takes seriously the politics of representation, of how encounters and our work can improve the world of others. Central to this chapter is an inquiry into how to study encounters methodologically, grounded in the conviction that interviews are moments in which subjects meet and construct meaning. Thus they are not necessarily moments of "truth-telling" but of "truth-building" in conversation.

To try and understand the experiences and hopes of both volunteers and hosts for volunteer abroad during their encounters, I conducted semi-structured interviews with mostly volunteers from the United States in Nicaragua, as well as semi-structured interviews in Spanish with Nicaraguans who come into contact with volunteers in their everyday life. I limited my research

to programs in which people from the so-called "global North" volunteer in the "Global South. "
I focused on young volunteers (under the age of 36) and those who were involved in social
volunteering such as working in a school or coordinating education workshops. This research
took place over two separate research trips to Nicaragua – one in the summer of 2014 and then
one in the summer of 2015. The first trip lasted one month and the second three months. During
my time in Nicaragua, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 19 volunteers and
21 hosts (both Nicaraguans who worked as host families and those who were facilitators). Each
interview ranged from 45-120 minutes depending on the participants and the conversation that
emerged. While most of the interviews were one-on-one, I also draw upon group interviews. I
noted this when they are discussed. My questions focused on the experiences of both hosts and
volunteers during their time in volunteer programs, as well as their expectations leading up to
participation.

I first recruited participants by meeting volunteers in hostels, bars, Spanish schools and cafes that
volunteers frequent. I connected with local staff at hostels and cafes (often ex-patriots) to see if
they could suggest participation in my research to people they knew. Finally, Nicaraguans
connected me with organizations that work with volunteers. From these participants I used
snowball-sampling, asking participants to recommend others who might be interested in the
work, or, at the least willing to be interviewed (Roulston 2010, 82).

While Vrasti (2012) argues that her decision to interview only volunteers and not hosts was
because of her recognition of the constant surveillance to which people living in the Third World
are subjected (research not the only means of surveillance[5]), I decided to interviews hosts. I
believe that working with hosts is integral to understanding encounters – it is important to
understand the meeting of multiple sides of an encounter both in volunteer abroad and in
interviewing. *Not* interviewing people because of their experiences of oppression continues the
ways their voices already are marginalized in the existing literature about volunteer abroad.
Additionally, an exclusion of hosts from the research prolongs reducing their lives to an analysis
of oppression. This discounts the volunteers' possible experiences of oppression, both those they

[5] Indeed, an ethical dilemma arises in my work, given the notorious history that connects international development
and volunteering with state institutions and information gathering. This history of surveillance led many
Nicaraguans I know speculate that folks in the Peace Corps were actually spies.

may experience at home or during their stay in Nicaragua. I also chose to interview hosts because they are *experts*. While volunteers generally volunteer once for a short time, hosts have been working in the field for years.

I read my interviews with an eye to seeing "how people's everyday [lives are] strife with creative and critical potential, while their lives and imagination[s are] also constrained by problematic cultural ideologies as well as structures of social inequality" (Saukko 2003, 13). Thus, critical ethnography helps me to situate the narratives and understandings of those I interview not only in the context of an interview encounter and in volunteer abroad, but also broader, transnational forces and imaginations. Taking a constructivist perspective, I understand what emerges in the interviews as one event in the life of the participant; co-constructed between interviewees and myself. Thus, when I talk about my interviews, I use the past tense to indicate that they are narratives in a particular time, relationship and space and could be narrated differently now. Interviews reveal part of the "sense making" process of the interviewee, about their experiences in volunteer abroad and how they fit into their life, but also in relation to the lives of others. Through reflexive practice in critical ethnography I consider the implications of being a white Canadian woman-- and a past volunteer in Ecuador-- doing research in Nicaragua.

In my interviews, informed by the focus on "sense-making" I asked the participants to tell me stories, leaving much of the interview open to the interests of participants in order to:

> …[consider] stories as representing ideology and meaning-making, see fieldwork and interviewing as inherently collaborative and relational, identify human experience as constructed through subjective and intersubjective interpretation and stories as a primary way to understand these constructions and deny a universality of experience or reality, believe that multiple narratives exist and can both be in conflict and reflect truth, and place narrative within a sociological context illustrating that stories reflect history as well as create history (Kezar 2003, 400).

Structured as an open-ended process, the interviews elicited stories of sense making and how these stories are important to the participants.

Importantly, I build on critical ethnography by situating methodological encounters as transnational, as well as being attentive to local processes. This situating requires a

…dialogic mode of doing research [that] would be attentive to the lived, cultural as well as social and material aspects of our realities, and acknowledge that there may be disjunctures between them. It would aim to cultivate modes of social and cultural analysis that would be both sensitive to different realities and capable of building bridges between them (Saukko 2003, 35).

The qualitative methodological literature has given much thought to central aspects of the interview process, such as understanding interviews as co-constructed; the role of the researcher's identity; as well as the importance of well thought through questions (Ellis and Berger 2003, Rapley 2001). Understanding interviews as co-constructed and situated in the transnational also allows me to ask directly about the sense-making processes of participants in relation to broader processes, to suggest to them how I am trying to make sense of my research, and to inquire about what they think of these ideas. This method works to "invite participants to study their own communities…" (Kirsch 1999, x). Interviewing is not only a conversation, but also a conversational way to think about meaning making alongside and with my participants.

On being in relation

A consideration of positionality has been an important intervention in research methods, and has been given more attention in feminist scholarship than in other realms. While some researchers have talked about positionality as something to be struggled against in order to connect with participants – i.e. wanting to be "like" participants (Calhoun 1994; Fraser 1997), others have thought about the challenges that identity poses in interactions in ways the evoke identity politics, such as researching while vegetarian (McCorkel and Myers 2003). While much of the research about positionality is concerned with the ways in which identity can either "get in the way" of eliciting good data, or forge connections, other methodologists, particularly feminist and anti-oppressive writers have argued for the necessity of the researchers being explicit about their politics and positions (e.g. Denzin and Lincoln 1998). More recent literature has suggested that disagreement can be imagined as useful in the field (MacDonald and Struthers Montford 2014; Smyth and Mitchell 2008).

The call for recognition of positionality is a call to see how our histories are brought with us as we move about the world (and indeed, which help or hinder us in this movement) and are central

to how we think about people and the world around us. Often, however, this call for reflection on positionality has resulted in a quick recitation of the identities we supposedly "are" without interrogation into how these identities come to be in interactions and encounters with others – what ways they orient us and those around us, or the concrete effects they had on the research process (everything from topic of study to choosing participants to what methods of data collection seem most appropriate). These questions about identity are present in methodological questions about whether researchers are "insiders" or "outsiders" to those with whom they are studying. While many have complicated the fantasy of being *either* an insider or outsider (Abu-Loghod 1991; Haney 1996), or that one of these positions may elicit "better" data (Aguilar 1981), or threaten data (Horowitz 1986) and the ethics of this position (Naples 1996), an examination of how identity *takes shape in the research encounter* has been less explored.

The self-reflexivity asked of researchers that often results in a simple recitation of identities (i.e. I am a white, middle class cis-gendered woman from Canada) fails to recognize the complexity of the epistemological and ontological assumptions that undergird these confessions. As Nagar (2010) argues

> This kind of identity-based reflexivity is problematic because it fails to distinguish systematically among the ethical, ontological and epistemological aspects of fieldwork dilemmas. Consequently, the epistemological dilemma of whether/how it is possible to represent 'accurately' often gets conflated with the issue of ethical relationships and choices, as well as with the ontological question of whether there is a predetermined reality (about researcher–subject relationship) that can be known, represented, challenged or altered through reflexivity (Nagar & Geiger, 2000, p. 3). [p. 179]

As Nagar (2010) points out here, having "accurate" representations is generally imagined to stem from having "ethical" relationships with participants and each of these foci in research sidesteps questions about reality (or, ontological questions) and does not attend to the complex ways in which identity, while historically contingent, is enacted and comes to life through relations and thus in the research encounter itself. As Kirsch (2005) demonstrates, the call for relationship building and intimacy in feminist research as a mode for ethical research provokes its own complications of alienation, disappointment and possible exploitation felt on the part of

participants. These complications have implications not only in how we are oriented to research and communities, but also, importantly, for our epistemological and ontological approaches.

To heed Fine's (1994) suggestion to "work the hyphens" is to attend to the *politics* of location. This politics, articulated by bell hooks (1990), is one that is within "complex and ever shifting realities of power relations" (p. 145). For Fine (1994), to talk only about the Other or the research participant(s), as though the self were an impartial, scientific observer, is to obscure the self as related. I build on what Fine suggests it means to work the hyphen,

> [to] probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations… Working the hyphen means creating occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is, and is not, 'happening between' within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom and with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence (72).

Building on this understanding of the hyphen, I look at how relationships during research are additionally complicated not only through a Self-Other relation, but also in the relationship among, in this case, researcher, volunteers who participated and Nicaraguans who participated: what we might call self-other-other relations. This is not necessarily a question about how *identities* matter (Wagle and Cantaffe 2008), although this is certainly a part of it, but also how *relationships* matter.

This builds on important methodological work about "betweenness" and multiple identities (Nast 1994, Kobayashi 1994, Fontana and Frey 2000, Tarrant 2014, Faria and Mollet 2016). This literature suggests that the ways researchers are figured in their work is as complex as our relations and identities – they are not fixed or pre-determined but rather shift and respond to contexts. Encounters in research cannot be neutral or predicted (Fontana and Frey 2000). As Faria and Mollet (2016) found in their research, shifting conceptualizations of racialization impacted how they were perceived by participants and community members during their fieldwork depending on where they were and their relationships to others. Thus, rather than controlling or predicting how identities emerge and are understood in the field, seeing this process as emergent can provide insight. Nayak (2006) suggests that attending to the

relationships we build during fieldwork is important because it is "embodied configurations through which [identity] is repetitively enacted, performed and tenuously secured" (423). Thus, looking to encounters and betweenness is not only a way to consider our place in the field, but also becomes a site for analysis of power, relationships and identity formation.

While much of recent qualitative literature focuses on identity as ways in which we are either "insiders" or "outsiders" or between, there are other ways we can be in relation to participants. In their work on qualitative research methods, Adler and Adler (1987) identified three "membership roles" of qualitative researchers engaged in observational methods: (a) peripheral member researchers, who do not participate in the core activities of group members; (b) active member researchers, who become involved with the central activities of the group without fully committing themselves to the members' values and goals; and (c) complete member researchers, who are already members of the group or who become fully affiliated during the course of the research (36-61). These three roles are ones that help researchers to think about their involvement in the everyday lives of their participants and their relationships with them, and to consider relationality differently than above – rather than listing identities as bounded categories, Adler and Adler suggest we think about how we relate to participants. Where Nagar (2010) attends to the politics of identity and knowledge, Adler and Adler (1987) are concerned with participation in and distance from the lives of participants. In what follows, I argue that a transnational feminist methodology of encounters asks that we bring these two perspectives together.

The membership roles that we are called into throughout our research must be examined for the ways in which they enact and/or undermine privilege. Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) outline some of the ways to think of relationships as emergent and dynamic as they outline, building on Fine (1994), four different hyphen spaces: insider-outsider (where researchers are considered one of the community and feel at home), sameness-difference (which is centrally around identities i.e. gender or race), engaged-distant (how involved respondents are in the research) and finally, active-actively neutral (how much research engages with the struggles of participants). These hyphen spaces outline the kind of relationships that can be created during the process of researching – from identification of research questions to sharing results. The work of Fine (1994) and Cunlifee and Karunanayake (2013) pushes back against the ways the researcher's

voice has dominated representing the lives of others, and challenges what this means methodologically and in terms of relationality in the field.

The inclusion of others has important political implications. In revisiting her pivotal work, "Under Western Eyes," Mohanty (2003) maps the ways in which multiple curricula in Women Studies have responded to the need to internationalize and represent "new scholarship" in feminist and women's studies. She outlines three strategies through which "other voices" have been included. While her analysis is explicitly about the development of curriculum, these questions of inclusion have important resonances for methodological work – questions about how we approach and understand knowledge. Mohanty (2003) suggests that "it is the way we position historical narratives of experience in relation to each other, the way we theorize relationality as both historical and simultaneously singular and collective that determines how and what we learn when we cross cultural and experiential borders" (238). The questions Mohanty (2003) poses here address the politics of knowledge and relationality – what we know, how we know and, importantly, *who* can know. Mohanty's (2003) analysis of texts and Nagar's (2010) work on identification brings a political read to Adler and Adler's (1987) understanding of membership.

During my research I was called into different relations to my participants. Each of these moments reveals important aspects of the politics of knowledge in methodology and the site of my research in particular. I use Mohanty's work here to attend to the ways in which my encounters with participants through my research, and the encounters I was studying, were moments that "cross cultural and experiential borders" (238). In particular I am interested in extending the "betweeness" discussed by Fine (1994), Nast (1994) and Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) to consider what this looks like when working with multiple groups. Thus, while my research is not about curriculum, it is, at the heart, about how we are able to hear and relate to people across (and between) difference.

In her work Mohanty (2003) identifies three different modes of changing curriculum. The first is the *feminist-as-tourist,* where non-Euro-American cultures and in particular sexist cultural practices are included but "leave power relations and hierarchies untouched since ideas about the centre and margin are reproduced along Eurocentric lines" (239). Secondly she identifies the *feminist-as-explorer,* often enacted in disciplines such as area studies where the "foreign

woman" becomes an object and subject of study but remains figured as outside of the U.S. This inclusion and does not attend to how

> …globalization is an economic, political, and ideological phenomenon that actively
> brings the world and its various communities under connected and interdependent
> discursive and material regimes. The lives of women are connected and interdependent,
> albeit not the same, no matter which geographical area we happen to live in (241).

Finally, she outlines what she calls the *feminist solidarity* model where "the local and the global are not defined in terms of physical geography or territory but exist simultaneously and constitute each other… the focus is not just on the intersections of race, class, gender, nation and sexuality in different communities of women but on mutuality and co-implication, which suggests attentiveness to the interweaving of the histories of these communities" (242). What this work on inclusion in curriculum complicates methodologically is not only how our identities as researchers *impact* our relations with our participants, but also that our conceptualization of difference is crucial to how we consider what we learn and what people tell us (and what we tell people). Echoing Fine's (1994) suggesting that the hyphen is about our personal identities, but also our invention of others, the work of transnational feminism methodologically, is to consider how we imagine the lives of others and our relationships to them. It is not simply that we arrive in the field and interact with participants, but rather that the identities which come to the fore in interactions are relational and historical. While this may be most obvious in my research to think about myself in relation to hosts, this was also important to consider the stories I told about volunteers and how this impacted my interpretation of their stories. Thinking about personal histories and identities and influencing our interpretations and interactions means that the story I give above about my journey from Edmonton to Managua that signals capitalism, heterosexism, and settler colonialism is not only to provide a sense of setting for "the field", but also to map some of the ways in which I was already in relation both through social and historical realities.

That lives are connected to one another, and in relation, is crucial for transnational feminist theory– not just that some people are privileged and others are not, but that the very possibility of privilege relies on others not having this privilege – what Mohanty (2003) talks about as *co-implication*. I see and understand transnational feminism as *necessary* for my project because this was the call of many of the Nicaraguan participants – to see interconnectedness not only

between nations, but also in everyday life. In what follows, I look to moments in my encounters with participants to consider how the ways in which I was called into relation with them reflect larger processes and also simultaneously attend to the intimate. As Faier (2009) writes about her decision to focus on encounters, "[m]y focus on encounters developed in the context of my efforts to understand people's divergent perspectives and of my recognizing of the ways that my relationships with them were not only reshaping my understanding of my world and myself, but also potentially affecting their relationships with each other" (26). In the following section I consider the ways in which I was multiply and complexly called into relationships with others (or hailed in the way that Ahmed [2006] suggests building on Althusser's work [1979]) in my field encounters.

In my research, I was both an insider and an outsider at various times and with both Nicaraguans and volunteers, and despite many difference in our identities (age, racialization, nationality, gender), I was differently called into each of these membership roles outlined by Adler and Adler (1987). In the sections that follow I give three examples of how in different moments I was called into each of these "membership roles" and politicize each of these roles drawing on Mohanty (2003) and Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013). It is important to note that these are not experiences separate from one another, or only found with certain participants. Each of these relations is ongoing and present at different times with nearly every participant. Looking at these moments of being called into relation demonstrates the multiplicity of encounters and highlights the unfinished and undetermined modes of relationality.

On Translation – *active membership*

While interviewing, I was often asked to translate for the volunteers who were participants in my study. This could range from the everyday need for translation – such mundane instances as when orders at the café where I often conducted interviews were mixed up, I would be able to sort them out for my volunteer participants, but also at times of miscommunication between host families and the volunteers living with them. Being called to translate for volunteers hailed me into relationship as an active member researcher – where I was helping volunteers and host families navigate the difficulties of their relationships while not fully endorsing the volunteer abroad program, or becoming a part of it. Being a translator brought me into a relationship *between* volunteers and host families where I was a foreigner who was better able to

communicate with Nicaraguans than volunteers generally are; it thus involved me in their daily lives. These were also often moments where my personal frustrations with volunteers would arise. As an active member who was able to translate I was often positioned as better able to communicate, and this worked to figure me as "closer" to Nicaraguans (both by myself and others). This positioning of me as "closer" to Nicaraguans often worked to validate my presence there, and affirmed the difference between my work and that of short-term volunteers.

In one instance – the instances with which I began this dissertation – I was asked to translate between a host family and the volunteers staying with them to ask what kind of food they liked, how they were feeling in the host family's house and if they were happy. As discussed in the Introduction, being asked to facilitate this translation was telling for my research. I had just completed an interview with the volunteers where they had told me significant details about the family's life. If I had not been asked to do this translation, especially given that the two volunteers told me they spoke "some Spanish", my subsequent interpretation of their interview would have been completely different. Indeed, I use this story to illustrate an important insight for my project not only the ways that American bodies move unheeded without many requirements (including language) through the world, but also the ways in which Americans are called into a knowing subjectivity that asks of them to know about their host family, and to translate their guesses into facts about them.

A focus on encounters and meaning making in this moment also helps me think about, as Faier says, "… negotiating the ways I became a node in relationships *among* them. Many people I met were engaged in sincere and intimate relationships, but significant tensions also existed between and among members of these groups…" (2007, 25). In this case, I was called into relationship between the host family and the students as a translator but through observing and learning about their relation also called me to be generous about the complexities of building relationship across difference. Being called into this relationship between participants and hosts in this moment was the most literal figuring of me between them. This position was available to me because of my history of previous experience in Nicaragua, of knowing some of the host families through my repeated visits, my ability to translate and my investment in encounters that they were living. Thus, being called "between" to translate worked in three ways for my research – first, it helped me to see the kinds of subjectivities that were dominant for volunteers (as knowers) and hosts (as

carers). Second, it revealed to me how often in translating I was positioned as "closer to" and Nicaraguans which worked to secure my position as researcher rather than to highlight my anxieties of, as Vrasti (2012) argues, furthering the surveillance and over-researching of marginalized lives. Finally, it required a generosity on my part in my interpretation to consider the structures that bring hosts and volunteers together, particularly in relation to volunteers.

As we will see in subsequent sections, I was called between encounters for reasons other than translation. Much of the way I was brought into relationship with my participants was to help understand their encounters more fully. While there were other moments in which I was asked to help with linguistic translation – both by hosts and volunteers – it is important to note that this was not the only kind of translation that I was called to do. Often I found myself "stopping" the regular course of the interview rhythm and instead found myself falling into professional roles that I had once held in volunteer abroad. This reflection on relationality, then, not only happens "after the fact" of research but rather in and as a part of these interview encounters themselves

On Commiserating and Mentoring – *complete membership*

I was often called into what felt like a professional relationship with participants while interviewing them. My initial interest in this project has developed as I was mentoring students volunteering in Nicaragua in 2009. I spent three months living in Nicaragua, working with students, placement partners and host families to facilitate learning and to make sure that the program was running well. As such, in my interviews I was often called into relationships with Nicaraguans as a commiserator about how difficult these experiences of working with volunteers can be and how hard it can be to facilitate learning, while other times I felt compelled to act as a mentor to some of the volunteers that I interviewed.

At one point in my research, I interviewed three women who were volunteering together. As a group interview, this was a much different dynamic where they filled each others' stories in, asked one another questions, prompted one another and reflected together about their experiences. As Montell (1999) writes, group interviews are valuable for showing interaction and this can be a valuable resource for researchers. Additionally, it reveals the ways in which groups create their own meanings, and highlights when there is disjuncture in these meanings (Frey and Fontana 1994). While McCafferty (2004) writes that groups often require moderation when they

are composed of strangers, the groups I worked with always knew each other and so required little moderation. This worked to highlight for me themes they often talked about, the language they had agreed upon to talk about experiences and common concerns. In Chapter Three I draw extensively on one of these interviews as providing insight into the ways in which one participant's experience clearly held significance for those she was there with.

During this group interview with four women who were volunteers, I was asking the group about cultural differences that they had noticed. After talking about all of the "common sense" things that Nicaraguans don't do (such as recycling and cleaning the streets and specific regimens of bathroom cleaning) the following exchange happened:

> Nora: Or not flushing your toilet paper

> Becky: Yeah, I keep forgetting that!

> Nora: The first couple of days I kept forgetting to and no matter what, I guess it is a cultural thing, a habit thing.

> Katie (interviewer): It's also a plumbing thing.

As the conversation went on about how difficult it is for the volunteers and how badly it made things smell (and then how absurd they thought scented toilet paper is), I opted to interject to open a conversation about what constitutes "cultural practices" as well as the sewage infrastructure that necessitated not flushing toilet paper. I asked the volunteers what it might mean to talk about this as 'cultural' rather than 'logistical' and what we describe as culture.

In this same interview, one of the other women confided in me (at the prompting of others) about a friendship she had formed with a boy who had taught her surf lessons and how she was struggling through thinking about her relationship and responsibilities to him, while also respecting his right to make decisions about his own life. This struggle, for her, was intense – it was about someone she cared deeply for but also about her role in the world. We talked at length about this in the interview. Later that day I saw the participant again on the street and we chatted more about her experiences. She walked with me to the market and we talked more about her experiences with the boy she had formed a friendship with and how she was thinking about it. We met another time later while I was in the city, to talk more about this situation and how she

was processing. In both of these instances I was called into relationship with these volunteers as a mentor – as someone to help them think through what they were struggling with and in a moment where I felt a *responsibility* for mentorship. In mentoring the volunteers in these moments, it pulled me closer to them – as someone who had struggled with travel and adjustment in the past and who still thinks about relationality, inequality and difference. While volunteers saw me this way, I also felt a responsibility as someone hearing their stories (such as opinions cultural toilet paper practices) to respond and help them think through these stories. This, in many ways, was my alignment with what Cunlifee and Karunayayke (2013) talk about as "active." Thus, I was active in the struggle of volunteers to process their experiences, but I was also active for their host families. In prompting volunteers to think about the context of their experiences, I hoped, would impact how they lived and interacted with their host families and work placements. The "active" stance I was taking, then, was one between hosts and volunteers.

This professional role was not only with volunteers, but also with hosts. In an interview I conducted with a Nicaraguan woman who had been working in volunteer abroad programs for the past three years, she told me about her difficulty working with Canadian youth – it was hard for them to understand cultural differences such as needing to eat supper at home with a family, or getting them to follow the rules of the house where they would be staying, such as no drinking or having to come home before dark. She talked about an activity she had developed to build on ideas of "group contracts" where the group would contribute parts of the contract that they wanted on the list, such as "listening" or "respect," and she would ask them to unpack what they meant by each of these terms. In the most recent year, she had included Nicaraguan host families in this activity because it would give insight to both volunteers and hosts about how ideas often used in these group contracts such as "respect" are conceptualized differently. At this point, the schedule for my interview was completely derailed because I was taken by this activity. In the middle of asking a question from my schedule I said, "Sorry, I am still thinking about that activity, it's such a good one. So, how do you facilitate it?" Again here, I was called into relation as a practitioner interested in thinking through this activity alongside of the participant, and in thinking of the "betweenness" of encounters of hosts and volunteers.

In each of these moments, I stepped or was called into what Adler and Adler (1987) would call a complete member researcher. I was implicated in the experiences of volunteers not only in that

the interview happened *during* their time as volunteers but also in that I made an effort to be a part of their processing of these experiences. This effort was especially influenced by my work as a practitioner in volunteer abroad who believes strongly in the need for mentorship while in placement. Talking with volunteers about their experiences as they happened was also an easy role for me to fall into – I have been working with volunteers for the past seven years and thus was both able to do this work with volunteers, and attuned to moments to prompt further questioning. I also felt a responsibility to helping volunteers talk through their experiences. This responsibility is one I take seriously and one that aligns with my understanding of allyship[6] – one that asks those with privilege to take their learning back to their communities, and to consider how these moments of privilege and inequity are *connected*. Thus, working with volunteers to think through their relationships, or to provide some context to their toilet complaints, is an important piece of how I understand my methodological perspective as a researcher working towards solidarity. Madison (2012) talks about this as a "moral responsibility." These experiences prompted reflections for me not only on relationality in volunteer abroad and activities to promote reflection, but also on the responsibilities I carried.

On Expertise – *peripheral membership*

Finally, and in relation to each of the above experiences, I was often called into relationships with others as an expert. As we have seen in some of the above examples, communication between hosts and volunteers is fraught, and so often at the end of an interview, and usually once I had stopped recording, participants would ask me about the results of my work – what did Nicaraguans *really* think of Americans, why were young people volunteering in Nicaragua and what were they learning? Many of my participants were very invested in volunteer abroad, not only in the specific programs they were involved in, but also in larger questions about its utility or futility. My history of involvement in programming in Nicaragua alongside of my PhD research and functionality in Spanish, as well as my white mobile body led to me being read as an expert on volunteer abroad and Nicaragua.

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[6] My idea of allyship here is influenced by the work of feminists of color who theorize the need for allies who attend to their position, try to work across difference and understand that allyship is not a goal to achieve, but rather a process. In my work, I see allyship as central to both my practical and scholarly contributions.

For example, when I was interviewing Chloe we were wrapping up the interview and she asked me,

> Do you, how do, from the people you're interviewing, how do Nicaraguans view Americans, because I always wondered, because I know they are interfering in the revolution was not good, and a lot of them, the people were angry?

In this moment Chloe was asking me to explain something that she had been wondering about based on the research that I was doing so far. I answered,

> Yeah, so a lot of people I interview [who] are talking about teaching about the revolution and contra war are very clear that it was bad involvement [on the part of the United States], but sort of what you were talking about earlier, this delicate balance of wanting to teach the history but also recognizing that the young people who are here are not the people who were making those decisions and trying to talk about that while they talk about the history, but also that America, and Canada too – we have terrible mines so when I ask about Canadians, that's what they want Canadians to learn about – so it's really interesting, but they talk a lot about that delicate balance of saying 'you're not responsible that this happened, but it is both of our histories so we should learn it.'

Following this interaction, Chloe and I kept talking and she asked me about the transition from the Sandinistas to Chamorro following the election in 1990, some of the recent changes in laws, and actions against femicide in the country as well as perceptions of Ortega, the current president. Most of these questions came from things Chloe had seen or heard in her everyday life, but either because of language or comfort, she didn't feel able to ask Nicaraguans around her.

Volunteers often asked me questions about Nicaragua and vetted their ideas of Nicaragua with me as an "expert" on the country. They told me they felt worried about asking about politics with their host families. Americans especially felt wary about talking of the long history of intervention between the U.S. and Nicaragua, while for Nicaraguans this was a crucial component of learning they wanted for American volunteers. Nicaraguans wanted to ensure that young volunteers were learning about the world, but specifically learning about the world through the history and present of Nicaragua in relation to other countries. Volunteers seemed nervous to approach these topics with their hosts, and so would often ask me for clarity about the

revolution, the dictatorship and the funding of the Contra war. This experience was frustrating for me – to move between interviews where Nicaraguans talked with pride about wanting to share their history and political work to end the dictatorship and how passionate they were to teach about current political systems, while volunteers would tell me it was not polite for them to talk with their hosts about politics. The ways in which volunteers talked with me about Nicaragua were due not only to the linguistic ease of being able to discuss in English but also to the ways in which my identity and positioning signalled me as an "expert" that simultaneously kept their Nicaraguan host families from being seen as experts. Through the repetition of this interaction with multiple volunteers, I began to think about the ways in which Nicaraguans are denied epistemic authority in volunteer abroad programming. This positioning and relationship during encounters in my research helped me to think about the ways in which hosts and volunteers were differently positioned as able to know, and how differing modes of political conversation influenced encounters.

 This call for me as an expert helped me to see the discrepancies through which the desires for a different future were understood for Nicaraguans and hosts –in the next chapter I argue that while for Nicaraguans the context and narrative of solidarity and struggle were key to thinking about a specifically different future, for volunteers their wilful ahistoric perspective was cultivated through neo-liberal and individualizing discourses. In these instances I was being called into relation with my participants as a peripheral research member.

Conclusion

The ways in which we, as researchers, are positioned as members brings "alive" our identities in relation to others – membership is not only about the choices we make about our involvement as researchers, but also about privilege, ethics and politics. It is, importantly, not only choices we make but also how participants see us in relation to them and to those around them. Thus, in some moments of what Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) would call "sameness-difference," I was imagined 'the same' because of language or experience facilitating, while in others I was imagined as "different" because I was a white university student from the Global North. It is important to note that this sameness-difference is also constructed in context and thus compared to other foreigners in Nicaragua I seem more aligned with either hosts of volunteers. This is not to suggest that in moments of "sameness" there was no difference, or recognition of difference,

but rather that through particular lenses (such as experiences of facilitation) I was positioned as closer to or farther from some participants. Attending to methodological encounters as multiple allows us to see the complexity of relation "between' in the field.

The vignettes above aren't only insights into how participants saw me and related to me, but are also epistemological insights into the politics of knowledge in conducting research across and in the midst of difference. Being situated between Nicaraguans and volunteers, sometimes literally, in a project that attempts to see what is happening "on the ground" requires careful consideration of how my relationality with participants, as well as with histories, emerged in research encounters and in analysis. As researchers we must think about how our membership and involvement is not only a choice of *methods* but is also a choice with implications for our epistemological understandings and our relationships with others. This is a move to understand the *co-implication* of research and between lived experiences of both participants and researchers.

While the easy read of solidarity in my work is to "side" with Nicaraguans – to privilege their reading of encounters and their desires –an analysis of encounters leads us to a different view. I often "side" with Nicaraguans – in my frustration with volunteers, and in the struggle to facilitate; but I wonder, how this "siding" is in fact a performative move meant to try and secure my position as "in solidarity", and to see myself as different from volunteers. These positionings and affirmations of myself are about my own struggles with identity and privilege in the field. In truth, the Nicaraguans I interviewed were much more generous with volunteers than I was – they told stories of broken doors at midnight, of hung-over volunteers, or students with extremely picky eating habits with a laugh. They often talked about how they admired the courage of leaving home and living elsewhere, even for a short amount of time, and the difficult learning that volunteers were experiencing. A methodology of encounter focuses attention on complexity and diversity, rather than coherent "sides" to a story. The generosity and frustration of hosts should not be understood as contradictory stories, but rather as illustrative of complexity. A methodology of encounters is not one that attempts to assemble fragments to find the "real thing" but rather one that looks for the different attachments and stakes in encounters as they are narrated in a particular time. Thus, for my interviews, the distance that I desire to measure is a distance of experience and feeling.

As Stone-Mediatore (2003) suggests in relation to storytelling and transnational feminist theory in relation to Third World women's texts, we can see people as "multiply aligned historical subjects only if we re-describe 'historical actors' in such a way that acknowledges the many social relations in which selfhood is constituted, the consequent heterogeneity within identity groups, and the possibility for strategic alignment with varying social groups" (136). This analysis of people as historical subjects and actors situated in systems is one that I trace throughout this dissertation. In the following chapter, I consider the politics of interpretation of interviews alongside of what Mediatore calls "strategic alignment." Thus, I recognize my multiply situated social relations with my participants, not only to show the ways in which we and our 'data' are constituted through social relations, but also to read interviews as recollections and encounters with non-unitary subjects who are made through encounters and relationships with others. Throughout I read my interviews as insights into encounters, not as "true" stories or as stories that tell exactly how things are. Rather, I look to them to understand what it is that is at stake for participants, and what their narratives can tell me about desires, fantasies and identities in volunteer abroad.

This analysis also figures me as a *part* of the encounters in that I became a node in their relationships and their understanding of their experiences. Being called into relationships with volunteers was also a part of the politics of location to which I am attentive. As Viswesaran argues in *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (1994) decolonizing ethnography "requires enacting a politics of location that directs its gaze homeward toward a politics of arrival" (26). Thus, a politics of location is not only one which attends to who we are and how we fit in systems of inequality, but one which also directs our attention to where we came from about how we arrive in different places. In my work I see this politics of arrival that gazes homeward as work that I do with young people who are interested in transnational work. Examining encounters keeps the desire for me to write a dissertation of measurement between the narratives of volunteers and hosts, rather encounters allow us to see these gaps and what they look like on the ground, but to also moments in which they are rich for potential for seeing volunteer abroad and participants differently.

Chapter Two

The Politics Motivating Hosts and Volunteers

As a speaker of Spanish and a former volunteer abroad mentor, I was often asked during my research fieldwork to translate or explain the historical and political context of Nicaragua to volunteers. Being hailed in this way, I became increasingly aware of the contextual contingencies that shaped, and often escaped attention in, encounters between hosts and volunteers – contextual factors such as the Nicaraguan revolution, the promotion of volunteer abroad programs to the volunteers, and current political realities such as the announcement of the canal project while I was doing my fieldwork, or the protests against the increase in femicides. In this chapter, I argue that the contexts in which the expectations, hopes, and fears related to volunteer abroad take shape are central to understanding narrations of both the experiences and motivations of hosts and volunteers. Further, I argue that these contexts are not only about motivations, but also *motivate* the encounter. By this I mean that these contexts should not be understood as pre-existing structures which exist around encounters giving them shape, but rather that the contexts I outline here – advertising and popular critiques of volunteer abroad, as well as Nicaraguan history and politics – not only *lead to* the encounter, but are also always *present in and shape* these encounters. Volunteers are set up for the experience through advertising and critiques of volunteer abroad, and notions of bettering themselves (as a practice of self-making). The latter is often articulated as desires to connect transnationally with subjects of difference, and, through this connection, to learn about the self. Programs develop pedagogical outcomes of volunteer abroad where volunteers learn about themselves in an individualized way, produced through encounters with generalized difference. For Nicaraguans, on the other hand, I suggest that encounters are motivated by a history of intervention and, similar to volunteers, a desire to connect transnationally. Yet, for hosts this connection is articulated as desires to teach about *politicized* difference and about specific relations of difference. Thus, while for volunteers the motivation and motivating factors for participation in volunteer abroad are about self-making and an encounter with (neoliberal, apoliticized) difference, hosts are motivated through desires to teach about (politicized) difference and solidarity. When I use "motivations" in this chapter I do so to articulate a constellation of attachments and emotions that participants bring to the encounter – these include hopes, fears,

imaginings, love, and promises. While current literature talks about motivations of volunteers (Tiessen 2012, Georgeau 2012), I include hosts in my consideration and complicate "motivations" to include the complex emotional attachments present in what motivates encounters, not only the articulated desired "outcomes."

Much of the current literature that talks about homestay or host family experiences, which are an important site for my study, focuses on the experiences, motivations and outcomes of students. These authors explore how homestays increase language learning, increase commitment to international travel and experiences, and think about how homestays and volunteer abroad are beneficial for students (c.f. Knight and Schmidt Rinehart 2004, 2010; O'Sullivan 1999; Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight 2005; Young and Cassidy 2004). While there is an increasing interest in the experience of those who work with or host volunteers (c.f. MacDonald and Vorstermans 2015, Mostafenezhad 2014), this is still a significant gap in the literature. This gap reveals the ways in which volunteer abroad is conceptualized as experiences *for volunteers*. Programs are heavily advertised and geared towards those who could be volunteers. This advertising is found "at home" – while volunteers are looking at websites or on their university campuses – but also while they are already abroad through tourism companies, language schools and for-profit companies on the ground where they will volunteer. There is little research about how host communities are called into these experiences. Indeed, many of the host families that I spoke with had not applied or been interviewed, but rather had heard about a need for hosts through a friend or a colleague. The process for host families was much less formal and organized than it was for the volunteers in my study. In the next section I look at the motivations that hosts told me compelled them to participate.

Host Motivations

In this section I look at the ways in which Nicaraguans talked about their motivations for hosting. I suggest that the historical and political context of Nicaragua is such that host participants are "set up" for a politicized encounter. While there were other motivations, as we will see, that can be understood through a lens of developing social capital at a time when neo-liberalism is striking hard in the Nicaraguan economy, this chapter suggests that the particularity of the Nicaraguan context give rise to a political approach to encountering volunteers.

In the interviews that I did with hosts there was a clear expectation that these programs would teach volunteers about Nicaraguan history, and that volunteers should live alongside of Nicaraguans and participate in their everyday lives - what most of them named and described as solidarity. While Vrasti's (2012) work in Ghana and Guatemala and Mostafenezhad's (2014) work in Thailand didn't find these calls for solidarity in their work, I suggest that this is because of the specificity of Nicaraguan history and the historical experiences of those hosting or working with international solidarity.

Nicaragua has a long history of international intervention. This long history of is one which hosts prioritized as something to teach volunteers about, but also one which I argue impacts how hosts conceived of volunteer abroad programs and how they wanted to work with volunteers. It is not only a history that Nicaraguans speak of, but also one that is tangible in the cities where I did my research. As shown in the Introduction, murals in the city depict histories of American intervention, of the revolutionary hero Sandino stomping on the heads of both the previous dictator and the imperialist Uncle Sam. Within Leon, the revolution is especially tangible where evidence of the dictatorship and the involvement of the United States are commemorated in a prison converted into a museum and a tank to prove American involvement in the Contra war. This is not a dry history of Nicaragua found in books, but rather one which Nicaraguans talk with me about openly each time I visit (from friends to cab drivers to bartenders) and one which they walk through in their everyday lives; where bombed churches have not been repaired, and houses still have bullet holes. People daily pass by the site where four protesting university students were gunned down that is marked by regularly repainted white crosses on the street.

Leading up to and during the revolution and the Contra war (1979-1989), the Sandinistas called for international solidarity in order to bring attention to their cause. This came in the form of international recognition of the Sandinistas as a ruling party, of financial support, of arms and goods (often from the USSR or Cuba), and with international brigades that traveled to Nicaragua. These brigades were often understood as observers to the war (as the United States was denying involvement) but also at times participated in fighting, and other tasks such as bike assemblage or medical help. This history of the revolution and Contra war is still present and vivid for many Nicaraguans, most of whom can name family members who died in the struggle for

independence, but also because at the time of my research one of the leaders of the revolution, Daniel Ortega, was again (controversially) President.

I suggest that this experience of solidarity as well as the importance of international support to the Sandinista victory has implications for how Nicaraguans approach volunteer abroad. Nicaraguans talked with me about wanting volunteers to learn about their historical and contemporary situation. Motivations for participation in volunteer abroad related to solidarity were articulated as mutual learning, reciprocity, and learning that would lead volunteers to remain connected politically to Nicaragua.

Mutual Learning

When I spoke with host families about their decisions to host volunteers, they often talked about hosting as their chance to interact with foreigners because they would not have the opportunity to travel outside of Nicaragua. As I will discuss in the next chapter, encounters are shaped by the desire to know others, but this access to others is differentiated through mobility. Where volunteers have the ability to move relatively freely (often complaining about the ten dollar visa fee they have to pay when they arrive in Nicaragua), Nicaraguans I spoke with talked of the difficulty of travel for them and the expense of visas (as well as the uncertainty if they would be granted, and the labour required to apply). Hosts cited cross-cultural and language learning as the two of the main reasons that they would want to host volunteers in their house. For example, when I asked Carlita who had been hosting both volunteers and tourists for the past five years she said "we learn new things, new cultures, we learn a little bit about each one." For Carlita, having a volunteer stay in her home was a way to bring intercultural learning to her.

Both host families and facilitators emphasized that teaching and learning were the main reasons they were involved - they spoke about wanting to teach young volunteers about Nicaragua, historical and contemporary Nicaraguan politics as well as international relations. This often was initially described as "cross cultural learning" but when I asked more about what this looked like hosts often talked about history and politics as key pieces to this learning. When I interviewed a community cooperative called Santa Ana, they told me "the richest experience is that we share everything with them – and that they learn so many new things. This is important for us, because they are young, they are learning now, they can take it back to their families, their experiences in

our houses." Like this cooperative, facilitators saw their work as contributing to a different world. They imagined that these programs may create a different future for Nicaragua because the volunteers they were working with would go on to become leaders in their communities in the Global North. It was not simply that they were working with individual volunteers, but that these volunteers would subsequently take their learning to their communities back home.

Host moms (who did most of the labour in host families of caring for volunteers) often described hosting as a way for them to have companionship throughout the day, as they were often women who stayed *at* home and *in* the home for most of the day. Host moms also described hosting as beneficial for their children, a (small) financial gain for their family, as well as a chance to teach others about their lives. For example, Mia, who had been hosting for two years, told me when she decided, "I was thinking about my daughter. I was hoping that they would learn another language from another country because here in Nicaragua it is hard for us." For many of the people hosting, it was important that there were benefits for them *other* than financial compensation; having a volunteer in the house was seen as a way of accessing English language, finances for projects such as future work on their house, and beneficial for the future of their children in terms of language learning and cultural learning.

Thus we can see that motivations for host families include the reciprocal development of social capital, as well as access to increased income in the home, or potential future connections. Vrasti (2012) rightly points out that the *institutional structure* of volunteer abroad is such that volunteers are poised to develop social capital while hosts are not, thus perpetuating inequality and reinforcing the types of people seen as "potential leaders." It is significant to note, however, that the Nicaraguan participants in this research were motivated by the development of social capital. While it may not be a part of institutional design in volunteer abroad programs, it is a significant hope on the part of hosts.

Reciprocity and Living Alongside Of

While host families and facilitators talked about the desire for solidarity, this was often articulated through the term *reciprocity.* Isabella, a facilitator, told me about the struggles she has had in planning programs for the American youth she works with, in that often projects are

designed for volunteers rather than community members. One of the reasons for working with the organization she was with now was because

> …my studies were about planning and tourism. So, I started doing things and practicums related to this and I learned of the founder of the organization… but one of the things I learned from my studies and that was really important to me was to create tourism with social responsibility – something that was good for volunteers, but also the people who receive help and with participation.

For the Nicaraguans that I spoke to, ensuring that the work was reciprocal, that there were some benefits for community, host families and volunteers was crucial. This was often named as solidarity.

This desire to teach volunteers about the context, and for volunteers to take that learning home was often talked about as a call for solidarity through *mutual learning*. Selena, a host mother, told me she

> …was interested in having this relation and to get to know about the work culture of the organization [where the volunteer would work] but also [the culture of] those who come to this country. In this way, it was to know more about their culture and what they would be doing and what they want. What they do, how they do it and all of this can open things up because it is in the manner of solidarity, how we can help to improve a little and that they feel good and that they can be successful in their work because we are benefiting from their work too, right?

We can see in this interview with Selena the ways in which cross cultural learning is not only about learning songs or dances, but also about solidarity and exchange. This motivation was heard throughout my interviews. While this idea of mutuality was important, it often became clear in conversations with hosts that the experience and desires of volunteers came first (see Chapter Five: *A Hopeful Pedagogy*). For example, in the above quote from Selena, it is important that volunteers "feel good" as a part of this connection.

Nicaraguans often talked about the beauty of being able to share their lives and stories, and wanting the volunteers to live like them alongside of them. This call was a call for being in

"profound relation" - Nicaraguans talked about wanting to be connected to volunteers deeply (see Chapter Three: *Transformation through Proximity*). The relationships hosts talked about forming with volunteers were very important to them, and this relationship building was key to solidarity. To get to know families and to live in their struggle was a way for volunteers to act in solidarity. For one host mother I interviewed, she told me that when a past volunteers came back to Nicaragua to visit it was especially meaningful to her because it signified to her that "they had meant as much to her, as she had meant to them". For Nicaraguans, especially host families, they were motivated to build meaningful connections with the volunteers in their house, not only in the hopes of transforming their political future, but also to have a connection with volunteers in the future.

A Different Political Future

Many hosts told me that they hoped that their work in volunteer abroad would impact the political life that volunteers lead in the future - whether that means supporting companies that are against the destructive mining that is happening in Nicaragua under the leadership of foreign companies, or voting differently. Hosts saw this politicized outcome as one created through mutual learning, living reciprocally and learning about the history and context of Nicaragua. This learning that they wanted for volunteers to take home was also often specific to the countries that they were from – for Canadians to learn about mining, those from the United States to learn about free trade agreements and their international policies, and for Germans to learn about the importance that having young people funded to volunteer for a full year has made to social service sector in Nicaragua. Thus, the pedagogical understanding of solidarity for hosts is specific to the lives of volunteers – it is not enough to buy fair trade, for example, but rather volunteers are called to have a specific understanding about the relationship between their country and Nicaragua.

Nicaraguans found themselves involved in volunteer abroad through a complex weaving of pedagogical hopes designed to develop a political sensibility of solidarity. These clearly articulated goals of solidarity were not necessarily what initially brought Nicaraguan hosts to get involved in volunteer abroad – they found their way into this work through family members, or a related profession, and were usually not actively recruited. Volunteers, on the other hand hear about volunteer abroad in many different parts of their lives, spend time thinking about applying

and have even heard popular critiques of program that shape their choices. In the next section I look at the ways in which the context of volunteers motivates their participation in these encounters.

Volunteer Motivations: Self-Making

Volunteer abroad programs are often advertised as a way to make vacation meaningful, and to contribute to the communities and people with whom volunteers stay. With the increase of desire for volunteer abroad programs, and with a growth of organizations and companies facilitating these experiences, there is a concurrent increase in marketing. Universities are often postered, presentations are made in classes, and organizations advertise through Facebook and email applications. People who have volunteered and have since returned home are encouraged to help share the message of the importance and benefits of volunteering through presentations, posts, reviews and sharing with friends. Volunteer abroad is not only advertised "at home" but also in Nicaragua – tourist companies I walked past in Leon had signs suggesting that they could arrange "eco-volunteer" opportunities. The owner of a Spanish language school in Nicaragua who I knew had begun to arrange volunteer opportunities because this was what they told me their clients were asking for. The increase that I have seen in the past five years of tour companies and schools in Nicaragua advertising volunteer opportunities within Nicaragua speaks to multiple aspects of volunteer abroad – that it is profitable and thus more people are involved, but also demonstrates that people who are "just" tourists are looking to "give back" while they are in Nicaragua.

From Development to Pedagogy

In Kate Simpson's research on students who use their gap year (between high school and college or university) to participate in volunteer programming, she examines the ways in which these projects "produce and reproduce particular notions of the 'Third World', of 'the other' and of 'development'" (2004, 682). Simpson (2004) looks at how the language of volunteer abroad programs posits volunteers in relation to those with whom they work. In her study, she finds that often these projects do not use 'development' to describe their work or what volunteers will do, but rather use vague phrases such as "making a difference," "doing something worthwhile," or "contributing to the future of others" (683). In these ads, programs and projects, volunteers are

not recruited for their specific skills or their knowledge of a geographical region but rather to 'help others' and more often to help their personal growth. This stands in contrast to the constellation of motivations that hosts articulate which are centered on learning with and reciprocity. The dropping of development language and particularities of place and people shields volunteer abroad against concerns about international development and privilege, positioning it as a way to work with others internationally without moral or other complications. As Mostafenezhad (2014) and Vrasti (2012) have shown, a focus on professional development and sentimentality results in a seemingly "neutral" and individualized sense of morality. This language of volunteer programs, which conflates helping others with the development of the self, operates to assuage the moral anxieties about what volunteer abroad is accomplishing and its associated critiques. Thus, in an ironic turn, volunteer abroad programming attempts to address the very structures of inequity upon which it relies for its existence. Inequalities such as those we imagine which "require" development intervention, such as poverty or low literacy rates, but also those that are crucial to the possibilities for programming, such as unjust mobility regulations and the overpolicing of racialized bodies. While recently there has been a shift to understanding volunteer abroad as *educational* rather than developmental*,* the volunteer work remains central, and the repeated refrain of "wanting to give back" despite "getting more", reveals the lasting importance of this development labour to the structure of volunteer abroad.

As volunteer abroad is seen as a self-making project where volunteers learn about themselves, it is presented through an apoliticized idea of "helping." This presentation is often deployed by organizations in their promotional materials, in which ideas of international development are invoked. Development discourse is often presented as neutral and apolitical and thus, as organizations deploy development language this construes their work as similarly apolitical. In his study of development work in Lesotho, Ferguson (1992) argues that discourses of development *depoliticize* the articulation of inequity and power so that development is framed as a neutral "hand up" rather than looking to systemic and structural causes of inequity both locally and globally. I understand volunteer abroad advertising as mirroring this process that Ferguson outlines (1992) in its uneven adoption of development discourse; in the articulation of supposedly "equal" benefits gained by both volunteer and host (personal growth for the former and community development for the latter), and the suggestion that the desire to help is inherently good. The ability to travel and help build schools, construct solar ovens, or to teach is

grounded in inequity. In order for some people to travel to help, others must be seen as in need of help. The framing of development as neutral or apolitical, and the lauding of the desire to help, alongside of the accumulated social capital for volunteers, works to obscure, and perpetuates systems of inequality. As Vrasti (2012) and Mostafenezhad (2014) show, these programs rarely talk about nation states, or structural, historical and political problems. Thus, volunteer abroad programs rely on apolitical representations of help and development that enable the foregrounding of volunteer learning and transformation without undermining the possibility for their travel.

Ambivalent Motivations for Development and "Helping"

In this section I look at three different sending organizations and their advertising to provide insight into the ways in which programs are marketed and how this reveals some of the desires and fears which volunteers (and often their parents) bring to imagining volunteer abroad experiences. I suggest that these websites figure the Global South as undifferentiated and that their focus on safety, self-development and assuaging anxieties reveals that people do not come to volunteer abroad necessarily because of commitment to a site of change or a type of work. Rather they come with complicated desires for self-growth (both personally and professionally). The organizational websites I draw from are not exclusively those of participants I interviewed, but rather are intended to give a sense of the frames used to represent and sell volunteer abroad experiences.

The websites of larger organizations I analyze resemble one another. They often feature images of white people helping children of color in unnamed locations, include links about what "you can do," and provide sections which seem to be in response to some of the more popular critiques of volunteer abroad that are circulating in the public realm. Of course, these websites are geared for volunteers and so are meant to entice them and to address the questions, concerns, and desires that they have. Indeed, these websites, I argue, do not give insight into the *actual* experiences of volunteer abroad but rather into the imaginaries that volunteers bring to the table – both of what is pleasurable and fearful. In the analysis of these websites, following Saukko, I see discourses as "'material-semiotic' forces, which emerge from a specific historical context and effectuate changes that are both symbolic and very concrete" (2003, 13). Thus, I draw on the

content of websites as insight into the symbolic of volunteer abroad, but also as representations that produce and are produced by experience.

Specifically, I look at three organizations – Cross-Cultural Solutions, Global Volunteering International and Global Glimpse – and draw from blog posts that discuss volunteer abroad as well. Cross-Cultural Solutions (CCS) partners with many universities including Duke University and the University of California San Diego. In 2015, they sent 2050 volunteers to 10 countries. Global Volunteer International (GVI), which has 150 projects in 25 countries that are run alongside local projects, say that they offer a "better experience guaranteed" because of their "passionate staff, unique programs, amazing locations, [and] cultural immersion. It's just different with GVI." The experiences that they offer range from expeditions, to volunteer holidays, to multi-country combos to long-term volunteering. Global Glimpse is relatively new to Nicaragua but also works in Ecuador and the Dominican Republic. I analyze these websites below to begin to understand the contexts in which the motivations for volunteers are developed. These include the wish to help others, the hope of learning about the self and concerns about global inequity. These three websites are some of the organizations of which I interviewed volunteers and hosts, but are also representative of the ways in which volunteer abroad is advertised.

While volunteers do not find themselves attracted specifically to programs based on specific location or type of work, their motivations largely revolve around volunteer abroad as a self-making project (Tiessen 2008, Georgeau 2012). Each of the websites of organizations that I looked at had a focus on the development and growth of the volunteer. Cross-Cultural Solutions (which is a non-profit but with significant reported net assets), a self-proclaimed leader in the field for the past 20 years, uses the tagline "Volunteer abroad. Change their world. Change Yours. This Changes Everything". Potential volunteers are told:

> A volunteer abroad with Cross-Cultural Solutions will change you. Change the way you see other cultures. Maybe even change how you live your life. All while you change the lives of others for the better. Ultimately we're changing the way volunteering is done, making it a safe, exciting adventure of a lifetime for people of all ages and walks of life.

Significantly here, change is differentiated – volunteers will change how they see other cultures and possibly how they live, while the changes for host communities are coded as making their lives better – supposedly through the projects and work of the volunteer. The tension between the changes for host communities and in volunteers emerges in the desire for self-making of the volunteer justified through their work in Nicaragua. Where volunteers are individually developing social capital and becoming leaders, locals are collectively benefiting through the material labour of volunteers.

Global Glimpse says that they will "open the eyes of tomorrow's leaders" and that they are working to "empower a new generation of Americans to become responsible citizens." Significantly, hosts do not seem central to, or are at least invisible in the articulation of, the purported transformational goals of these volunteer programs: Global Glimpse reports that "97% of alumni said that they have a clearer understanding of global interdependencies because of Global Glimpse," CCS volunteers are changing their worlds, and GVI alumni are becoming global citizens[7].

Despite this focus on the shifts in volunteer attitudes and perspectives (i.e. the pedagogical outcomes as directed at volunteers), there are also sections of the website devoted to questions about the *impact* of the projects that volunteers will be participating in. Cross-Cultural Solutions says that they pair volunteers based both on their top two choices as well as their skills – indicating that there is some thought to placements based on what volunteers may be able to contribute. GVI is clear that they partner with *local* organizations – indicating that their projects are developed "on the ground". This discourse of "the local" works to assuage fears and common critiques of development projects imposed from outside as being useless. Still, however, there is little talk in these promotional materials about how projects are decided upon, which community members are developing these projects and what "local" means.

On the websites, there are often references to "locals" and the impact on the ground, yet, these "impacts" often remain disconnected from the actual work of volunteers. Cross-Cultural Solutions explains that their fees are significant because they are paying locals a living wage,

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[7] A discussion of global citizenship is beyond the scope of this paper, but there is a significant literature on troubling ideas of global citizenship and how it is conceptualized in relationship to study and volunteer abroad (Jorgenson and Shultz 2012, Tiessen and Huish 2013).

with these locals being listed as "the CCS directors, drivers, cooks, and house guards, and to make sure that they're all expertly trained." GVI even mentions that their projects seek to make "long-term, sustainable contributions toward key global and local issues as contained in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals." Each of these organizations highlights first-hand experience as central to creating long-term change, with CCS suggesting that change only comes from small acts of kindness- not from governments, big organizations or the UN. Thus, the change that is articulated, when related to volunteer work, is through the everyday self-making of the volunteer (as [benign] global citizens or being more aware of global inequalities), through relationship building, and through "local" projects, but with very few details about the actual impacts on community or the learning of community members, let alone the mention of the sort of learning that Nicaraguans desire for volunteers about history and politics or connections between countries of citizenship.

The Customized Experience

The websites of sending organizations rarely offer specific details about work of placements or locations. Larger volunteer abroad programs are often for-profit organizations, or at the least non-profit organizations with significant reported assets. Those which coordinate multiple sorts of trips rarely advertise based on what country a volunteer could go to, but rather on what broad region (i.e. Latin America, Africa, Asia), what kind of work they want to be doing (i.e. with children, with animals, construction), or how long they are able to spend abroad (anywhere between five days to two years). That these criteria are central to the websites of organizations suggests that volunteers are looking to select their placement based on these preferences – length of stay, type of work, and region – rather than on preferences related to history or politics. That most of these organizations do not say much about the location of placement suggests that this is not a concern of volunteers. This echoes what I found in my research where volunteers rarely knew much about Nicaragua before coming and did not choose their placements based on the country or work specifically. Rather, the Global South ambiguously stands in undifferentiated relation as a location for experience rather than with specific histories, work placements and contexts.

Often when I talked with volunteers, their motivations were not tied spatially, politically or emotionally to Nicaragua and often not even to the work they would be doing. None of the

volunteers, save one, that I interviewed had particularly chosen Nicaragua for reasons other than cost. This mirrors the online representation of volunteer abroad. Here potential volunteers are encouraged to consider their length of stay, type of work or region (such as "Asia" or "Africa") rather than specifics of the community they will get involved in. We can see here that the motivations for volunteers in choosing their placements is often organized around their needs (how much time they have, what they can afford, and what work they are interested in), rather than in the needs of the community or what each placement is designed to teach volunteers.

Volunteers often could not recall exactly how they had heard about the program they were volunteering with, or specifics of what had drawn them to *that* program. Most of what they talked about in differentiation was that it was the program their school had, it was affordable, or they just fell into it. One volunteer, Grace, said a teacher had told her about the program and so she had saved the information in her phone and then "ended up coming" - but the details between these two moments (such as an application process) were foggy for her. While Tamara, on the other hand, had applied for a different program to which she was not admitted and so then found herself with her backup program and in Nicaragua rather than Costa Rica. The application process, which varied from program to program, was not well remembered by most volunteers. When I asked volunteers how they had prepared for coming on their trip - looking up history, or culture or anything of that sort - most said that they had not prepared at all, even when the programs they were participating in had asked them to do so and had suggested or circulated resources.

Choosing Programs

In an interview I did with three women participating in a program that involved language learning and volunteering for credit, Nora said that it "is an opportunity for all of us to use whatever Spanish skills we have to further them" while Becky said "I would think most of us stumbled upon it, either a couple people came into our Spanish grammar classes and told us that this trip was happening and then there's also a webpage, like the program was listed under summer study abroad programs with a couple of other options; this was one of the two options in Hispanic countries." These volunteers were each from the same university and the specificity of Nicaragua was not important to them, while the language-learning was their primary motivator as it related not only to their studies, but would provide them with credit for their degrees.

Another volunteer, Louise, who was on a programmed trip told me she had learned about the program through her university, said that it was something she wasn't expecting herself to do

> …it totally doesn't relate to my major or anything, so if anything I'm a music major so a lot people of to Austria or Europe to do some kind of… and yeah, that's why I wanted to do it. Just because it was so different from anything I would do and I have very limited Spanish too, to the whole thing was just going to be a big adventure.

When I asked Louise further about her decision, she said she "wanted to study abroad, I just didn't know exactly where and cost is a huge thing and I had a scholarship opportunity for this trip through my university so it just really worked out well." When I interviewed Mindy and Abby who were from the same university and sharing a host family, Abby said she was originally interested in going to Spain to practice her Spanish but she had heard about the Nicaragua trip and knew she liked volunteering and so "I just jumped in, I didn't have any idea what I was signing up for." Interestingly, when I asked Mindy about her motivations for doing her program she said, "initially I was attracted to the agricultural part, but it totally reversed and now what I value most is the family and being here and that's what I've learned most from." One student, who was on a three week programmed trip told me that she was interested

> …in pursuing a career in environmental science and sustainability so [the organization's] goals and their mission statement are really in line with things I am interested in and plus, it's just a really great experience to have a cultural exchange and have these experiences in a different country and really immerse yourself in a world that's completely different and alien compared to your own life at home.

Thus we can see that as volunteers talk about it, and as volunteer abroad programs advertise it, the motivations that bring people to participate are different from hosts in that they are focused on the development of volunteers through skills, language learning, being out of a comfort zone when paired with programs that matched the length, cost and interest that they had. Importantly to the decisions that volunteers made were concerns around safety and the best possible program for the development of the self.

Safe and Supported Self-Making

The field of volunteer abroad is huge. According to Nancy McGehee (2013) volunteer tourists spend between £832 million and £1.3 billion per year. Each of the organizational websites is similarly concerned with setting itself apart from other organizations. As GVI advertises, the experience with them is better. Projects Abroad has a list of what sets them apart, including; their track record, safety and backup, flexibility and variety, quality accommodations, volunteer community and going the extra mile. While the advertising among these organizations demonstrates striking similarities, they are attempting to distinguish themselves in a marketplace of experiences. This move to distinguish themselves from one another is largely through their program being a better place in which to develop the self.

Importantly, organizations argue that their placement is unique because it is a safer learning space for self-making than other programs. These organizations are each concerned with the safety of volunteers - there are links on each website to explain how safe their programs are (see Chapter Four: *The Intimate in Volunteer Abroad Encounters* for more on safety). In an FAQ section of the CCS website, the question of why one would have to pay for a volunteer experience is posed. This reveals the anxiety about if volunteers are truly able to help – for if they were, why would they have to pay (see Heron 2007, Heron forthcoming, Zemach-Bersin 2007). The organizational response is framed around security and argues that volunteers are paying for the work that CSS does to make their volunteer placements safe and responsible, and for the aspects that convert volunteering from simply helping to an improvement of the self,

> …with CCS, you don't pay to volunteer, you pay for the assurance of living in a safe and comfortable Home-Base; an opportunity to be completely immersed in a warm and welcoming community, and to find the family you never knew you had.

Almost all of these larger organizations provide experiences that are with and in groups, rather than as individuals or independently. CCS offers a running list of trips on their website where there are still have spots available, while Global Glimpse partners with schools. The group dynamics of these programs structured to keep volunteers in groups are usually talked about alongside and as a part of their safety precautions. Interestingly, hosts that I spoke with often imagined that one of the reasons volunteers chose Nicaragua was because it is known as the safest Central American country. However, this was not something I heard from volunteers as a

part of their motivations. It is also not advertised on websites as larger organizations are not specifically targeting countries.

Volunteering with Local Organizations Instead

While I don't talk about them in depth here, it is important to note that for organizations that only worked in Nicaragua and whose staff I interviewed, their advertising was often geared towards potential volunteers who had already heard about their work or were already in Nicaragua. These organizations offered much more context and information about the work volunteers would be doing (and often entailed a longer application process). For some volunteers, like Peter, who was in Leon for three months, financial concerns were central to making his decision on *where* to spend his time. Peter had been in Costa Rica previously and decided to stay in Leon and volunteer to stay in Central America. He said "to be honest, one of the biggest things was the cost of living in Leon, it was so cheap that it made it possible to volunteer." While Peter was dedicated to volunteering, his decision was focused through financial constraints. Cost was both a source of both anxiety and frustration for many volunteers. Guy, who was also in Leon for three months said that he had been doing a lot of backpacking and wanted to

> …continue traveling, but… also wanted to volunteer somewhere and give back and so… looked up volunteer opportunities in Spanish-speaking countries. I looked at ones that involved hiking as well, and this organization hit the nail on the head and so I was like for sure, I'm definitely going to work with them.

The motivations of volunteers who found their own way to volunteering seemed to be organized around affordability, previous connections, and development of skills in their field.

For example, Christie, a long term volunteer (who had been in Nicaragua over a year) told me that she really wanted to be involved with the organization she was volunteering with because it was in line with the program she had just graduated from at college, and was interested in

> …creating more horizontal, equal relationships rather than vertical relationships of people being in positions of power and privilege and providing for those who do not have, even though it's pretty much a reality… we come, whether we want to admit it or not, we come from a place of privilege and any kind of relationships we're going to have

with the communities that we work with is gonna be an unequal exchange… and being
aware of that and actually addressing it was really powerful and important for me with
the organization.

Christie had done some previous work with the organization and knew about their work before
traveling to volunteer with them. We can read in this part of the interview that, while she was
interested in volunteering, she also has a clear articulation of the critiques of volunteerism as
outlined above. The organizations' work to address these concerns and critiques was a part of
what had compelled her to work with them. Hannah, a volunteer of two months with an
organization addressing an issue specific to one area in Nicaragua, had similarly had previous
contact with the organization because her cousin had worked with them. When I asked her about
her motivations she said that as she was thinking about coming, it was important for her that the
work she would be doing was in line with her degree and that she had

> … studied abroad in Italy and… it was my first big trip where I was actually able to
> travel on my on and to start to see things, and so while I was over there, like, I loved it so
> much and it was one of those moments where I was like, there's so much of the world I
> haven't seen.

For Hannah, the combination of being able to apply her skills from her degree, alongside of
being able to travel and see the world were key motivators. Hannah also recalled the application
process, unlike other participants, and told me that it was quite in-depth - she had to do two
Skype interviews and send in an application as well as her resume. In contrast, other programs
such as the one that Louise volunteered with, had little prior communication and Louise told she
had said in her application that she would be a good participant because she had worked on a
potato farm before, but could remember little else about the process or content of the application.
Yet, despite this difference between volunteers in what they knew about their work placement
prior to coming to Nicaragua, most volunteers knew little about the contemporary and political
realities of Nicaragua, as well as the history. The differentiation between those who work with
organizations specific to Nicaragua and those who come with larger programs is significant in
that it reveals the different ways in which volunteers' attention is focused through the orientation
of their sending organization.

Responding to Popular Critiques of Volunteer Abroad

The websites of sending organizations illuminate the hopes and expectations of potential applicants regarding the positive effects of volunteering, including transformation and self-affirmation through connections with locals. The websites also speak to the anxieties that might prevent young people from applying. Thus the websites offer extensive information regarding the safety of the programs, but also outline accommodation options, offer money management tips, and address the impact the work has on local communities. Many of these are also concerns raised by more recent critiques, both scholarly and in popular culture, of international development and international aid. Organizations that work internationally, particularly when soliciting donations, often describe how little of their funds go towards administrative costs. Despite recent critiques of development that includes those in the South (Kothari 2001), projects that are local and smaller-scale, such as micro-credit loans and improving access to education, are being heralded as solutions and this translates into volunteer abroad advertising. By addressing common critiques, such as excessive administrative costs or a top "top-down" management structure, volunteer abroad programs seek to distance themselves from the heavily critiqued field of international development. Following Vrasti (2012) and Mostafenezhad (2014), I suggest this shift away from development language also serves to shift the focus to cultural exchange and self-transformation. In an era of neoliberal responsibilization, this means moving away from attending to the outcomes of the *projects* and instead emphasizing instead the outcomes and richness of experience for the volunteers.

Recently, popular critiques of volunteer abroad programming are spreading. These critiques are voiced by academics, but also include popular media figures such as Teju Cole who talks about the "white saviour industrial complex." But even sending organizations such as Free the Children are contributing to these critiques, as are popular bloggers. The critiques question, for example, why volunteers wouldn't stay in their own country to help someone, given that there is poverty "at home." But they also include larger concerns about the concrete benefits of this work and critically assess the ways in which volunteer abroad secures a particular white identity, now solidified around helping and development. These critiques should not be read as separate from the websites analyzed above, but rather as a part of the discursive landscape that motivates volunteer abroad encounters.

A popular blog post from 2014 written by Lauren Kascak and Sayantani Dasgupte on the *Pacific Standard* (originally on *Sociological Images*) called "#Instagramming Africa: The Narcissism of Global Voluntourism" focuses on the ways in which the production of images from peoples' time volunteering and voluntouring in Africa works to frame how prospective volunteers imagine their time abroad. Ultimately, the authors argue,

> In the end, the Africa [that] we voluntourists photograph isn't a real place at all. It is an imaginary geography whose landscapes are forged by colonialism, as well as a good deal of narcissism. I hope my fellow students think critically about what they are doing and why, before they sign up for a short-term global volunteer experience" (para 20).

Kascak and Dasgupte outline three different images they see repeated in this unreal representation of Africa as the "The Suffering Other, The Self-Directed Samaritan, and The Overseas Selfie." This article, widely shared and mentioned to me in interviews by volunteers who were concerned about the usefulness of their time in Nicaragua, critiques the centrality of the volunteer in each of these images. As volunteers shared with me the information about this blog post, they articulated their fears that volunteering was more about them than it was for those they worked with and that they were self-absorbed for participating. Given the popularity of this blog post there is something significant stake in the defense and critique of volunteer abroad. It also demonstrates the ways in which these critiques have been taken up and resonates with some of the worries volunteers have about their efficacy.

It is not this blog post alone that creates the popular landscape of critique. Similarly, in *The Guardian*, Ian Birrell (2010) critiques the trends of volunteering in orphanages in Cambodia, and describes this volunteering as irresponsible. He says, "Insiders call them guilt trips. All those teenagers heading off on gap years, fired up with enthusiasm. Those middle-aged professionals spending a small fortune to give something back to society. And those new retirees determined to spend their downtime spreading a little happiness" (para 6). Citing a report on volunteer abroad (to which the links no longer function) and citing that Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) calls volunteerism a new form of colonialism, Birrell (2010) says in his concluding paragraph that

> [t]he desire to engage with the world is laudable, as is the desire to volunteer. But we need to tread more carefully. Unless we have time and transferable skills, we might do

better to travel, trade and spend money in developing countries. The rapid growth of "voluntourism" is like the rapid growth of the aid industry: salving our own consciences without fully examining the consequences for the people we seek to help. All too often, our heartfelt efforts to help only make matters worse (para 16).

Both of the above posts return us to the idea that the desire to help is laudable. But what each neglects is to understand the desire to help itself is constructed through particular subjectivities (Heron 2007; Cook 2008). Understood as a diversion of "good" energy, this fails to question the origins of the energy to change or help.

The online comments on this journal website generally approve of Birrell's message, suggesting that indeed, these trips are about resume building and the learning of the volunteers, as opposed to improving the living conditions for communities or changing global structures of inequity. While some of the commentators imagine that these changes supposedly provoked in volunteers are positive for the volunteers themselves, others were not as convinced. One user called *lightacandle* said "if you really want to be so altruistic why not give the money you would have spent to the professionals in the field to use more productively and instead spend that year at home doing something useful there too. Winners all round." Thus, while for some there is a sense that the transformation of the volunteer is worth it, even if communities do not benefit, for others "altruism" cannot be the primary goal or else traveling wouldn't be involved.

The solipsistic nature of volunteer abroad is apparent almost each time I present my work – yes, people will argue, volunteer abroad is problematic, but it is what set you/I/my sister/daughter/cousin[8] on a critical path to rethinking the experience and realizing how problematic it is, and is thus worthwhile. Conversations that critique the utility of volunteer abroad as an international development project *and as a pedagogical project* are emotionally charged. As Berlant notes,

> It makes sense when people object when analysis of intimate emotions makes those
> desires for attachment seem equally like instruments of suffering. In the liberal society
> that sanctions individuality as sovereign, we like our positive emotions to feel well

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[8] Significant here is the gendered nature of volunteering.

intentioned and we like our good intentions to constitute the meaning of our acts (2004, 5-6).

As critiques of volunteer abroad suggest that programs may be *more* harmful or reaffirming a colonial subject, this is concurrently a critique of the attachments and positive emotions that volunteers (and hosts) feel for volunteer abroad. The objections to these critical conversations about volunteer abroad are significant in that they reveal the ways in which subjectivities of volunteers as caring, concerned Westerners are called into question as is the usefulness (both in terms of international development and pedagogical possibilities) of volunteer abroad. There is much at stake in a critique of volunteer abroad programming and transnational helping more broadly. Yet even academic writing about volunteer abroad continues to defend these programs.

I heard similar critiques of volunteer abroad from volunteers that I interviewed. Some of these comments came up when I asked about their work, or why they were in Nicaragua. But even more often after I had ended the interview and turned the tape recorder off, volunteers wanted to know what I *really* thought about volunteer abroad programs. Being called into their experience as both an expert and an interlocutor who could provide insight into the industry, they brought up "both sides" of what they had heard and many of these conversations ended with them talking about how they have learned so much about international development or aid through the experience of feeling useless. Thus, despite the circulation of these critiques in popular culture and in conversations with volunteers, programs were often ultimately rescued from the call for their end. The problems of volunteer abroad articulated in these posts, are thought to educate volunteers about the problems of international development more broadly. by the pedagogical impulse of volunteer abroad. The problems of volunteer abroad programming are becoming a part of the broader circulating discourses about them. In turn and as a way to manage the critique of whether they *actually* effect change, volunteers tend to articulate their involvement as self-transformation. Instead of creating social change, volunteers change themselves. Critiques forced volunteer abroad programs to move away from development language. Instead, they emphasize the pedagogical value of their programs for volunteers.

Conclusion

The differences between the motivations of hosts and volunteers are significant. Volunteers are invested in these programs with hopes to learn about the world, a wish to develop themselves, and the intention to build capacities and resumes. While Nicaraguan hosts more commonly talk about a hope for cross-cultural learning, a desire to teach about Nicaragua and have companionship. This gives us insight into the gaps between expectations that the different participant groups bring to volunteer abroad. Looking at the ways volunteer abroad programs are marketed, it is not surprising that volunteers come to see them as a self-making project. Volunteers abroad view volunteering as a way to learn broadly about the world and about themselves. Outcomes are often related to resume or skill building. This matches the rhetoric through which these programs are advertised -- and highly facilitated programs are in fact heavily advertised. Flyers are all over university campuses; university abroad or international offices are facilitating and funding students to participate in these programs. Daily new blog posts highlight the transformational experiences these programs offer young people in the Global North. That volunteers are highly recruited and advertised to while hosts are not is also telling of the direction in which transformation and pedagogy is directed and imagined.

We can see through the outlining of the contexts that motivate encounters, and the ways in which participants are recruited, that programming is explicitly designed to both produce and respond to the interests of volunteers. The institutional structuring and advertising of the programs emphasize the individual transformation of the volunteer. They are said to learn about themselves. However, this institutional focus is not reflected when it comes to hosts. Hosts are not vetted for their understanding of programming nor are they trained for how to respond to the desires of volunteers. I argue that in this unscripted gap between what programs promise, what volunteers expect, and how hosts act, there are moments of possibility. Hosts can articulate their understanding of the purpose of volunteer abroad. They can emphasize that the program is about the creation of solidarity and mutual social capital development. They can challenge the idea that volunteer abroad is about social capital development only for Northern youth and their future role as leaders. Hosts, unlike the volunteers, are not inundated with volunteer abroad advertising, and do not have access to the critiques of volunteer abroad and popular cultural representations of helping and development focused on the volunteer. Instead, they are rooted in contexts that focus on solidarity, reciprocity, and learning in community, which in turn produces different expectations and hopes for the programs to which they contribute.

In the next chapter I build on this argument that there are significant gaps between the motivations of volunteers and hosts by looking at how for both hosts and volunteers proximity is imagined as a productive tool for transformation. As we have seen, both volunteers and hosts see transformation as a goal of volunteer abroad, it is just differently directed. It is this desire for proximity that brings hosts and volunteers together for pedagogical purposes despite the gaps between the constellations of motivations. In the next chapter I draw more explicitly on the experiences of *encounters as they happen* to demonstrate the consequences – both of limitation and potential – for pedagogical encounters of these differential ideas about volunteer abroad.

Chapter Three

Transformation through Proximity

Hegemonic narratives and imaginings of volunteer abroad suggest that volunteers are supposedly transformed by their experiences abroad to become global and employable citizens, while host communities are said to benefit from the service work that volunteers do (Vrasti 2012). Proximity is a key pedagogical logic in volunteer abroad programming and imagined as a "good method" for the transformation of both volunteers and hosts. In this chapter, I argue that proximity is imagined in terms of a simple approximation of the (racial, cultural) other: Volunteers live and thus become *like* Nicaraguan hosts. Proximity is also a key pedagogical logic for Nicaraguans, however differently so: asking volunteers to live alongside their hosts in their struggles is invested with volunteers coming to understand their lives as interconnected. In this chapter I look in detail at the attachments both volunteers and hosts have to proximity and ask what is at stake when proximity becomes a pedagogy. In particular, I am interested in the different investments that hosts and volunteers have in physical proximity as a pedagogical tool, and how hosts and Nicaraguans understand the utility of proximity differently.

As we have seen in the introduction and in the discussion of the motivations of volunteer abroad participants, much of the desire for a recovery of volunteer abroad, especially amidst growing critique, is centered on the possibilities for subject-(re)making and transformation - particularly of volunteers (McGehee 2013). The proximity at stake in volunteer abroad programs *relies* on the differential mobilities that make physical proximity possible in the first place, but also on conceptions of difference and of who can help. It is thus inevitably fraught with complexities. Drawing on transnational feminist theory and on the insights from interviews with participants, I trouble an understanding of learning as a rational, linear model of acquiring information. I do so by juxtaposing the ways in which volunteers and hosts animate differently their respective desires for proximity as that which has transformative powers. Central to my analysis is an understanding of education and learning informed by feminist and indigenous theorizing; these are forms of theorizing that, when taken together, trouble rational, masculine, and linear models of education. I conclude this chapter with an analysis of a partial story told to me by a volunteer in which she recounts her struggles and difficulties in the face of proximity to an other. This

story is partial in that it was not resolved, but also in that it was a part of an ongoing series of encounters.

This chapter outlines differing attachments to physical proximity as a tool of transformation and then begins to trouble the assumption that simply being close to a subject of difference (who is often objectified) provokes a transformation of volunteers. In this chapter, I ask what is at stake in a vision of pedagogy that imagines closeness with others as a condition for personal or structural transformation. Throughout my analysis I am less concerned with the morality or politics of attempting to create a new orientation to others or the world. Instead, I ask after the ideological and historical formations that ground a pedagogy invested in the transformative potential of proximity. While "simple proximity" involves a nearness of bodies, encounters, on the other hand, are moments in which subjects meet one another and that holds the possibility for learning otherwise.

Pedagogical Stakes of Proximity

While pedagogy is often imagined as methods of teaching "well" for learning "well," I propose pedagogy as an inquiry into how we come to know and how knowing subjects are produced in encounters with knowledge. Thus, while proximity is figured as a good method for learning, the inquiry in this chapter focuses on how proximity is presumed by both volunteers and hosts to be related to how knowledge and knowing subjects are produced in these encounters. My critical inquiry is informed by Berlant's (2004) understanding of critique, as something that "seeks not to destroy its object but to explain the dynamics of its optimisms and exclusions" (5). A critical inquiry into how proximity is imagined as a "good tool" for transformative learning means to look at the ways such a view imbues hope for transformation into volunteer abroad. It also means to look for what is missed in the focus on physical proximity as a tool for transformation.

Volunteer abroad encounters are rife with fantasies about education, wherein education is understood as a tool to transform. The chain of pedagogical assumptions imagines that bringing together bodies that are marked by difference will produce a response of empathy (on the part of the volunteer) to the other, and through this the volunteer will be transformed. This transformation is mapped not only in newfound empathy in the volunteer, but also in a growing

reflexive understanding of the self. In what follows I outline how proximity emerges as such a pedagogical tactic, and what sort of "togetherness" is evoked in these relations.

Desire for Proximity

As outlined in the chapter on volunteer motivations, there are multiple ways through which people find themselves in volunteer abroad programs. And, these programs are themselves multiple and varied. Volunteer abroad programming and imaginaries, whether radical or neoliberal in their scope, often cite inequities in the world as their *raison d'etre*. They claim to exist to address inequities- through the labour that volunteers participate in, through the cross-cultural learning that "opens minds" or through a radical imagining of building transnational solidarity. The very possibility of facilitating this proximity is justified through the supposed need for development (the need that communities are imagined to have for the service work volunteers do). Even when the language of development is unspoken, it implicitly is the backdrop for the continued existence of these programs, through the rationale that some places are in need of -- and 'ready' for -- the foreign volunteers (Heron, forthcoming). Thus, it is through international development that volunteer abroad programs justify the presence of volunteers and therefore their proximity with others.

Throughout my interviews, both hosts and volunteers asserted over and over again that what sets volunteering apart from tourism, and thus is the heart of volunteering, is that it brings volunteers and hosts, cultures and nations *closer* together, making it a deeper mode of engagement than tourism. This mode of closeness is predicated upon several different factors: its structural condition includes the mobility of the volunteers, which in turn is predicated on the ease through which bourgeois bodies (Heron 2007) move across borders. Other factors include the presumption that white bodies always have skills and something to offer, as well as a vision of the global majority world as "lacking," when defined through the lens of the global minority world (Simpson 2004, Zemach Bersin 2007, Heron 2007, Vrasti 2012). These presumptions about bodies and places make mobility and ease appear more "natural" for some bodies. The bodies of volunteers from the minority world are able to find themselves "at home" or not out of place in Nicaragua.

Proximity for Volunteers

In this narrative of volunteer abroad as a *different mode* of proximity compared to tourism, we see that proximity is not just about geographical closeness or of moving from the United States to Nicaragua, but also about being close to people and culture. We see this in my interview with Kyle, a short-term volunteer in Leon, who was concerned with the impression that people had of the United States. In our conversation he tried to recount the interventionist history of the U.S. in Nicaragua when he said, "the people who do visit as tourists, their attitudes, I think, tend to, we were told [in our workshops], are a lot more egotistical, and they think they are better than the Nicaraguan people." Here Kyle is talking about the ways in which volunteering is different than travel and tourism, particularly since for him the learning component of his program was meaningful. But, he is also signalling that a discussion of these differential orientations were included in his program. Important here, in Kyle's view, but also in that of his program, is that volunteers are different from tourists in their physical closeness to Nicaraguans, and in that they don't think they are better.

The volunteers I interviewed did not come to encounters with Nicaraguans with the same expectations as their hosts. Some volunteers talked about not even knowing beforehand that they would be staying with a host family, and they often didn't know what kind of volunteer work they would be doing in advance. One volunteer in particular struggled with the hosts' expectation to build relationships with those around her. Talking about trying to spend time with her host family, she noted "but I need to be way more personally invested in this trip than I ever expected to be." As I talked with volunteers who stayed with host families, it became clear that they understood this experience of staying with a family and being close to Nicaraguans as central to their learning.

When I asked Louise, who had chosen her program through her university, to tell me about what the experience with her family was like, she said:

> I am learning so much from them and I think living with a host family, I wouldn't get that if I was living at a hostel or not with a family but actually living with a family and seeing how they live everyday that's like… so, it's really cool that [the organization] not only does service trips, but then also has this whole cultural immersion aspect, that you can live with a family and that, it's not like you're just coming here to help people; you're coming here to learn about yourself and essentially, I mean, these people help us too.

We can see in this excerpt that for Louise the host family experience and being with them in their everyday lives is central to her description of her learning. It also signals the concerns I outlined in the second chapter that volunteers have about the utility of the "help" they might give and how this emphasizes the importance of learning. We can also see here that for Louise, she is learning about herself with the help of "these people" who we might infer as her host family. In fact, the very suggestion that volunteers "benefit more" rescues volunteer abroad from having to address the material inequities that structure and give shape to these programs, because now they are simply about learning. The focus on learning, for programs and volunteers, works to attempt to manage inequalities in the present, through the hope for a different future through pedagogical accomplishments.

The focus on pedagogical possibilities of volunteer abroad through interactions with local people was strong especially for those volunteers who were sceptical about the aims of volunteering. An example of this are three volunteers who were primarily facilitating outdoor adventures for tourists as a fundraising strategy for local organizations and who were quite hesitant about the aims of volunteering. However, as we dug deeper into these hesitations, *proximity* remained key to how they conceptualized worthwhile international experiences. For Rebecca, volunteering was a way "to meet people here and to see another culture and to speak Spanish." While each of these volunteers was critical about the position of helping, their reasons for volunteering and staying in Leon for three months was about "really" getting to know the city and the people, which was facilitated by them staying longer, even while not being confident about the utility of their work.

This idea of getting to "really" know the city was present in many of my interviews. Being proximate to Nicaraguans, especially through host families, was seen as a way of knowing the "real" or "true" Nicaragua through personal immersion. When I interviewed Chloe, she told me that she had volunteered with the same organization the previous year. On her previous trip she had spent only a week in Nicaragua and had not stayed with a host family. In her decision to do the homestay she described the month-long program as "more intense" and as something she thought she would now be able to handle after her first experience in Nicaragua. I asked about her decision to do this other sort of trip, and she said "it's just a really great experience to have a cultural exchange and have these experiences in a different country and really immerse yourself

in a world that's completely different and alien compared to your life at home." As I asked her to talk about her impressions of Nicaragua, she said

> Last year [the one week trip] it was a very watered down version because it's a group of high schoolers, so the mood is different… the program is more geared towards having fun and its mostly touristy because they don't, it's more lighthearted and here, it was a really, you're getting to know these people on a personal level and it makes it much more personal because you're living in their house and you're succumbing to their way of life and living like they do everyday so it makes it, for me, it is more special because you have a deeper connection rather than just observing or being in a foreign country.

For Chloe, the experience of living with a family set her apart from tourists because of the ways it brought her into personal relationship with Nicaraguans, that it was more intense and that she was living *like* Nicaraguans – to *immerse* herself. In her words, she was *succumbing* to their way of life. This idea of succumbing is key for the ways in which it evokes the idea of living *completely like* a host family. Her use of the word succumbing is also worth noting here for the ways in which *physical* proximity leads to particular affective relationships and responses, and the ways in which subsequent intimacy can be fearful. While this chapter is about outlining differing attachments to physical proximity and its connection to pedagogy, I later look at the complexities of intimacy in volunteer abroad encounters (see Chapter Four: *The Intimate in Volunteer Abroad*).

Proximity as Knowing

The desire to "really" know from these experiences in volunteer abroad, is closely tied to proximity – it is through nearness, living like, and observation that volunteers are thought to become knowing subjects about Nicaragua and Nicaraguans. In tourism studies MacCannell (1999) uses Goffman's (1967) conceptualization of "front stage" and "back stage" to think about the desire for authenticity in travel. Goffman argues that we have front stage presentations (where we perform ourselves for others) and back stage presentations (our true selves) – MacCannell suggests that in tourism generally but in cultural tourism especially, there is a desire to see this "authentic" self of the other. Recent studies in tourism have shown how this "authentic" representation of a place is commodified and produced, all while relying on static

understandings of culture (Shepperd 2002, Outka 2008). A central promise in volunteer abroad as a pedagogy is that through being close volunteers are supposedly able to access the "back stage" of the culture they visit. It is this promise of authentic "backstage" experiences on which homestay programs are predicated. When I asked Abby and Mindy about the benefits of staying with a host family they said:

> Abby: Definitely the cultural immersion. If I lived in a hostel I wouldn't understand anything, but here when they do things differently, I can ask why and see oh, wow, that's a better way of doing things, you know? It's like easy to judge others when they burn trash or when they rake the leaves every single day or whatever, but when you live with them you can understand the reasons why and it's like this is my family.

> Mindy: Yeah, I will never do another international volunteer thing that is not with a host family from now on because my experience, I know that if I lived in a hostel all the time it would be completely different. I'd probably be really homesick right now if I lived in a hostel, but being here you feel like you're just a part of it and you have a home.

Cultural immersion here, for Abby, is central to her reason for wanting to stay with a family. For these two volunteers who were staying with the same host family, they understood this experience of being close as different than staying at a hostel which would maintain difference and a lack of clarity about the lives of Nicaraguans. While for Abby learning about customs that one might be prone to judge, such as burning trash, from a host family provokes increased understanding through suspended judgment, for Mindy having a home was important for her. These two volunteers not only felt *at home,* but were also gaining "insider" knowledge about life in Nicaragua.

It wasn't only volunteers who prioritized this desire for insider knowledge. When I spoke with a Nicaraguan facilitator, Isabella, about why she thought staying with host families was important, she similarly said

> We always want that they [host families] give the students a taste of their family values and help… one of the things that we think is the most important in the program is that the family can open their doors because it isn't the same to live in a hotel as to live in a house.

For Isabella, this closeness to the host family was important for learning about Nicaraguan values and was not accessible through staying at a hostel. As we will see in the subsequent sections, while both hosts and volunteers are attached to proximity as a tool for transformation, these transformations are conceptualized differently.

Chloe told me that one of the key parts of her experience in Nicaragua was that she learned "things you can't learn from a textbook or a tour around the city, just things you have to learn from living the lifestyle." It is important here to note that a tour around the city (which one might assume is signalling the tourist experience) is not sufficient but rather, living the 'lifestyle' is the conduit for learning. For Chloe, when I asked about homesickness she said that the point of the experience is to "live in this life, like as you would if you were actually a Nicaraguan person born into the community." We can see in these pieces of the interview with Chloe that living with her host family was key to her experience, and was particularly tied to how she understood volunteering as distinct from tourism and central to her becoming knowledgeable about Nicaragua. In our conversation, Chloe talked about moments with her host mother that were important and they often centered around learning to do things *like* her host mother, such as peeling a mango, making coffee, or using water frugally. This closeness was tightly connected with her learning and the value that she saw in the experience. What we can see in each of these narratives above, however, is that the learning is generalized to being about Nicaragua – not about the particular subjects they are interacting with (i.e. learning about the host family) or their histories, or even that of the communities they are living with, but Nicaragua in general.

Knowing Through Approximation

Immersion in everyday life was key to the imagining of proximity as pedagogy for volunteers. Towards the end of my interview with Mindy and Abby, I asked if they were thinking about what stories they would want to share with people when they got home. Abby told me "I want to tell them everything and just have someone to talk to about it and comprehend things together. It will be good to get different perspectives in there. Because I've been here long enough that I feel like I'm seeing it through their eyes." For Abby, the time that she had spent in the community (three weeks) and the proximity with her family meant that she understood herself as being or at the least seeing *through the eyes of* a Nicaraguan.

In two programs that I interviewed participants of there were similar activities structured around experiencing the life of and meeting people living on a dollar a day. These volunteer groups would go to a community identified as living on less than a dollar a day and would stay for six to eight hours. When I asked Alice what she would remember most about her whole trip, she said

> …the dollar a day. We basically lived on one dollar. We couldn't use the lights or the electricity, we had to shower with a bucket and then we went to a family that basically lives on a dollar a day. They had no electricity, they had contaminated water, and we had to help them do their daily chores.

This experience of living like the family for approximately six hours was moving for the students I interviewed. They talked extensively about being grateful for what they have as a result of seeing what others don't have. When I asked Chris for advice he would offer to future volunteers he said "don't complain, you only have to live this [on a dollar a day] for six hours, they have to live it forever." When two students were paired with a family for six hours they reported learning by way of being close to and acting like their host family – even if only for a total of six hours. As I pressed participants to tell me more about what they had learned, they told me about how they had a competition on the same day, where they were given some goods – rice, beans tortillas – to sell on the marketplace. Whoever sold the most would win the competition. Remembering that students generally speak very little Spanish while engaging in these activities, the key method of learning is *acting like*. Thus, volunteer abroad is not just about being close to, but also through attempting to be *like*, what I am calling approximation. As in Chris' statement above, this moment of attempting to be like is safeguarded against becoming like (i.e. living on less than a dollar a day) because volunteers know it is not forever, and the purpose is to generate a sense of "gratefulness" in volunteers.

Some of the volunteers I interviewed asked me about Nicaraguan history (see Chapter Two: *Toward a Transnational Feminist Methodology of Encounter*). However, more frequently, volunteers were ready to offer up narratives of what Nicaraguans and Nicaragua were like. While volunteers I spoke with talked about the importance of the experience of living with their host families and their learning, it became clear that this learning was about simply *being* close and living like, rather than conversation with particular people, or about particular histories or contexts. In fact, volunteers that I interviewed rarely spoke Spanish. Few of the hosts speak

English. Accordingly most communication between host and volunteers is done through a translator (as I was sometimes asked to do), the Internet, dictionaries, and gestures. As Louise said in our interview "…my host family is awesome. I mean, obviously I can't really communicate with them, but I still, it's not like, it's amazing how you can connect with people without a lot of language." While there are some exceptions to these language barriers, and as they decrease over the time volunteers spend in placement, it is significant that volunteers rarely engage in these sorts of specific historical or social conversations with their families (see Chapter 5 on *Hopeful Pedagogy*). Thus, the learning that volunteers report is often not through in-depth conversations, which may allow an understanding of context, but rather through the proximity of bodies. Many volunteers recalled such an immersion into "lifestyles" as crucial to their learning. While volunteers talked with me about their host families and the meaningful relationships that they developed with them, these relationships were ones formed *because* of the desire for proximity to *an* other. Recall the story I include in the introduction of two volunteers who feel certain they know about the lives and relationship troubles of their host parents. These two volunteers, while telling me about these specific and personal dynamics of their host family, did not know much about the historical or social context of the community in which they were staying.

The mobility central to volunteer abroad programs brings volunteers and hosts into close proximity. And this proximity is understood as central to the learning that volunteers report. In interviews the volunteers emphasized *likeness* and *knowing* as key elements of their encounters. By this they mean that attempting to be like Nicaraguans in their everyday life, or approximating their lifestyles, is a way for them to understand and know more abut Nicaragua. This articulation of likeness as a way to learn suggests that the proximity in volunteer abroad is about an *approximation* of the other. While proximity is about being close to, approximation on the other hand is about becoming closer through everyday practices that mime the lives of others around them. While proximity is a "tool" for learning and transformation, "approximation" is the text from which volunteers learn. While approximation is important to this learning, it is also a risky learning as we heard above in Chloe's signal that she was "succumbing" to her host family's way of life. I return to dangers of proximity and intimacy in the next chapter. This learning through trying to be like is reminiscent of anthropological anxieties about the need for approximation and understanding to "know" the other through being *with* the other, but to avoid "going native"

(Clifford and Marcus 1986). Volunteers are invited to "know" about Nicaragua through their encounters with others, and upon returning home, are often interpolated as experts (Roddick 2013). Indeed, it is important to note that while these experiences are sometimes promoted as important for people who want to work in international development or other international work, programs that facilitate time abroad advertise that the learning at stake in these programs is *about* the self. Promoting such learning about the self in a capitalist economy becomes part of acquiring *cultural* capital and international competency (Vrasti 2012, Mostafenezhad 2015). This development of the self both as an employable citizen and as knowledgeable about other places is imagined as possible through the approximation to Nicaraguan life, despite the ambiguities that we an hear in Chloe's use of the word "succumbing" and Abby and Mindy's worry of only seeing things *as* Nicaraguans.

In my interviews with both hosts and volunteers, proximity figured as something that motivated their participation in volunteer abroad programming. For volunteers, proximity was equated with a closer understanding of what "real" Nicaragua was like, articulated alongside of critiques of "shallow" tourist travel where people did not make friends, did not speak the language, nor did they spend more than a few days in one place. For hosts – both families and facilitators alike– proximity as living *with* was the crucial element. As volunteers lived the lifestyle of Nicaraguans and approximated their everyday life, they became knowledgeable and transformed. While hosts and volunteers imagine proximity and its effects differently, it is striking to note that the sheer *being around* one another is imagined as the key to transformation.

Proximity to Difference

In the above sections, I have outlined the ways in which proximity is figured by volunteers and programs as a good method for transformation. Through these narratives we can see that it is not just a moving across space that is desired through proximity. In configurations of volunteer abroad, proximity is not just about the geographical distance between volunteers and hosts that is imagined as shrinking. As Alexander (2003) notes, through anthropological imperatives, distance is collapsed into difference; distance is marked by nation, labour, class, race and gender. Race and gender, while often obscured through talk of "culture" figure prominently into the figuration of *some* modes of proximity within volunteer abroad as more important and potentially

transformative than others. Thus, we hear that living the lifestyle is crucial to transformation, where touring a city is not sufficient.

Distance traveled is also marked by talk of time – both in terms of travel time, but also as a metaphor for progress. Alexander (2003) argues for a view of time which is palimpsestic – a view that encourages us to see the ways in which the "here and now" and the "there and then" are scrambled to be the "here and then" and the "there and now." This scrambling keeps our analysis attentive to the ways in which the past is present in our current encounters and undermines the ways in which linear time positions the First and Third worlds as existing in differential places along this line – where the Third world exists in what McClintock (1995) refers to as "anachronistic" time. This palimpsestic view, Alexander (2003) says, is one which allows us "…to hold on to the historical specificity through which those various social relations are constituted at the same time that we examine the continuity and disjunctures of practice" (191). My interest in proximity here is about how the desire for and modes of proximity are historically constituted, while being attentive to the everyday lived realities that shape the practices of volunteer abroad.

Reading palimpsestically, we see how colonial modes of relation enable the proximity of volunteer and host bodies. Several facets of colonial historical relations are evident in the voluntouristic quest for proximity. This embodied encounter between primarily white female volunteers from the United States and Nicaraguans can be read through the lens of what Heron (2007) calls the "helping imperative" – where the bourgeois subjectivity of white women is constituted through and reliant on the desire to help others. During colonization, white women found their mobility increased through the moral and educational imperatives which we can hear echoes of in the motivations of volunteers in the previous chapter. This subjectivity hinges on the ways in which racialized bodies in the majority world are imagined as incompetent and in need of intervention and help which can only be found *outside* of the majority world (MacDonald 2015, Briggs 2003). Important to this understanding of colonial subjectivity are not only the ways in which colonial bodies occupied and moved into the majority world – in this case, Nicaragua – but also how bourgeois bodies are colonial bodies with an often erased colonial and

genocidal history. This erasure of history works to maintain a white sense of self, which remains unconnected to colonial (both historical and ongoing) violence.[9]

Certainly the mode of helping has shifted over time – colonial help, moral help, educational help and democratic help are some examples of these shifting iterations. This historically embedded, homogenizing and violent imaginary of other places being "in need" enables the "desire for development" even when the language of development is not explicit or spoken (Simpson 2004; Heron 2007; Heron forthcoming). This reading of coloniality from the creation and possibility of particular modes of proximity is crucial, and brings into view the mobility of white bodies, the capital which allows this mobility (and the historical basis for this capital including the transatlantic slave trade), and the imagining of the Third world as a place where white bodies are sure to have something to offer through white colonial subjectivity. As Ahmed (2006) suggests in her discussion of queer phenomenology,

> …bodies are shaped by colonialism, which makes the world "white" as a world that is inherited or already given. This is the familiar world, the world of whiteness, as a world we know implicitly. Colonialism makes the world "white," which of course is a world "ready" for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach. Bodies remember such histories, even when we forget them. Such histories, we might say, surface on the body, or even shape how bodies surface (111).

The world of volunteer abroad is largely "white" and "ready" for volunteers. The tools to build schools, the capital to fund scholarships, and the time to volunteer are already available to white mostly middle class university students. While, conversely, the world is not "ready" for people in the majority world to participate in the same sort of mobility.[10] While the volunteers I interviewed may not speak to colonial histories or the colonial past of the U.S., yet, as Ahmed (2006) suggests, *bodies* remember these histories. They surface on bodies and allow for

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[9] While there is not space in this dissertation, an as of yet unstudied, yet important, site for analysis concerns how contemporary colonial relations (in countries such as Canada and the United States) shape the subjectivities of volunteers.

[10] Canada World Youth is a notable exception to this. In this program Canadian youth are paired with a youth from a partner country (such as Nicaragua) and spend three months as volunteers in the partner country and then three months volunteering in Canada. While the programming is an exception, it brings to light the difficulty of mobility in that attaining visas is a struggle for many of the youth coming to Canada and the cost is prohibitive.

particular bodies to surface as ready for a moment of pedagogical transformation, in part, through colonialism.

Critically, the specificity of Nicaragua in relation to other nations is crucial here to our reading of the palimpsest and the surfacing of histories. Alexander (2003) suggests that the understanding of time as scrambled is not one which homogenizes, or suggests that everything is everywhere at all times, but rather one which allows an analysis of mechanisms that attends to how they "would have different effects that bear on the contextual arrangements in which they find themselves, which in turn shapes their capacity to travel, to overlap, and circulate within and among these [historical] formations" (192). While I have outlined what animates the investment in proximity as a tool for transformation for volunteers, in what follows I look at how Nicaraguans differently understand physical proximity as a transformative tool. Following Ahmed (2000), I consider these encounters as sites of inter-embodiment where "with-ness is a site, not of shared co-habitance, but of differentiation… in other words, the inter-bodily movements that allow bodies to be formed (as well as de-formed), *bodies are touched by some bodies differently from other bodies*" (48). This embodiment is not one which is only in the present, but in which the past is also present.

It is the scrambling of time, attending to multiple embodied historicities (i.e. seeing encounters as palimpsestic) that allows us to bring seemingly disparate ideologies into proximity – to illuminate the traffic between them, and to ask after what is at stake in their deployment and to see how bringing them alongside one another provides new insight into encounters. This reading of the past into the present is not simply a pulling of imperial and colonial relations through time as an over determined reading of encounters. Although colonial and imperial relations appear through the palimpsest of volunteer abroad, the histories of solidarity and international collaboration central to Nicaraguan history also appear. Just because volunteers arrive not knowing these histories of solidarity, and rarely consciously align with them, this does not mean that these histories are not there. Accordingly, in the next section I ask what it might mean to read histories of colonialism and imperialism as surfacing in encounters alongside of histories of solidarity? In what follows, I examine the ways in which proximity is figured and evocative of colonial and imperial relations, but also attend to important histories in Nicaragua of solidarity.

Pedagogical Authority

It was clear in my interviews that for both hosts and volunteers proximity was important for the transformative goals that participants held to be at the center of volunteer abroad. I have outlined the ways in which, for volunteers and institutional programming, it is through a being close to and an attempt to live *like* that the transformation of the self is accomplished. What we see in host narratives, however, complicates both this understanding of desired transformation but also the roles that hosts play in the pedagogical work of volunteer abroad. I suggest that what is at stake in these differences is not only what *kind* of transformation takes place, but also the pedagogical place that is afforded to hosts. While volunteers see proximity as a tool for them to become global, self-aware citizens, hosts understand proximity instead, through a complex history that calls for an attention to what it means to live alongside of (*conviviencia*) and that retains possibilities for solidarity.

In recognizing the diversity of volunteer abroad programs, we can still talk generally about the pedagogical impetus of programs that take learning at their core. This is especially important in that hosts very strongly saw the purpose of volunteer programs as pedagogical. In considering how to understand the politics of this pedagogy, it may be considered curious that while it is evocative of colonial frames, it also undermines colonial discourses of "helping." Volunteers often say that they know and have been told that they will "benefit more" than the people they are there to help. This undermines, or at least makes more complex, a linear relationship between volunteers who help and locals "in need of help." In figuring volunteers as "learners" and those in the majority world as their teachers, this relationship is seemingly reversed. Volunteer abroad also evokes educational frames that have attempted to undo colonial figurings of "learning" and "expertise" by valuing lived experience and learning which is not simply by rote.

Yet, upon closer examination, we can see how this recognition of lived experience and Nicaraguans as teachers of volunteers, does not necessarily undo the colonial relationships that work to legitimize volunteer abroad programs in the first place. Participants in volunteer abroad are instructed to learn from *their* lived experience of being close to Nicaraguans, and through this experience become experts, whereas their Nicaraguan teachers are figured as objects they interact with to learn. As Himley (2004) writes, it is the "stranger" that haunts service-learning: "[t]his figure reveals the power asymmetries, social antagonisms, and historical determinants that are all too often concealed by discourses of volunteerism or civic literacy or active citizenship or

experiential learning, or rhetorical training" (417). But as Ahmed suggests by, like Himley (2004) drawing on Simmel (1908), in *Strange Encounters* (2000), the stranger must already be known in order to be identified and recognized as strange. In the binary framing of volunteer abroad, the stranger is the figure from whom volunteers learn by being close to, and whom their labour helps. This stranger is unknown in her specificity, but recognizable in her need for help and her difference from the volunteer. It largely does not matter *which* Nicaraguan volunteers interact with (see the next chapter for the complicated ways in which danger is marked and erased from bodies in volunteer abroad), nor whose histories are shared with them, or which specific lived experiences Nicaraguans may have, or how they conceptualize the world. Rather it matters that the bodies of the volunteer and the Nicaraguan family are brought closer together in the "authentic" local setting.

This setting was key for host families in the work that they do with volunteers. Host families talked with me about the significant amount of work they engage in to make volunteers feel at home: they practice English, clean and decorate rooms, and do the volunteers' laundry. It was not only that hosts were expected to be responsible for a significant amount of material care labour (which is discuss in depth in the fifth chapter). Importantly, hosts took on roles of facilitating learning, which required intellectual labour. One host mother told me that she was glad to have been a teacher, because she felt better equipped to answer the questions of the volunteers. For example, she had started to collect books on Nicaragua and Nicaraguan history to be able to better talk with volunteers. Facilitators often told me about the incredible emotional burden that working with volunteers had. Marcia, for example, said: "it is great that they are here, but when they leave I can finally sleep." Another facilitator said the difficulty was that she didn't have a certificate in this kind of work – she wasn't a psychologist or a counsellor. What both facilitators here are indicating is the incredible amount of labour and expertise that is required to facilitate volunteer learning. For hosts, while proximity is still a "good tool" for transformation it is not as simple as being close to the body of an other, it requires intellectual labour.

While host Nicaraguans are not considered knowledgeable because they lack formal studies and degrees, *they see themselves as knowledgeable* and also take on the heavy burden of the possibility of transformation as they conceive of it through proximity. For Nicaraguans volunteer aboard programs are a heavy task; volunteers are not simply learning about themselves or

Nicaraguan history. The desired outcome is a long-term, structural change. They want volunteers to return to their home country and to continue thinking about the world in ways which will cause them to vote differently, to protest mining in Nicaragua, and to share what they have learned about Nicaragua and its struggles with their friends and families. Nicaraguans take this burden on and *work* to facilitate this learning. Although they are constructed as simply hosts with whom volunteers interact culturally or from whom volunteers learn about "Nicaraguan lifestyle", they see themselves as key to these encounters being politically transformative. As such, they take on the pedagogical authority formally denied to them. In Chapter Five*: A Hopeful Pedagogy,* I look at the consequences in the everyday practice where hosts manage the complexity of seeing themselves as knowledgeable and as authorities, while through institutional programming and volunteer perspectives are often denied this authority.

Conviviencia

For the Nicaraguans I spoke with, being close to volunteers was important. However, the ways in which they talked about this closeness and the role within volunteer abroad programs of proximity was significantly different from the narratives offered by volunteers and the programs themselves. In this section, I look at how Nicaraguans spoke about proximity with me. I argue they did so in ways that pushes back against the kind of approximation I noted in my analysis of the interviews with the volunteers. I argued approximation means knowing more through acting *like* Nicaraguans, however for Nicaraguans I spoke with, it is through volunteers living alongside of and understanding their experiences living with host families in relation to history and poverty that is a conduit for transformation. Thus, while Chloe talks about living the "lifestyle" as a method of learning, for Nicaraguans proximity should include a politicization of this articulation of "lifestyle" to understand, for example, why her host family must conserve water, or to connect feeling grateful for having "so much" to systemic inequalities. This builds on my analysis of host motivations centered on solidarity in that for hosts proximity is a good tool for *political* transformation that has the possibility of generating modes of encounters that provoke solidarity.

In the narratives of the hosts, we find distinctly different modes of proximity from that which volunteers articulated – or what Ahmed (2000) calls different ways of touching that "allow for different configurations of bodily and social space" (49). Ideological and historical formations of colonialism, imperialism and solidarity emerge in proximity and shape the social spaces of

encounters. Modes of touching, or being touched, have implications for the ways in which closeness is figured as a mechanism for transformative learning, and the imagined "outcomes" of this learning.

When I spoke with Nicaraguan hosts and facilitators, it was clear that the labour of the volunteers was often superfluous to the reasons for programs. One of the facilitators told me that the volunteer work was not crucial. In fact, she suggested that local people could be paid to accomplish the work quicker and better, thereby confirming the critiques often levied against international volunteer programs that volunteer labour is useless. However, to the hosts and facilitators (similarly to volunteers) it was the *learning* that was important. This learning was generally framed *as an exchange* between volunteers and hosts, in which hosts learned, too. The hosts I interviewed talked about *conviviencia* – or living with – as central to transformation. By taking a closer look at how hosts talk about *conviviencia* we can see how histories of solidarity and international support are present in these narratives and thus in encounters, alongside with (and not unconnected to) colonial and imperial frames. While volunteers imagine proximity as a mode of knowledge production and self-making, hosts imagine proximity instead, as a mode for fostering international solidarity.

One of the facilitators I interviewed said that in her work with volunteers the most meaningful aspect was seeing the transformation of students. For her, this transformation emerged from living alongside of Nicaraguans – particularly in host families. She said,

> I think that it is living alongside of others everyday. *Conviviencia* because for example, in their work, in whatever work they end up doing, it is with people, they have to talk to them and get to know them and they need to know how these people think about different things and then they go home to live with their families and they talk with them and discuss with them. Being close to people and talking with them changes mentalities. And, also, for example, in all of the volunteers we have had here, all of them, the learning evaluation and in all of the evaluations, the family for them always has the highest importance. They say, and so 80 percent of their learning, they say, about culture about

values, is about their family and living with them daily. To talk with them daily, to sit at

the table with them to talk for hours and hours[11].

For this facilitator, the learning with and being close to people is crucial for changing

"mentalities' by which she means the transformation of volunteers into politicized citizens

attentive to relationality. While for volunteers much of their learning was about understanding

and being part of Nicaraguan "lifestyles," for this facilitator, proximity was a "good method" for

changing ideological viewpoints and developing solidarity. Rather than creating knowing

subjects such as in modes of approximation that keep volunteers in the center as experts

developing their social capital, this facilitator saw proximity as creating subjects with new

frameworks that would be explicitly political and attentive to historical and contemporary

relation. In the final chapter we will see how these investments in change through physical

proximity are figured in hosts conceptualizations of pedagogy for a hopeful future.

While facilitators had a perspective of what *living alongside of* meant in the larger view of

programming and in the choices they were making in their work, host families also echoed this

need for closeness, seeing living *with* and transformation as tied together. One host mother,

Gloria, told me,

> …what I have seen that really makes an impression on the youth is that they can live
>
> alongside of people, and that they can do this in *the same conditions* as the family, they
>
> can share with the family and live alongside of them. That there isn't just a Nicaraguan
>
> who cares for them, but that they would be aware of being their companion, of spending
>
> time with them, that they are human.

We can hear in this description that *living alongside* is differently articulated from that of

volunteers. Living with Nicaraguans is not just to learn about their culture, but also to see them

as specific *humans who are companions* rather than caregivers. For many of the host families

that I spoke with, it was when volunteers lived in the same conditions as the family that they felt

conviviencia. In a rural community where I interviewed a cooperative that hosted volunteers,

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[11] While volunteers often don't speak Spanish and hosts don't speak English, they do often spend hours talking with one another through translators, miming, and dictionaries. Volunteers often don't have access to their phones, wifi or other technology and so, in some ways, are forced to sit with their host families for hours and try to communicate.

members talked about being nervous the first time they hosted. They knew the conditions of their house weren't "as good" as what volunteers would be used to. So they came to appreciate seeing students live like them and with them. This also provided for many comedic stories they would share about volunteers, such as not knowing how to use their shower -- and thus choosing not to shower for weeks.

That being said, many of the hosts and facilitators I spoke with were sceptical whether a transformation could happen without deeper understanding of politics informed through formal pedagogical components (such as reading or lectures or workshops). In other words, proximity alone was not enough to create changed mentalities. A significant barrier to this sort of additional component was the lack of shared language. Many people talked about language barriers as the most significant challenge in their day-to-day life with volunteers. One facilitator said that while host families are important, she believes that closeness is not sufficient on its own for political transformative learning. When I asked if she thought staying with a host family made a difference for learning, she said

> Really, I think that participants who want to live with families are looking for something more [than tourism]. Ideally, I think they need more though. I think they need a program that tells them about themes that explains about poverty, or about history, or education, that you can't just come as a tourist and just live with a family. There is much less of a chance to learn about the things that are important to learn and that programs can teach.

For this facilitator, teaching the context to help students to understand their everyday experiences, the reality of life in Nicaragua, and the connection to broader themes is crucial to volunteer learning.

In the above interview excerpts proximity is understood within ideological frames of solidarity. Hosts see proximity as a "good tool" for political transformation, but as one that must be accompanied by other learning in order to facilitate the solidarity as articulated within their motivations (see previous chapter). This is quite different from the understanding of proximity we found in the volunteer interviews, where distance merged into difference, and proximity into approximation. Set within existing colonial and imperial frames, in the interviews with hosts we can begin to see an articulation of proximity that resists approximation. Hosts envision

Nicaraguans as *companions* rather than *caregivers*, and in this different mode of relationship, histories of solidarity and cooperation differently orient bodies to one another. Although both hosts and Nicaraguans see "living like" as crucial, it is what this living like provokes that is different – for volunteers, the meaning making of learning is through approximation and culture, for Nicaraguans, on the other hand, it is living alongside of when linked to historical and social contexts that holds possibilities for transformation. Although histories of solidarity do not carry the same force as imperial and colonial frames in structuring the present, we can see how these interviews with hosts call this history forth. Importantly, hosts complicate proximity from approximation to the need for context and connection. In the hosts' view, proximity as a mechanism for transformation suggests the need for labour; learning needs to be facilitated. Taken together, the distinctly different ways in which hosts, programs, and volunteers respectively understand proximity as the method for enacting pedagogies which hold potential for transformation in volunteer abroad programs indicates the messiness and ambivalence of pedagogical projects. In my interviews, hosts and facilitators recognize the work required by critical pedagogical projects – as caregivers, teachers and so on – and insisted that volunteers put labour into their learning as well.

Partial Story

In the first two sections of this chapter I outlined the imaginaries embedded in the differential ways that hosts and volunteers think about proximity. In this section I look at how proximity is complicated in the everyday living of it. In this section I work through a long interview excerpt. During the interview with three volunteers, I asked them to each share with me something meaningful that had happened for them. This story, quoted at length below, was significant for the volunteer who shared it, but also for the two other volunteers who had been processing the experience with her. I include this story because of the ways in which it expresses the ambivalence of learning – the ways in which learning that emerges from proximity is not predictable. This inclusion of an excerpt of an unfinished story – one which the participant is still working through -- shows the ways in which discourses and subjectivities are operating and are called into question. It also highlights the ways encounters with others challenge an understanding of the self for volunteers as knowers and doers. As we will see below, Tania struggles with how to narrate this experience, and how to understand her self in relation to

someone she has made friends with. It is important to note that this is one way she has talked about this experience, and it is likely not the only way. As I write about this interview, almost a year later, the ways in which power, discourses, and questions of her position would circulate in the story as she would tell it now may look completely differently. Looking to the multiplicity of encounters, we can complicate the ways both hosts and volunteers (while differently) imagine proximity as a reliable tool for transformation.

> Tania: I made pretty good friends with kids out at the beach, because I definitely, one of the things I wanted to down here was to get better at surfing and so I go out there a lot and also trying to hang out with the kids out there and one of them is just a year younger than me, he's 18. He was my surf instructor and his brother owns the store there and they like, I didn't realize exactly what was going on in their family and I just learned a bunch of stuff about all of it and I was hanging out with this kid [Mario] last night and he was just, his mom told this older kid that [Mario] hangs out with a lot and told him [Mario's friend] you can have him, he can be your son now, I can't do this and he's 18. It was just, that was a lot and he was telling me about how he has one of the, there's a surf company and they had a contest here and he entered with this other guy [Chris] who grew up in the U.S. and now is back and he was like you need to do it man, you're so good at surfing so dragged him into it. And the owner of the company tracked him down and now they have this giant contract on the table… and it's this great big opportunity for him, and they can't find Mario's dad to sign the passport papers and so like [Tania starts to cry], this kid is so cute. I don't know, they can't find his dad and his mom doesn't want him.

> Natalie: It's really tough for him to grab a hold of the opportunity because his dad left and is completely out of the picture and his mom has gone to the passport office on several occasions, but every single time his dad bails.

> Tania: She's got like 16 kids, and Mario's worried about what's going to happen to her, I'm scared for him. I don't know why I'm crying so hard. I'm really scared of what's going to happen if he's going to be on the street or something, like this kid, I've been hanging out with for three weeks and I didn't realize that just getting food or having a place to sleep is something that he's worried about all the time. The thing is he has no interest in going to school, he dropped out of school sophomore year and I was like you

should think about going back to school and he's like why, there's no work for after school anyways. I can't pay to go to college, like it means nothing to me. And I want to be like go to school, you can do it, but he thinks its so pointless and he knows the country better than I do and I just got really close with that kid and he taught me how to surf and we've been hanging out everyday since I got here and I just heard all of this last night. And he's just like, he just has no idea that he could get the contract and make some money and do something with surfing and go back to school and maybe help his brother and help his cousin and mend all of these bridges, but he has no family right now.

Natalie: It seems like he is running out of hope.

Tania: Like running out of hope and running out of love. I don't know how to help. I was like making jokes last night, I'll bring the muscle, we'll get your dad in the back of the truck and stuff like that, but he lives and works on a farm like an hour away and he drove out there three times and he just won't get in the car and won't come with him and he just doesn't understand. It's kind of like sad too, it's like the same thing we do in the States, these little kids from the inner city and your only way out is basketball… and I feel like the same thing is pushed onto this kid, Mario, even though he loves to surf, I feel bad putting so much into like his surfing and really, I want better for him, but he doesn't even realize that there is so much better, he doesn't have to, when he is 30 years old he shouldn't be worried about his next meal or. It's something that he was so excited about, it's every kid's dream to have this company knocking at his door, he's never been on an airplane like, all of this stuff I really want to see for him. It's not my place to say though.

I quote this excerpt at length to highlight the ways in which being close to Mario has, for Tania and in some ways also for Natalie, elucidated many questions about her place in the world, about what happens in her home country, and about what this means for her relationship with him.

What Tania's experience here illustrates is the messy and complicated ways in which learning takes place. Indeed, there are a lot of illustrations of *both* of the sorts of learning volunteers and hosts are interested in. Tania *used to* think that she knew about Mario's life and was shocked to hear about his struggles. *Through* her closeness with him she is rethinking life in Nicaragua and what her role could be in relation to Mario. Indeed, she doesn't have much of a sense of what it

should look like. As she narrates it, there is much that she wants for him but doesn't know if she is able to actually know what might be right for his life, or if she even should be thinking about what he should do. Interestingly, the two women with whom Tania had come and who were in the focus group with her had significant investment in this story as well. It was told at their prompting, and was one that they joined in to narrate. There was also a sense from the interview with Natalie and Becky, the other members of the focus group, that they were not forming the same sorts of bonds that Tania had with Mario. This came up later when I asked about relationships they were forming with their host families. This story, then, highlights for these three volunteers the struggle of life in Nicaragua. It brought us to later talking about education in the country, the impossibility of their having a long-term impact there, and also to talk at length about building relationships. As I mentioned in my methodology chapter, there were moments when I felt interpolated as a mentor to volunteers and this was certainly one of those times.

In addition to the way in which this story was meaningful for my participants, because of the timing of my interviews we are left with the uncertainty of what "actually" happens in this scenario, which models the uncertainty of learning. We might wonder: how does Tania resolve these struggles that she faces, and does Mario get the contract for surfing? These questions reveal that it is the *outcome* of proximity that is often of interest – does it produce thoughtful caring, employable citizens, citizens committed to solidarity, or citizens who are overwhelmed by not knowing what to do with their knowledge? Are the lives of people are there to help improved? When we look at everyday encounters it becomes clear that they are filled with the messy modes of being close to one another. They are messy not only in that these moments are rife with many fantasies about what proximity may teach and what transformations are possible (and desirable), but that they are also messy in that they do not result in one way of transformation or learning or proximity. Moments of encountering others are confusing for those who live them. Looking at encounters defers us from looking for results and judging them – such as transformed citizen or not – but rather directs attention to look at the *logics* and *depth* of volunteer abroad as a pedagogy. This partial story shows that what is key in the analysis of both imaginings of the possible effects of proximity (since we could imagine out of Tania's story an "ending" with either sort of transformation) is that it is messier than a simplistic pedagogy and is a process that does not have one outcome. The logics of volunteer abroad as a pedagogy where proximity is

figured as a "good method" for transformation (both political and self-making) erases the complexity of getting close to others, which I explore in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In the pedagogical logic of volunteer abroad, proximity plays a key role. While both hosts and volunteers understand the *outcomes* of this tool differently – either as creating knowledgeable subjects through the approximation or others, or people with changed ideological commitments – they are both imaginaries that are reliant on proximity. Each of these modes of proximity are imbued with possibilities of volunteer abroad – creating employable people who know more about the world or changing commitments of those with privilege. These imaginings reveal differential understandings of volunteer abroad, and as argued above can be read palimpsestically. I have argued that while it is important to consider the colonial and imperial readings of the idea that proximity to others will teach volunteers, and the privilege through which this mobility is possible, it is also important to look for the ways in which Nicaragua's history of solidarity can be read in the call for *conviviencia* and for the ways in which the ambivalence of learning is present in the everyday moments of encounter. However, the pedagogies of proximity are not straightforward; indeed, these encounters are tied up in a multiplicity of demands for volunteers. The demand on volunteers is not only to learn about themselves and about Nicaragua, but also to create a different understanding of the world that will result in a different future. While a hope for a different future is present in both hosts' and volunteers' understanding of proximity, these futures are imagined through different lenses. Yet, despite these differences in each frame there is a multiplicity of demands on the learning of the volunteer.

While much of the framing of volunteer abroad looks to the undifferentiated other as the site from which students learn, as Mostafenzhad (2014) also found, "culture is seemingly absorbed through proximity rather than linguistic communication" (115). Thus, in the pedagogical fantasy for volunteers and programming, it is not through a knowledgeable other that students are transformed, but rather Nicaraguans become embodiments of the culture volunteers are supposed to learn from and about. However, the insights that actual encounters with others make possible are not straightforward and, as we have seen in Tania's story, are tied up with different ideas of transformation and relationality. While the *assumptions* of institutional programming are that

Nicaraguans are simply culture keepers, most of the Nicaraguan participants in my study talked about the difficulty of the work that was required in these encounters, the steps they had taken towards professional development and their investment in improving volunteer abroad.

As evidenced by Tania's story about her relationship with Mario, the actual, everyday experience of proximity is neither simply one which creates a knowledgeable subject through embodied learning (such as the dance classes she told me she went to) or changing her mentalities (such as the questioning of her role and right to assert any ideas about Mario's life). Rather, an examination of these everyday, unresolved and intimate encounters of proximity shows the complex ways in which relationality is enacted and the difficult questions that these raise. To read these accounts of how volunteer abroad works as modes of learning and its difficulties, is to challenge the assumptions that proximity and thus, volunteer abroad, is a "good method" for change. Proximity evokes feelings of closeness, but also complex questions of the self, and relationality. In the next chapter I look at the different registers through which we can think about intimacy in volunteer abroad encounters.

Chapter Four

The Intimate in Volunteer Abroad

Intimacy is thought to be one of the key components of volunteer abroad programs. As noted in the previous chapter, proximity is imagined as a key tool for transformation and one that is also central to what brings participants to volunteer abroad programs. In these programs, it is assumed by volunteers that they will learn through their approximation of Nicaraguans. For Nicaraguans, this same closeness involves a living "with" that is attached to opportunities for political pedagogy and transformation.

Whereas proximity is imagined as a nearness between bodies, intimacy indicates the relationality that is developed through this nearness. I suggest that intimacies in volunteer abroad programs are idealized as loving, familial relationships, and that these are usually expected to be the outcomes of homestay programs. But, in the experiences of programming, relationality and intimacy are fraught with complex meanings and experiences because being with others is unpredictable. This chapter explores how intimate encounters relate to learning in volunteer abroad programs. It also looks at participants' stories of intimacy and what these stories reveal about the ways power relations surface, even as they are denied.

This chapter is an inquiry into the two modes of intimacy that repeatedly surfaced in my interviews: intimacy with host families in the home space, and intimacy through catcalling in the streets. These encounters involved the promise of close familial intimacy, and the discomfort of sexualized intimacy. The former was associated with the home space of the host family and the latter with catcalling on the streets, although as I discuss below, sometimes the lines separating these domains of intimacy were blurred. Both of these modes were salient across my interviews. Although I didn't ask about catcalling, specifically, it quite often came up, particularly when I asked about moments when volunteers felt "different." I put these two modes of intimacy beside each other because they mark two profoundly different affective moments: when volunteers primarily felt they belonged and when they felt most at odds with being there. Yet, what these distinctly different feelings share is that they come about through the intimacy that emerges when bodies are brought proximal with one another. Further, although white women seemed to experience a higher rate of catcalling than other volunteers, volunteers of colour, including men,

also cited being catcalled and witnessing catcalling as moments when they *felt* different. For the male volunteers in my research, these feelings of "difference" often occurred during moments when the white women they were with were being catcalled.

In this chapter, I ask, "How do these moments of intimacy differently construct experiencing subjects?" and "how do these modes of intimacy produce insight?" These two sites of intimacy give us insight into feelings of fear and safety, in relation to travel, gender and race. While intimacy is often used as a topic when speaking of close, physical and *chosen* interactions, I use the term to indicate the ways in which the experiences of living with host families and of being catcalled create relationships between bodies. Following Faier (2009), I use intimacy to mean "interactions [that] involve relational self-making practices that engage gendered and sexualized form of affect and desire, often in the realm of what is considered private" (14). While catcalling does not usually take place in private, I suggest that it is an intimate self-making practice. This is due to the ways in which catcalling produces bodily relation, not only during the moments of catcalling between the catcaller and catcallee, but also in terms of the anticipatory actions that are produced as a result of the possibility of being catcalled, such as volunteers staying in groups when they travel in the city. While idealized imaginings of intimacy occur in the private sphere, intimacy is also present in public spaces (Berlant 2000). As volunteers moved through the city and in the home, they found catcalling and the possibility of its occurrence deeply evocative and rife with the complexities of gendered and sexualized affect and desire. In my interviews, volunteers found it difficult to narrate their experiences of catcalling. I suggest this was because they felt overburdened by the multiple meanings of the relationship between the self and others brought to the surface in these encounters. On the other hand, volunteers used language filled with ideas of love and care in their narratives of their experiences with their host families.

While some modes of intimacy are imagined to be conducive to learning, others are seen as threatening and preventative of learning. The two modes of intimacy I outline in this chapter are spaces in which volunteers and Nicaraguans encounter one another. The home space becomes framed as a space that is acceptable and conducive to learning because of its characterization as asexual and safe. On the other hand, intimacy with strangers on the street – especially through catcalling – is seen as dangerous because of its sexual charge and, therefore, as not conducive to learning. I challenge this dichotomy of intimacy as good or bad for learning.

Mostafenezhad (2014) argues that the focus on intimacy as love for volunteers overshadows understandings of inequality. I suggest intimacy can provide insight into relationships, and their practices, that are deeply unequal. Through an analysis of the ways the desire for intimacy can be disrupted, I trouble the idea that volunteers only experience the positive affects of intimacy, such as "love." When understood as a mode of attachment, intimacy that is both affectively pleasing and troubling provides insight into the complicated processes of attachments in volunteer abroad programs.

In the previous chapter, I mapped the attachments to proximity and its relation to learning and transformation. In this chapter, I explore affective intimacies and how participants understand them. These intimacies reveal the surfacing of inequalities in volunteer experiences. While "good" intimacies are imagined as conducive to learning, we see that different modes of intimacies in encounters between Nicaraguans and volunteers all involve meaning-making and, thus, contain potential for learning.

Intimacy

While recent studies that look to intimate transnational encounters take marriage or sex as key points of inquiry (Schaeffer 2013; Faier 2009; Frohlick 2007; Jacobs 2012), in this chapter, I extend the concept of intimacy. Here, I use intimacy to indicate the processes through which bodies are brought into affective encounters. This can mean reactions to catcalling that range from disgust to desire or both. It can also mean reactions to the everyday experiences of sharing a living space with a host family that invoke an inability to hide that one is feeling ill, to feeling love toward the family, to cooking together.

In Faier's (2007) examination of cross-national marriages between Filipina women and Japanese men, in rural Japan, she notes that an analysis of these marriages

> …can show us how cultural meanings and identities are shaped not only by structures of power and forms of human agency, but also by the mundane and sometimes surprising ways that discrepantly located agendas and forms of desire come into productive relations (4).

I take the diverging intimacies of catcalls and living with host families as sites of inquiry into how discrepant desires and agendas are brought into productive relations in encounters of volunteer abroad. As Berlant (2000) suggests, intimacy "involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way" (1). As we have already seen, volunteer abroad produces a narrative about things shared between participants, and despite the differences between the *content* of these narratives, the participants' outcomes are assumed prior to their embarking on their programs. The discrepant desires and agendas not only include the desire for change, as a result of volunteer abroad programs, they also include the ways in which living with host families and experiencing catcalling are evocative of a multiplicity of racialized and gendered reactions and readings of these experiences– from mentalities being seen as colonial to one's affirmation as a sexual subject. Discourses of host families as a site for love and care, and the street as a space of danger also involve aspirations and expectations about what "good" intimacy is, and the function of intimacy in relation to safety and learning.

Faier (2009) uses the word "intimate" to show the "social and spatial proximities that define relationships;" she also uses it because it signals connections between gender and sexuality (14). My understanding of intimacy draws on thinking about contemporary and current relations alongside a historicity of how bodies come to be proximal to one another. As Pratt and Rosner (2012) suggest, the global and the intimate should not be thought of as separate, but rather as entwined and mutually constitutive. It is through the entanglement of the global and the intimate, in the lived experiences of volunteer abroad, that participants learn about the world through their relationships with others. Indeed, we might consider volunteer abroad what Povinelli (2008) would call an "auto-logical project," where auto-logical refers to the "discourses, practices, and fantasies about self-making, self-sovereignty, and the value of individual freedom associated with the Enlightenment project of contractual, constitutional democracy and capitalism" (4). Volunteer abroad is a project infused with fantasies about self-making in relation to others, where volunteers are supposed to become caring, global citizens while also becoming more employable through the development of their own social capital. Vrasti (2012) shows the ways in which these soft skills are understood as social capital for the job market. Indeed, the volunteers recounted that having on their resumes both international experience and volunteering would set them apart from others in terms of the job market.

Looking to the intimate also directs our attention to the ways in which gender and sexuality are present in the everyday encounters of volunteer abroad. As I have already argued, both hosts and volunteers primarily imagine proximity as a condition of the home space; it is a space rife with imaginings of asexual love in the ways we often perceive as intimate the private sphere and the family. Thus, for example, the term "intimate partner violence" is used to distinguish the violence people (often women) experience at the hands of their partners or other family members as distinct from violence at the hands of friends or strangers. Indeed, it is important to understand intimacy not only as relationships that are life-giving or affirming, but also as including moments that threaten these very fantasies. Following Berlant (2000), I see intimacy as that which "names an enigma of attachments" rather than only as the dominant understandings of intimacy as loving, close and affirming.

The ways in which intimacy arises in volunteer abroad programs lends insight into the dynamics of gender, sexuality, and race. Many of my participants did not want to talk about these sexualized, gendered, or racialized dynamics as impacting their experiences. However, as volunteers talked about the work that their host mothers did to care for them as a labour of "love" and as the host mothers talked about worrying for the safety of the female volunteers who lived with them while outside of the house, the dynamics of racialized gender, alongside the heterosexist understandings of family, began to emerge. That these dynamics emerged in encounters between host families, and then on the street, gives us insight into the operations of the logics of heterosexuality, in volunteer abroad, in the positioning of the nuclear family "at home" as a realm of safety. The distinction between "private" and "public" often translates into "dangerous and not good for learning" and "safe and productive for learning." Important to these distinctions is the operation of a temporary familial adoption to secure the home space as asexual and thus as safe for learning. This distinction also produces the public space as belonging to the Other, and as unpredictable and thus unsafe. These discourses are present not only in my interviews, but also in public media, tourism literature and advice about volunteer abroad.

Understanding the ways in which the everyday, intimate encounters, often marked as "private," are connected to the larger-scale political, social, and economic aspects of these encounters is central to this chapter. While intimacy is often imagined as either a dangerous encounter (such as experiencing violence at the hands of an intimate partner) or safe (a heterosexual marriage),

Berlant (2000) suggests that, while being rife with fantasies about a good life, intimacy also includes "unavoidable troubles, the distractions and disruptions that make things turn out in unpredicted scenarios" (1). Central to Berlant's important work is the understanding of intimacy as a widely and publicly shared value; it "builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relations" (2). Here, we can see that intimacy in the home space creates space and relationships between volunteers and Nicaraguans. Catcalling, on the other hand, is a mode of intimacy where volunteers find themselves in what Berlant refers to as "unavoidable troubles." Thus, contrasting experiences in the home space with those on the street is not to suggest that the former is the place for making a good life (in the home space) and the latter contains unavoidable troubles (on the street). Nor is it to suggest one is simply public while the other private. While the host family's home space is considered private, it also occupies a quasi-public space in that multiple volunteers reside with one family over time. Rather, this suggests that these spaces are necessarily entwined, and that encounters in host family spaces and on the street are complexly intimate.

As Pratt and Rosner (2012) outline in the *The Global and the Intimate*, transnational feminist theory works to complicate binaries, for example, by positioning the intimate alongside the global, rather than relying on public/private or global/local distinctions. In my positioning of both catcalling and host families as modes of intimacy, I investigate how these two modes of interaction are connected in volunteer abroad experiences, as opposed to setting them up as entirely unrelated to each other. This positioning of catcalling volunteers in the street and caring for volunteers in the host family's home allows us to see how the safety imagined in the host family and the danger imagined on the street are deeply entwined. They are also both deeply reliant on gendered and racialized ideas of who should be doing the caring, whose bodies need to be protected, and whose bodies contain danger.

In what follows, I focus on how the ever-increasing concern for the "safety" of the volunteers, particularly for women, is central to understanding the ways in which the social construction of the host family, in the "private" or "domestic" sphere, is in stark contrast to the social construction of the bodies on street or in the "public" sphere. The context for this social construction is the current larger, global concern for the safety of white, female Western bodies, particularly when they are in proximity to non-white male bodies. It is in this larger context that I

situate my analysis of the interviews wherein both volunteers and hosts discuss the relationship of having/ being a host family and also wherein volunteers talk about having been catcalled. To understand the complex, everyday ways in which these two different intimate encounters are felt, I analyze each of these experiences as moments in which gender, race and sexuality emerge in relation to private and public spaces. In doing so, I pay close attention to how safety and fear are invoked in narratives. Outlining the broader context is important to each of these modes. This is because both the programs and the people associated with them not only reproduce fears about safety but they also extoll the virtues of host families' homes as safe spaces. Attending to both narratives of "safety" and "fear" is crucial to understanding volunteer abroad programs as a pedagogical tool. Ultimately, I consider this in relation to learning.

Safety: Narrating Fear and Comfort

Both hosts and volunteers expressed concerns for women's safety while they are traveling. This common theme also figures prominently in the public media, including blogs, travel guides, and volunteer-program content. For example, volunteers participating through home universities were often required to attend "risk management" seminars prior to departure. Volunteers talked about the concerns of their families and friends. For example, one young woman's family had watched the movie *Taken* and was worried she would be kidnapped and sold into the sex trade. Host families talked about specific advice and the worries they had for the female volunteers staying with them, such as staying out too late or taking cabs alone. Indeed, recent reports state that the Peace Corps required participants who had reported being raped to sign waivers that limited their movements and actions, if they wanted to remain in their placements (Norbert 2015, Stolberg 2011). These are some of the stories that circulate among volunteers and that increase the attention paid to (and the construction of) women's vulnerability while abroad. Websites and books also abound with advice for female travelers. This is discussed later in the chapter.

This conceptualization of the vulnerability of women's bodies leads to limiting women's movements. As feminist literature has shown, the fear of sexual assault can constrain and limit the ways women are able to move in the world and how women's bodies are socially constructed and imagined. This social construction of women's bodies as sites of danger means that a woman "learns to accept her body as dangerous, wilful, fragile, and hostile. *It* constantly poses the possibility of threat and only persistent vigilance can limit the risk at which it places the woman"

(Cahill 2000, p. 56). Thus, as many scholars and activists have pointed out, rape prevention often focuses on women's tactics and strategies thus making them responsible for their safety. This is no different from the pre-travel advice guidebooks present to women (a topic discussed later in the chapter). For example, women are advised to not talk with men they don't know while traveling, to not drink too much or stay out too late, but the reasons for taking these precautions are not explicitly spelled out.

Experiences of travel are not only gendered but are also classed and racialized. Razack (2000) argues that colonial, capitalist and patriarchal ways of seeing and living in the world are not only often *taken up in* movements of white bodies, but they are also *enforced through* their movements. She argues that middle-class white men come to know who they are by entering and leaving particular spaces. As she explains:

> Moving from respectable space to degenerate space and back again is an adventure that seeks to confirm that they are indeed white men in control who can survive a dangerous encounter with the racial Other and who have an unquestioned right to go anywhere and do anything (95).

Although Razack (2000) is talking about the experiences of white men in Canada, women travellers often see this move into risky space, as they travel, as important to their identity formation (Heron 2007).

Global understandings of gender inequity posit that the "West" is more advanced, and thus the "South" is "risky" (Mohanty 2003). Lozanski (2011) found this in her study of white women travelling to India: "Western women traveling far from home are characterized as independent in their home countries, by fellow travelers, and by those living in the places they travel. While Indian women are governed by their fathers and brothers, Western women are assumed and expected to be independent, equal, and liberated" (301). Western women are positioned as more free; but, in their travels, they are subject to the unruly, racialized, "local" men. Thus, assumptions about racialized men work to create a geography of fear for volunteers.

This threat to the bodies of white women was productive to advocating that volunteers stay with a host family in order to mitigate danger. For example, on a travel blog called *Maria Abroad* the

author suggests that people should stay with a host family when going abroad. She lists one of the main reasons as that a

> …host family can **give advice on safety** and keep an eye on you. They know which areas of town you should avoid and which behaviour might get you in serious trouble. This might be a great point to convince your *real family* to let you go abroad in the first place (mariaabroad.org, emphasis in original)

Safety tactics in the above excerpt operate to keep volunteers safe from what may be lurking outside of the home. Further, we can read that the volunteers, and their "real" families, are also concerned with their own safety. In fact, many of the volunteers in my interviews repeated that their families might be worried for their safety. Interestingly, when I asked Nicaraguans why they thought volunteers chose to volunteer in Nicaragua, almost everyone thought one of the reasons was its status as one of the safest countries in Central America. However, none of the volunteers mentioned this factor in their decision-making.

One of the Nicaraguan facilitators suggested that the host family was a tool to keep volunteers safe and out of trouble. When I asked whether his organization suggested for volunteers to stay with a host family, he said,

> There are some [volunteers] who, for the same cultural reasons [needing space, privacy, being independent], don't adapt and, so, decide they are going to live independently. We don't like this because if they come as a volunteer, independently they go to parties. Many parties; and the idea is to enrich their experience, live with a Nicaraguan family. They get up early, have to do many things, and sometimes foreigners have an intense need for privacy. To have their own room, their own bathroom, that there isn't noise.

Later, this facilitator went on to explain that when they are connecting volunteers with host families, they even try to place them in areas of the city where it will be more difficult for them to go to parties whenever they want to. Here, host families become a buffer to keep volunteers from getting into trouble and to teach them how to be safe in the city. When I spoke with host mothers, they often told me about how worried they were about volunteers when they went out at night, particularly female volunteers. They also noted that they spent a lot of time explaining to

them how to get around, where not to go, and asking them to let them know of their plans in advance.

While the travelling woman's body is imagined as being under threat, the space of the host family is imagined as being safe and instructive. Indeed, programs often advertise the site of the host family as one that will provide love and care, and help volunteers navigate the community, learn the language, and to stay out of trouble. Thus, the host family comes to occupy an imagined safe space that is positioned against the inherent risk of travel. In the following section, I take a close look at the ways in which the domestic/public spatial distinction aligns with a desexualized, feminized, and familialized and, thus, safe home space. I also look at how the "family" is crucial to this framing. This, in turn, sharply contrasts with the construction of the street space that is sexualized, masculinized, adult and, thus, dangerous.

The Role of (Familial) Labour

Many of the study participants thought host families were crucial to facilitating a good learning experience in volunteer programs. As we saw in the previous chapter, host families are seen as a key site for learning. The role of the host mother is central to this experience. Host mothers talked, at length, about how they were the ones who had decided to have the volunteer stay with them and also to take on most of the labour associated with their homestays. Companionship and building relationships were central to the host mothers' vision. The work of the host mother supposedly leads to the creation of a loving intimacy through familial adoption – a relation between bodies. The expectations of this labour are not only framed as the labour of a host family (indeed, many times not at all through the ideas of *hosting*), but rather through volunteers' perceptions of gendered and racialized labour under the auspices of family. These expectations reinforced the home as a space of safety for volunteers (and, thus, of potential learning). In a safe space, the proximity of bodies is not dangerous and, thus, can be productive for meaning making.

Volunteer abroad organizations, volunteers, and host families all expect families to be welcoming. The latter want to spend time with volunteers, to talk about and explain their culture, and to teach them Spanish language. When I asked both the hosts and the volunteers about what makes a "good" host family, they often said that families need to be welcoming, willing to communicate through gestures, be patient and "open minded," and to include the volunteer *as a*

member of their family. Indeed, host mothers consistently insisted that volunteers should *not* be treated as guests. The inclusion of volunteers *as part of the family* is crucial to this relation formation.

While many of the study participants emphasized this distinction between guest as guest and guest as a family member, the actual practice of a homestay is less clear. An advice column that is widely shared offers the following description of the volunteer abroad homestay:

> The main purpose of a homestay is to provide a home away from home to the guest. Homestay costs are a fraction of the cost as opposed to hotels and hostels. Homestays are a great way to experience the culture. As a volunteer you will get a new family to live with, in that you will have host parents, host brothers, host siblings and sometimes host nephews and nieces. In the home you will be living in you can choose the amount of work or responsibility that you want to be given in the home. You can do as much or as little as you want. The activities that are normally included are cooking, washing dishes, clothes, and cleaning. In most occasions you will have a private room to yourself, but sometimes you will share the room with another international volunteer. Most international volunteers remember their experience in the homestay other than their visits to tourist sites (True Traveler, 2010).

This description makes compelling arguments for the homestay, including its affordability, the emotional connection and the memories they create. The post also produces a set of expectations that shape how volunteers encounter host families.

Volunteers are in a curious position of simultaneously being a member and a non-member of a family. As described above, they are invited to enter into an already existing family as *they* see fit. Indeed, when I talked with host mothers, they told me that volunteers were treated as a member of the family. However, as the interviews progressed, it became clear that extra work was involved in housing these volunteers, and that it was the same work one would do for a guest (such as doing their laundry, or teaching them how to use a gas stove). The host mothers took on this extra work, and sometimes host sisters also pitched in. Often this extra labour either went unrecognized by the volunteers or was coded as "love." Thus, the language of adoption and

becoming   *a member of the family* often treated this extra work as invisible labour. Instead, the work involved in caring for the volunteers becomes seen as an expression of motherly love.

We can begin to see the ways in which hosting practices that are designed not as labour but as love are also designed to foster intimacy. Coded as the intimate relations of love, the economic exchange required for the possibility of hosting volunteers are obscured. Economic arrangements are incongruent with being a member of a family, despite connections between the family and the market (Franklin and McKinnon 2000). Where intimacy is often relegated to the private sphere, and volunteers are named as family members, the intimate can be thought of as a process of attachment, "a drive that creates spaces around it through practices" (Berlant 2000, 4). Volunteer abroad, through the practice of paying for a homestay, creates a new kind of temporal quasi-familial relationship. As Conran (2011) argues, the fantasy of intimacy and love are actually the commoditized experiences of tourism; this is especially so in volunteer tourism. So, as we can see from the discussion of the work required of the host mother, including the volunteer in the family space changes the family's private space.

In my interviews with volunteers, the fantasies of love, belonging, and inclusion that are associated with families, and the assumption that the private, domestic space is safe, were strong reasons for choosing a homestay. Rarely did these conversations involve questioning the safety of being in a private home with a family they did not know. In what follows, I look at the ways in which the space of the host family and the subsequent intimacies are constructed as loci of the type of love, care, and kinship that are imagined as safe and important for learning.

Mothers as Culturally Loving

Volunteers and the programs they come with understand learning as amplified through living with a host family because of the possibilities for living "like" Nicaraguans through approximation. The supposedly private sphere of the volunteer experience becomes the site of learning. I spoke at length to one of the participants about the role her host mother had played in her experience: "she is the sweetest person ever, she's honestly *just like a mom*, like *my* mom, and she takes care of us and she makes food and is super sweet and always willing to talk, and teach me how to do laundry." This narration was present across my interviews. That is, the volunteers felt belonging through the gendered work involved in caring for them. Here, we can

see how the work of the host mother (teaching the volunteer how to do laundry, taking care of her, cooking for her, talking to her) is coded as love and as the acts of a *mom,* rather than as the work of someone who is employed to care for a homestay. The language of familial adoption led to interactions between the volunteers and the host families being understood as familial relations and as acts of love.

When I asked Abby to elaborate on what she meant when she said that she felt love in the experience with her host family, she told me a story about how she had lost a bra and had mentioned it to her host mom. She said, the next week, her host mom returned from an hour-long trip to the city, by bus, with a bra to replace the one the Abby had lost. Another participant told me about how she felt love because her host family always let her have the front seat in their truck. Love also meant she had her own bed in the house, while other family members shared. While these actions may be read as being about affection or caring for another, they could also be read as being about inequity and an expression of the pressure to provide special care and services in order to maintain good standing with the volunteer abroad organization. However, in both of these situations, the volunteers read the special treatment they received as acts of *love.*

The interviews did not narrate the experience of staying alongside a family or living with a family, but rather the volunteers expressed feelings of *becoming part of* the family. These feelings of becoming part of the family were further fostered by volunteers being encouraged to call the host mom "madre" and the dad "padre," and by being treated as children of the family, regardless of the volunteers' ages.

 Often, Latin American mothers are assumed to be even *more* capable of mothering than are mothers elsewhere. In the concept of the Latin American family (and the mother is integral to this), mothers are understood as more warm, loving and hospitable. In their research on host mothers in Mexico and Spain, Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2002) found that "[t]hey [the host mothers] are quick to help students by giving them personal advice about what to wear, what to eat and drink, and who to go out with. They care for them when they are sick and when they have personal problems. In short, 'we try to help them as much as we can. Just like we do *with our own kids*'" (196, emphasis added).

This care work also extends to keeping the volunteers safe. That is, in addition to the above listed reasons for staying with host families, host families become cultural brokers that help volunteers understand how to move through the community in which they are volunteering; they help them know the spaces where they should and should not be. Again, we can see the ways in which the work of the host family is not only about learning but also about safety. Indeed, we might say that there is a multiplicity of learning goals in the homestay. Some learning goals are about the volunteer's personal transformation, others are practical and safety-oriented. Thus, this care work keeps volunteers safe while it also provides a space seen as conducive to learning.

In addition to this care work, host families consider family values as being important to the homestay experience. It is through the creation of intimate (temporary) relations with a host family that volunteers are encouraged to encounter tightly knit families who eat together, who are commonly not divorced, and whose children do not leave home as soon as possible. Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2002) found that the host families felt as though they were imparting important family values on the volunteers:

> [M]any Mexicans have the perception that our students do not have the strong family bond or extended family ties that they have. In referring to both students from divorced families and families in which the members are not home a lot, they noted "They are not used to the warmth of the family." The Mexican senoras then see themselves as surrogate mothers in the sense that they are providing something the students do not get at home, filling in emotional holes – almost like psychologists (195).

These family values are also understood as *culturally specific*. This was also a theme that came up in my research. Volunteers understand interactions with the host family together with the extra care work as a special kind of cultural experience, crucial to the homestay and, thus, as facilitating learning about the values of unity and togetherness in the nuclear family. The host mothers to whom I spoke talked about wanting to teach the volunteers about family values. One host mother told me

> …if they take back with them how we relate in our families, to practice this. I cannot conceive of families there, but it's because it is another culture, but I don't know how it is possible for us to live so independently and apart from family. With everyone in their

own little world? No. The family has to be united and together, I want them to learn

about my family.

Many host families expressed this cultural difference as an important component of living

together and wanting to host volunteers. Host mothers explained to me that they were very

maternal and did not want their children to leave the home until they were married. They saw

this as distinct from North American families, which they characterized as independent, lonely,

and distant. Thus, host mothers also understood themselves as having something to offer the

volunteers, namely a different family value system, one that could teach the volunteers some

valuable lessons.

In her study of First World parents hiring Third World nannies, Hochschild (2003) found that the

characterization of loving Third World families was central to employer families' reasons for

hiring nannies:

> [T]hey import the benefits of Third World 'family values.' Says the director of a co-op
>
> nursery in the San Francisco Bay Area, "this may be odd to say, but the teacher's aides
>
> we hire from Mexico and Guatemala know how to love a child better than the middle-
>
> class white parents. They are more relaxed, patient and joyful. They enjoy the kids
>
> more… I tell the parents that they can really learn how to love from the Latinas and
>
> Filipinas. (191)

This characterization of loving families is also part of why the volunteer wants to stay with host

families. It is also what students are paying for and, thus, not devoid of economic significance.

The ability of white volunteers to pay to stay with families is premised on global inequalities.

For host families, they see this adoption of volunteers as a new child in the family as part of their

work of teaching volunteers about Nicaragua and Nicaraguan culture. The hosts see the

volunteers as children of their family, who need to learn new familial modes of conducting

relationships. Latin American families see themselves as being in possession of something that

the volunteers' families are lacking but can learn about.

Provocative Intimacies in the Family

As we have seen, the idea of family is generally understood within an emotional register of love. Closeness and intimacy with a family are often imagined as crucial to the learning and self-making of volunteer abroad. Volunteers are safe when they are living with a host family. But they also learn about different family values, about Nicaragua, and become connected to people on the ground. However, there were moments in which volunteers began to feel uncomfortable in relation to specific experiences of intimacy with their host families. These moments of discomfort, while being in the host family space, reveal two important aspects of the operation of intimacy in volunteer abroad experiences. The temporary adoption of volunteers into host families reveals aspects of the operation of intimacy in the pedagogical logics of volunteer abroad. First, the use of familial adoption is meant to promote connections between volunteers and Nicaraguans, without attention being paid to difference. When difference is taken out of the equation, labour becomes coded as love. Yet, despite the work of familial adoption, an attention to this type of encounter shows that difference emerges despite it being disavowed. Second, these moments reveal the assumptions that render private space as productive for learning, and public space as threatening. Thus, intimacy, when seen through the concept of the encounter, is troubling to imaginings of volunteer abroad.

In our interviews, both facilitators and volunteers recounted moments of uneasy intimacy. One facilitator told me about a volunteer who was uncomfortable with her host dad. Subsequent to being made aware of the volunteer's discomfort, the facilitator had to move her to a different host family. The facilitator spoke, at length, about the difficulty this posed for the organization. They had worked with this family for years without receiving complaints, but it is the organization's principle to believe the volunteer when they report such experiences and to respond by immediately finding another host family. The organization, then, had to grapple with how to work with the original host family, how to talk with the community about why the volunteer was moved, and then debrief the volunteer.

Similar narratives of conflicts arose when I talked with volunteers. Nora told me about a time her host brother had walked into her bedroom, without knocking, to offer her an ice cream. It had been especially humid that day. She had been lying on her bed reading, and wearing only a sports bra and shorts. As she talked to me, it became clear that the intimacy of this moment was infused with ambivalence, to say the least. She knew her room was part of the family's space,

and not truly hers. She also knew that her host brother was offering her something out of kindness, though he had already been annoying her by regularly playing loud music and by not having employment. She felt he shouldn't have come into her room without asking, especially since she had only been wearing a sports bra. She felt vulnerable, in this moment, as the bodily relations between them felt as if they were either already shifting or were threatening to shift. This encounter with her host brother ruptured the supposedly safe, desexualized sphere of the host family and its asexual intimacy. Suddenly, her body became the site of attention—hers, but also potentially his, as this encounter could have potentially provoked sexual tension. She found it difficult to think through this encounter.

Interestingly, Nora had already been struggling to build a relationship with her host brother. She assumed she shouldn't find him annoying, even though these are typical feelings among many siblings. She also felt that she should want to have a relationship with him, even though many siblings do not. However, she simply could not bring herself to spend time with him.

While the work of the host family is to create a fictive kinship, the narratives that frame this do not allow for much complexity. That is, siblings may be simply annoying or uninteresting, on one hand, or desirable, on the other. The possibility of sexual attraction, in particular, threatens to blur the lines between what is deemed a "safe" private space and, instead, raises the specter of feelings in an "unsafe" public space.

I understand this moment as being intimate because of the ways in which it brings together bodies that "meet the normative practices, fantasies, institutions, and ideologies that organize people's worlds" (Berlant 2000, 2). To read this destabilization of what is, for Nora, safe and unsafe, is to read how the attachments associated with being a member of the host family provide insight into the binaries of safe and unsafe and private and public. It also reveals the ways in which the language of familial adoption, within volunteer abroad experiences, does not sufficiently mirror the actual complexities of familial relations, for example, where siblings don't always get along. Rather, this adoption relies on a romantic notion of family life.

These moments of uncertainty in the experiences of intimacy, and the ways in which intimate moments provoke ambivalence, demonstrate the ways in which the fantasy of the home space as being domestic, safe, and asexual can be easily interrupted. While men on the streets are

threatening to the white female body, in the home these same bodies are not supposed to be threatening in the same way. Yet, the racialized and sexualized social construction of Nicaraguan men and their bodies points to the possibility of volunteers seeing or experiencing these men's bodies as threats, regardless of whether these men's location is in the home or on the street.

For volunteers, the home space is supposed to be filled with (easy) familial love and belonging. Through this belonging and participation, the volunteers understand themselves as learning about Nicaragua. Home spaces become characterized as ripe for self-making, in volunteer abroad, partially because they fulfill the fantasy of educational spaces being devoid of politics (Britzman 1992). Host families become even more potent as the locus of desexualized love, care, and safety, when juxtaposed to the outside world. In the public space, volunteers are often uncertain of their utility. Their language inabilities make them vulnerable, and they experience themselves as different from Nicaraguans. In the private space, the home space is not simply characterized as safe and, therefore, good for learning, it is also imagined as being necessary for protecting the bodies of volunteers from others so as to allow for these spaces of learning and trust.

Being Catcalled

The experience of catcalling became the key moment during which my participants experienced themselves as feeling "different." These were also the only times volunteers talked explicitly about race. In my interviews, volunteers found it difficult to coherently narrate their experiences with catcalls. At the same time, the topic provoked much discussion. The host mothers told me it was difficult to talk with volunteers about catcalls, and gender relations more generally. They told me that volunteers often "misread" the actions of Nicaraguan men. Hosts talked about how volunteers did not understand that the ways men and women occupied space together were culturally different in Nicaragua. They found that the volunteers were not as friendly as Nicaraguans. I read this as a difficulty on the part of hosts. I also interpreted the hosts' accusations of the way volunteers misread catcalling as an acknowledgement of sorts. Namely, it was an acknowledgement that the experience of catcalling can provoke antagonistic feelings and resentment, in volunteers, as the result of a complex set of lived differences (including cultural, but also racial, economic and gendered). The difficulty for hosts rests in the acknowledgment that there are moments in which volunteers either feel threatened by or regularly express disgust,

frustration and contempt toward what, in Nicaragua, is considered to be a normal, everyday experience that is part of the local culture.

Discussions on catcalling, particularly with the volunteers, gave shape to how white female bodies drew unwanted attention. For the volunteers, this provoked feelings of fear, and a sense of danger. However, it was not only the catcalls that evoked these feelings. The possibilities of assault, theft and other uninvited interactions also caused concerns for the volunteers and limited their movements. For example, many female volunteers told me about walking around the city with headphones on to drown out the catcalls, and about not walking around alone or at night.

Feminist scholarship has demonstrated the ways in which fear of sexual assault can constrain and limit the ways women are able to move in the world. As Cahill (2000) writes,

> For a woman, the travelable world is a small place. Entire portions of each 24-hour period are deemed unsafe, and unless accompanied by a man (or alternatively, many women) these hours should be spent in the safety of one's own home. Geographical areas which may be completely accessible to men are, for women, sites of possible (even likely) harassment, molestation, or rape (55).

Cahill (2000) indicates the ways in which this danger is read not only in terms of spatiality, but also in reference to temporality and in relation to other bodies. In "The Solo Female Travel Experience: Exploring the Geography of Women's Fear," Wilson and Little (2008) ask how Valentine's (1989) geography of fear may be thought of in relation to women who are travelling internationally by themselves. They ask, "How are women's fears of male violence [in their home countries] transported as they journey alone?" (68). In looking at catcalling, I ask how this fear of male violence, or of a masculinist culture, is not simply transported *with* the volunteers from their home country but is also a fear produced through a danger that is read *from and in relation to* the particular bodies of Central American men in the contemporary global imaginary. This is an imaginary where white bodies are considered vulnerable to threats from the non-West (read non-white) world. Women's bodies are seen as vulnerable to danger and, thus, are imagined as being in need of taking safety precautions, while simultaneously, the bodies of strange men are often positioned as threatening.

Understanding the ways my participants view safety and risk provides insight into the fears and desires of volunteers in general, how these fears and desires circulate, and how these fears and desires work to mediate and create tourist destinations, in Nicaragua, in particular. Looking to catcalling as moments of the "trouble" of intimacy illustrates the difficulty in building relationships across difference where attention is not being paid to the context of how bodies are perceived and felt. While volunteers often talked about their experiences with catcalling, I am also interested in how their *anticipation* of this experience (and of other threats) motivated their decision to stay with a host family and how it influenced some of their responses.

Many of the volunteers I interviewed said that what they knew about Nicaragua, before coming here, they had read from a guidebook. So, it is worthwhile to examine what travel guides say about women and travel. They can give us insight into the frames of understanding that volunteers bring to their intimate encounters on the street.

In the *Lonely Planet Guide to Nicaragua,* towards the end of the book, a section entitled "particular concerns" contains a short paragraph directed at "women travelers." The primary concern, here, is with access to such things as menstrual products and condoms, and there is some advice on staying safe. *Footprint Nicaragua* (2010) has a similar section, at the beginning of the book, which also recommends another source, *Journey Woman*, for women who will travel to Nicaragua.[12] In Frommer's *Nicaragua & El Salvador*, while there is no specific section for women, women are mentioned when the authors cover security issues. This placement of attention to women shows that travelers are generally not differentiated from one another, except to highlight the heightened threat to women's traveling bodies.[13] These sections and pieces of text are directed toward women, and they often offer advice about ways to stay safe. But they do so without discussing, in detail, w*hy* they should stay safe. In this positioning, it is tacitly understood that women who travel must take precautions. The women reading these guides will

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[12] This website also includes love stories from travel and a recommendation for "Not Without My Daughter. " The latter, a deeply problematic movie, stars Sally Fields, whose character seeks to escape from her marriage to an Iranian man who has kidnaped her and her daughter and is holding them in Iran against their will. These stories and recommendations incite different modes of intimacy, ranging from the fear of capture to dreams of romance, in women who are thinking about and planning their travels.
[13] By comparison, only *The Lonely Planet Guide to Nicaragua* mentions the active Nicaraguans women's movement and does so only in passing.

begin from an understanding that they need to consider this sort of advice in the decisions they make – indicating the persistent fear surrounding the mobility of women's bodies in a global world.

Guidebooks work to construct places of travel as either risky or safe. Popular guidebooks variously describe Nicaraguan men as machistos who "consider the verbal romance of an unacquainted woman to be an art form" (*Footprint* 2008, 35). Nicaraguan men described by way of "struggling mustaches" become the location of danger, and women travellers are told that avoiding interactions with Nicaraguan men is a viable strategy (*Moon*, 435). In Caesar's (2000) study of travel guides for women, she found that sexual assault resisted representation – "[c]onsequently, the subject [sexual assault] comes to occupy a textual space for the power of something unknowable, terrible, and predatory" (530). While rape may not be explicitly mentioned, it remains an unwritten fear that guides women's tactics. Indeed, some noteworthy travel guides tiptoe around the issue if it is even mentioned at all.

Thus, narratives of sexual threats are shaped in ways that women's safety is seemingly available for mediation through individual tactics and personal responsibility. While danger is no longer a hindrance to travel, it still impacts women's movements. These precautions travel guides recommend are both vague and specific. While they are specific to what women are able to do, they are vague in where women will encounter danger.

Interestingly, only Frommer's Guide mentions sex and sexual encounters, in a section entitled "special travelers." This section addresses "gay and lesbian" travellers and reports that gay sex was only decriminalized, in Nicaragua, in 2008. While other guides mention sexual encounters, they do so under the auspice of safety concerns. That is, these sections offer advice on how to buy condoms and how to be safe, and include some useful sexual Spanish phrases. One of the most recent postings on *Journey Woman,* a webpage for women travellers, discourages women from being seduced into sexual encounters; the author claims to be motivated not by moral but by safety concerns. Her advice includes the following admonishment:

> Don't be flattered. Often you are simply a challenge. In some cultures 'only bad girls' will even consider sex before marriage. In these countries women's rights as you know them

> don't exist and men consider it fair game to seduce a foreign woman. All you become is a
> notch in their collective belt and by morning they are planning their next conquest.

The traveling woman is presumed to not know the person they will be having sex with; it is always presumed to be a heterosexual encounter. Indeed, the guides offer very little mention of desire or attraction on the part of the white traveling women, except to signal how intimacy between bodies endangers their white, female bodies. This narrative also relies on positioning men as consumed by desire and only interested in sexual conquest, rather than acknowledging the possibility for genuine attraction and connection. Conversely, guidebooks do not offer the same warnings about host families.

Gendered relations as represented in guidebooks can be reminiscent of colonial relations, where white women were required to be careful and protect their bodies from the hyper-sexed and uncontrollable non-white men. The distinction between the relationships of safe/unsafe to private/public is one that links back to colonial expansion and the fears about sex and sexuality during that era. The experience of white women who traveled during colonial expansion was markedly different than that of white men – while white men were adventurers and explorers, white women were understood as needing protection. Their bodies were both the bearers of imperial order, and the "custodians of their desire-driven, immoral men" (Stoler 1995, 33). These discourses and social constructions echo through travelling women's present-day leeriness of local men, particularly those on the street, and in conversations about Nicaragua being a male-dominated culture. In these framings, the public space and the male bodies that inhabit it are frightening. As Lozanski found, in her study of independent travel to India, "Indian men are perceived to be hyper-sexed, while women travelers are judged to act without reason for their safety" (Lozanski 2007, 296).

The Lonely Planet raises this issue when the authors caution that the "biggest problems that many solo female travelers encounter in Nicaragua are the *piropos* (catcalls) and general unwanted attention from men" ("Women Travelers" section, para 1). The use of Spanish, in this sentence, positions catcalls as an action that does not occur in the same way at home and, thus, does not translate easily into English – it assigns a particularity to the catcalls that grounds it in Nicaragua. Indeed, this action, when articulated only through Spanish, can only be fully understood in its Spanish articulation. This roots the experience of being catcalled in Nicaragua

in the bodies of Nicaraguan men. It also precludes other possible readings, which could draw on the racialization of bodies, global inequalities and colonization as a context for the catcalling.

Volunteers' Experiences of Catcalling

When I asked Nora, Tania, Diane, and Becky to tell me about their experiences of catcalling, they had stories to share. This was clearly a topic they had already discussed together. In the interviews, catcalling emerged as the moments when these volunteers were most unsure of how to react and how to make sense of their experience. It was also one of the only situations where both economic and racial differences were explicitly mentioned. I quote this excerpt from my interview with this group of women at length because it demonstrates the wide range of ways in which catcalling is processed, including as a threat, as a compliment, and as a reflection of the personality of the catcaller:

> Nora: I try not to give it [catcalling] too much thought and I've been walking around with headphones a lot because otherwise I get kind of annoyed. But I've only had one instance where I was like, wow, what the heck is your problem? I was walking home from class and it was the middle of the day, so it was completely fine. But this guy was like 'oh pretty lady how are you doing', but I ignored him.

> Becky: If I could come back here and do a sociological survey of what's going on, why do you think this is ok? What's the culture around it? Because I … part of me feels like there isn't anything behind it. Yeah, it's like it's a white girl, we're going to call her out for being white, and I'm like ok, I'm white, there's nothing I can change about that.

> Diane: I think it shows the …it definitely shows how much machismo there is there. It shows how men are; they just have … they don't see women as people. Because I think in the U.S., and I still don't quite see us as equals, but I don't know, it's more level in the U.S., I think.

> Becky: [women from the U.S. or Europe] are more independent and they're not really going to feel a need, like they're going to call a guy out on his bullshit and versus, like they know they have no chance with us. And I think they like to take the point to bring it

down to their level, so sometimes I care, and sometimes I don't. Sometimes, I'm like yeah, I feel good.

Tania: They see you as a target; they know you have money.

Nora: And the whole gender relations thing, like boys do this and girls do this and boys are, you know, at this societal level, women are at this societal level, that's probably another part of the culture shock that we had too, especially with the whole catcalling and all that stuff. There's a lot of different sociological aspects to take in.

For these four women, catcalling is representative of the unequal gender relations they had been observing in their placements, where they learned that girls do not play soccer and boys do not do ballet. At the same time, they feel they are particularly targeted because they are foreigners. In this conversation about catcalling, Becky was curious about the meaning behind it. In their conversation with one another, they connected this experience to multiple registers – machismo, gender relations, and racialization. Significantly, for many of my participants, it was *not only* that they were women but also that they were *white Western women, which they assumed* prompted the men to catcall them.

In interviews, catcalls became a moment in which volunteers can comment on gender relations in Nicaragua by comparing them to those in the United States. Catcalls also became a moment to talk about how relations to men in the street were about their whiteness. Significantly, catcalling was the only topic where volunteers talked about being white. When I asked the few volunteer women of colour about their experiences of catcalling, they told me it wasn't "as bad" because they weren't white and blonde. They still cited catcalling, often those directed at their white friends, as moments where they felt "different." Thus, although the women of colour did not feel they experienced catcalling with the same frequency, the catcalling itself was felt as an action that called attention to the differences between the bodies of the women volunteers and those of the Nicaraguans.

In the above excerpt, we can see that there are many different ways for volunteers to think through their experiences of being catcalled. However, they also report many different emotional reactions, including anger, frustration and confusion. Later in the same interview, the conversation returned to catcalling. Becky and Nora expressed their disgust with the men who

catcalled them from their motorcycles, while women (whom they assumed were their girlfriends) were riding on the back. They referred to these men as "scum."

These narratives tell us about how the fear of a hyper-sexualized machisto culture structures how participants think about public space, and how bodies come into relation with each other in this space. This interaction between bodies provokes an intimate encounter that threatens the experiences of volunteers and the learning they were expecting to gain from their trip. The encounters threaten to undo the self-making project of volunteer abroad, which involves creating caring global citizens who understand all humans to be 'the same.' Volunteers are forcibly called to recognize the difference of their bodies through being hailed by the already sexualized bodies of others, and also through their affective reactions, which include disgust, anger, and annoyance. Catcalls are unlike other actions. It is important to think of them as intimate for the ways in which these experiences call attention to the volunteers' sex and sexuality, and also their relationality to other bodies. This relationality to other bodies takes place in the context of the allure of the "Other," which is what brings volunteers to Nicaragua in the first place. It evokes the volunteers' assumptions of what these other bodies are, such as the hyper-sexualized brown male body. Catcalling became a point of contention for the ways in which it sexualizes the bodies of volunteers. It is not just that catcalling is read as cultural and, as such, as static and limiting to the ways women travel, this practice also evokes a sense of the sexual subjectivity of volunteers and also of sexual danger. When I asked Becky how she felt when she was catcalled, she said,

> If I'm getting catcalled in a long dress, I'm like 'I must look good if you think I'm attractive in my dress. You can't see any part of my body; yeah, I must be good.' And then part of me is just, like, I'm someone different; I'm a white female and that's just going to happen no matter what. It happened in Chile, in Mexico, and it happened to me in Spain, when I didn't look any different than the Spaniards. It's going to happen no matter what and, so, you just … the first couple of days it was just, especially the kissy noises and some of them get up in your face and it's, like, you're five centimeters from my actual body.

Here, Becky talks about the complex and ambivalent ways in which she experiences catcalling. It can make her feel different (read: uncomfortable) from those around her. It confronts her with

the fact of her whiteness, when she assumes that this is the *only* reason she is being catcalled. And she also describes how being hailed as a sexual subject affirms her sense of her own attractiveness. Becky struggles with the meaning- making associated with being catcalled and being hailed as a sexual subject. She is torn between reading this as being about her specific body or about her body being read as an exotic "Other."

Sexuality and sexual relationships rarely came up in my interviews, other than when hosts or facilitators talked about the program rules. These generally included not having sex. Particular programming can be wilfully ahistorical and apolitical when the organizations associate sexuality, or talking about oneself as a sexual subject, exclusively in terms of tourism, and not in relation to the volunteers potentially becoming desired or feeling desire, becoming victims or even perpetrators. As the tourist is not there to learn, her or she is different from the volunteer. For the volunteers, the experience of being catcalled points to them as being sexual subjects, as adults who are desired. Within the rhetorical context, set forth by the volunteer abroad organizations, which seeks to distinguish tourists from volunteers through their relationship to sex, being catcalled destabilizes the coherence of the volunteer's identity. Volunteers rely on their (asexual, apolitical) interpolation into their host families. Here, the street becomes unsafe in an unpredictable operation of sexualized gender relations.

Becky articulates the complexity at stake, here, when she notes that being catcalled affirms her desirability– "I must look good"—and recognizes her as being a sexual subject. But being catcalled also evokes fear. Here, the pleasure of being affirmed as a sexual subject sits in opposition to the volunteer abroad definition of volunteers and the asexual relations that are the foundation of the homestay program. Being desexualized promises to make safe the close encounters volunteers have with unknown others. Being catcalled, on the other hand, sexualizes the volunteers and illustrates the dangers inherent in being close to unknown others. It is not that catcalling is necessarily a bad encounter, nor is this to say that all host-family encounters are good. Rather, as bodies are brought into intimate relations, encounters produce both fears and desires.

These moments could be rich sites of inquiry into how bodies are already known before they are encountered. However, this was not often the case in my interviews. Though there were rare moments in which volunteers talked about race or gender, these did not often lead to critical

analyses of how the encounters were racialized and gendered. Since volunteer abroad programming is so focused on *cultural* learning, this often results in the experiences being over-identified with culture. As suggested above, insofar as catcalling, which is discussed as *piropos* in the guidebooks, is specifically aligned with machismo and gender relations in Nicaragua, these experiences are coded as "cultural." This was the way in which catcalling was read – as an overwhelmingly negative, cultural aspect of Nicaragua.

The overemphasis on cultural learning through an encounter with (safe) difference, in volunteer abroad programming, means that most things are coded as cultural, including poverty, catcalling, and the lack of recycling. While looking closely at the complex ways in which intimacy brings inequality to the surface, we can see that the overemphasis on cultural learning points volunteers to culture as an explanation for any sort of difference. Intimate encounters are rife with moments that destabilize the volunteers' normal mode of proximity, that is, the notions of proximity they arrive with. When volunteers arrive, they imagine a mode of proximity where they will learn about Nicaragua through acting *like* Nicaraguans. Therefore, the moments of intimacy they encounter, during their homestay, call attention to how a difference that is not only cultural, but rather also political. This has led to difficult and challenging narratives on the parts of volunteers. This is particularly so in reference to catcalling and the machistos of Nicaraguan men, and also in the volunteers' efforts to retain their position as people who are there to learn about the culture rather than to judge it or to "take action" (i.e. to change).

Complicated Readings of Machismo and Uncomfortable Intimacies

While catcalling was often attached to culture, many volunteers worked to ensure that it was not connected *only* to Nicaraguan culture. For example, when I interviewed Chloe, she said:

> …a lot of people will say you [as a woman] need to be careful and it's not really safe to be a woman travelling abroad in a foreign city. And, yeah, it's hard because part of the culture here is like you get, I'm sure you get catcalled at, but you also have to remember it's a part of the culture and everywhere you go, as a woman, there's that aspect and there's no place, it's just here it's a little elevated. But it doesn't really bother me, just something that we have to face.

Here, Chloe is signalling that she does recognize and feel discomfort with the catcalling she has experienced in Nicaragua. But, then, she connects these experiences to global gender inequity as a way to downplay catcalling as only being a problem in Nicaragua. In fact, many of the facilitators I interviewed, reiterated that when thinking about catcalling women need to be careful anywhere in the world. For example, when I asked Ricardo about some of the gender-related topics he talked about with volunteers, including Nicaragua's abortion laws, its divorce laws, and machismo, in general, he said

> We talk about machismo… as a part of the world. It is everywhere; it is in every political ideology, in all religions. The origin of machismo is religion and religion is the ideology of machismo. But, I think that when we talk about this, the students don't take it very well. The difference between Latin America and other countries is that machismo is a bit more aggressive. Aggressive in that men say what they are thinking, or say things that are intense. Like, in the street, men will give kisses or say many things. The difference is that, in other countries, they don't say anything, but they watch. This is the difference that, here, in Latin America, men are a bit more aggressive toward women.

For Chloe and Ricardo, and for other facilitators, machismo was not something specific to Nicaragua. Instead, it is something that women experience "everywhere they go." The difficulty of these narrations of catcalls and machismo are apparent as Ricardo suggests that machismo is "more aggressive in Latin America" than elsewhere, and that students do not like to hear that there is machismo in their own countries. Ricardo is working, here, to place Nicaragua and the experiences women have while traveling (and indeed that of Nicaraguan women while in the city) in a context of global inequity. But he is also signalling the different ways in which patriarchy takes shape in different contexts, while at the same time saying that Latin America is "a bit more aggressive" toward women. Ricardo went on to tell me that, in North America, men were likely thinking the same things about women, they just would not say it.

For Ricardo, religion is the origin of machismo. For Chloe, it is part of "their culture." For volunteers, saying that machismo is everywhere, rather than only in Nicaragua, is an attempt to not seem "closed-minded." However, I interpreted Ricardo's work as an attempt to situate Nicaragua in a broader context of global inequity and to teach volunteers about the patriarchy that also exists in their own countries. These complex narratives represent the complicated work

volunteers participate in when thinking critically about representations of Nicaragua. As Mahrouse (2013) found, in her study of transnational activists, people are often reluctant to report experiences of assault or ill treatment because of the ways in which it would play into racialized stereotyping. Activists who are dedicated to the cause they are a part of (such as Palestinian solidarity), and who are attuned to dominant racialized and sexualized images of the local men, are cautious about reporting this racialized and sexualized behaviour for fear of how it would be interpreted. Indeed, some were even *discouraged* from reporting it because of what it might mean for the movement.[14]

Host families talked about the difficulty of debriefing volunteers when they return home from the day and complain about catcalling. When I asked Carlita how she talked with the volunteers about catcalling, she told me,

> I say that we always say these things. Here, there are men who, when they see a woman like you, that they like, they say catcalls. And this is the thing I told you about when they say mamasita or you're so lovely and delicious. There are men who say, 'yes, they do this.' In general, they do this when they see foreign women. It's not important; it doesn't have much importance.

The relation between catcalling and culture is tenuous. While many participants want to recognize that the *character* of machismo (or patriarchy) is different in Nicaragua (and better than in, say, El Salvador), it is also attributed to a cultural practice. Narrations of danger and safety concerns for volunteers struggle to maintain the possibility for women to travel. These complex narrations work to keep catcalling rooted in Nicaragua and to make the streets risky but still manageable.

Conclusion

The space of the host family is characterized as safe in that it is a space of care, desexualized love, and familialization through gendered and racialized discourses. In contrast, the street becomes a risky space through sexualized intimacy with gendered and racialized bodies. The

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[14] Not to mention the complexity of imagining the legalities of reporting – would one be able to leave the country, how does one deal with the police in a country where you don't know the language? Do you trust the police? Subsequently, what are the prison conditions (for example) that offenders would face?

social construction of spaces as safe or risky is not only about the vulnerability of bodies and intimacy but also about the pedagogical possibilities imagined in these respective spaces.

When volunteers are "adopted" into the host family, the work of the host mothers is coded as cultural rather than as paid labour. This temporary familial adoption works to secure the home space as a safe, asexual environment. But, as we have seen, this arrangement can sometimes be troubled. That the host mother is so central as a *mother figure* is crucial to facilitating this safe space, but the erasure of difference (economic and racialized) also serves this purpose. The work of the host mother *must* be a labour of love so as to secure the fantasy of adoption. The labour of the host mother is imagined to produce learning in two ways: first, through the intimate encounters where volunteers live *like* Nicaraguans and learn about the culture and Nicaraguan family values; and second, through the tactics and tips that host mothers provide as brokers for helping volunteers stay safe on the street. Intimacies, however, are unruly and unpredictable and are related to the inequalities that are part of volunteer abroad. While the host family is imagined through a fantasy of adoption into a family that always cares, there are moments where inequality emerges in the threat of sexual attraction and in the danger that is imagined to be lurking in the bodies of Nicaraguan men. These inequalities are often erased for volunteers through their programming or through being coded as cultural. However, they come to the forefront when the safe intimacy of the host family is troubled by sexual encounters with others.

In contrast to the home space, the street is a space where volunteers must navigate in terms of safety and also in maintaining their legitimacy to travel. Catcalling reveals the limits of a pedagogy that relies on proximity and desexualized intimacy as tools for transformation. While I contrasted the home and the street space as being related to learning in different ways, we see in each of these experiences that volunteers participate in a multiplicity of meaning making. Referring to volunteer abroad encounters as intimate shows that inequalities surface in these experiences, even as they are denied. It also shows the consequences of an overreliance on "culture" as an explanatory mechanism.

When volunteers become part of the host family's life, the resulting intimacy and the learning this entails is much more complex than simply being seen as "safe," compared to the dangers of the street. Rather, both spaces are rife with ideas and discourses about bodies, relationships, and inequality. The everyday encounters at home and on the street show us the multiplicity of

intimacies involved in volunteer abroad. The logics of volunteer abroad, as a pedagogy, suggest that host families will be spaces that generate deep and thoughtful learning, while the street is a space where volunteers are in danger. I illustrate how both of these spaces contain the potential for volunteers to feel safe and unsafe in their encounters with others. In the next chapter, I look at host family's belief in their hopes for transformation through volunteer abroad pedagogy.

Chapter Five

Hopeful Pedagogy

In this chapter, I focus on the ways in which hosts talk about the *difficulties* of enacting a transformative and hopeful pedagogy. Hosts' narratives recount their hope that volunteer abroad programs will build a better political future by shifting volunteers' understandings of their place and actions in the world. I call the pedagogy of hosts hopeful because, for them, volunteer abroad carries with it a hope for a different future. When I say that there is a hope for a different future, I use future in the Levinasian sense, which suggests a time that is different from the present. As hosts talked about this future, they understood it as marked by a *relational* shift. Hope for the future was not imagined as a disciplinary regime meant to responsibilize volunteers or hosts. But rather hope is a prompt meant to catalyze a change in the ways volunteers see themselves in relation to Nicaragua not only here and now, but also in the past and future. At the same time that they identified this hope, hosts were clear that they often had difficulties facilitating transformative learning for the volunteers they worked with everyday. Attending to hosts' perspectives illustrates what happens in the pedagogical work of volunteer abroad when the complications and contradictions of proximity and intimacy are at its core. I further outline the pedagogical logics of volunteer abroad, but more importantly, I also trace the problems and possibilities of this hopeful pedagogy.

Scholarship on practices of remembrance, psychoanalytic approaches to education, and critical feminist theory provide a rich conceptual apparatus for understanding hopeful pedagogy. The hope hosts outlined is, at least in part, a strategic practice of remembrance in that it "anxiously attends to a horrific past [and present] in expectation of the promise that, by investing attention in narratives that sustain moral lessons, there will be a better tomorrow" (Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert 2000, 4). The hosts hope that volunteer abroad will shift how volunteers understand their place within global relations, and thereby generate a better future. Yet at the same time, their hopeful pedagogy, which asks for remembrance and attentiveness to the persistent inequalities in the world, entails what Britzman (1998) calls "difficult knowledge."

Encounters with difficult knowledge risk pushing the boundaries of the learner's ego. Recognizing a relation between the past, others, and the self, means, "risk[ing] our becoming

wounded in the attendance to the wounds of another" (Simon, Rosenberg and Eppert 2000, 5). While hosts seek a strategic practice of remembrance for a different future, the call of attending to the past is disruptive because it requires "the ongoing task of opening up ourselves to a reworking of [the] normalizing frames of daily life, a task that is rooted in attempts to remain in relation with loss without being subsumed by it" (5). Such pedagogy is emergent, unpredictable, and without guarantees. These practices of remembrance highlight the difficulties in planning an intervention into the ways in which we see the world. I suggest that hosts bring to life a pedagogical practice of remembrance through a strategic telling of past and present inequalities and by attending to relationality in their work with volunteers. However, remembrance and witnessing, themselves, are pedagogically unruly because their outcomes cannot be predicted in advance. This unruliness is further exacerbated by the shift in volunteers' everyday practices as they adjust to living in Nicaragua.

I suggest that the focus on volunteers in programming undermines the possibility that practices of remembrance and witnessing can be moments of what Biesta (2003) and Bruce (2013) call learning to be other-wise. Central to this argument is an understanding that while these pedagogical desires demand a better future, created through transformed volunteers, the bodily needs of volunteers disrupt this imagined transformation in two ways: through the demands required of volunteers living in a new context, and through the association of host mothers with the bodily.

While hosts are positioned and understood this way, I look to how they understand this positioning, and the labour required of them to care for volunteers. The hosts noted they carried two burdens, the burden of facilitating the possible outcome (for them as politically transformative) and the burden of care work. I look at these burdens alongside of the material and institutional realities of volunteer abroad programming. These realities include the focus on the desires and expectations of the volunteer and the disavowal of hosts as authorities. Through this analysis of burdens and institutional realities alongside of imaginings of a transformative pedagogy, I consider volunteer abroad as an unruly pedagogical encounter. I also further contextualize and examine the ways in which hosts are denied authority. Through a focus on their narratives in this chapter I centre them as experts. Volunteer abroad, through hosts' perspectives, is a project that asks volunteers to remember both "what was never my fault or

deed" (Levinas), but that also calls them to bear witness to the contemporary realities in Nicaragua *in relation to their own lives*.

The Bodily in Volunteer abroad

As we have seen in the previous chapter, there are many bodily aspects of the host mothers' and facilitators' work that can become barriers to the hosts' vision for the program. Here, I link the hosts' everyday experience and struggle of working in volunteer abroad encounters to structural and systemic challenges, such as their positioning as labourers rather than as experts. I suggest that hosts' desires for pedagogical transformation are disrupted by the labour required for them to care for volunteers in everyday, bodily ways, and that this is related to the relegation of host mothers to the bodily.

Volunteers Living in a New Context

I asked hosts what they thought volunteers should know before they arrived in Nicaragua. While many of the answers varied, I repeatedly heard that volunteers should know about the weather. After hearing this from respondents multiple times, I became curious. Surely, volunteers would have looked up the weather of the place where they were going. When I asked further, it became clear that the issue wasn't that the volunteers simply didn't know what the weather would be. Rather, they were unprepared for the changes in weather, but also other changes such as diet and infrastructure. The climate, food, and everyday habits volunteers encountered in Nicaragua challenged their ability to live well.

Facilitators saw that volunteers felt these challenges in their bodies and this became a sticking point for the pedagogical logic of achieving a politically transformative volunteer abroad experience. Facilitator Jessica talked at length about her desire for programs that taught volunteers about inequity in the world and that would lead to a different future. She was clear, though, that the challenges of living an everyday life that was different from what volunteers were used to often get in the way of her desire to teach about inequity. She told me, "Everything [for the volunteers] is a challenge, the climate, and the way we shower, especially in the communities." In the program that Jessica worked in, volunteers only stayed in the communities (rather than in the city) for a few nights because the program did not deem the conditions appropriate for longer stays. Facilitators who worked in projects that involved homestays voiced

this common concern about the conditions volunteers required. Similarly, Isabella told me about how her program shuttled students to and from a middle-class neighbourhood, in Leon, to the community where they were working on a project outside of the city, also because the local conditions would not be suitable for the volunteers. There was no running water, the homes had little personal space, and there were few other volunteers close by. Host families also recognized that these everyday conditions were challenging.

In the everyday work of volunteer programming, host mothers especially were responsible for caring for the bodily needs of volunteers. Host mothers described how at times volunteers asked for this care work, but the hosts also engaged in this work out of a sense of responsibility. When I asked Selena what she did to take care of the volunteers she hosts, she said

> Well, the first is that I have to give them the rules; the norms about everything. They have to come to the house because it is dangerous in the street. This is one. After, I talk to them about the norms and rules of the program, right? And then in relation to the house, I give them all the, how can I say, the things about how to make things accessible in the house, but also that they need to know the things that could be dangerous in the house. Sometimes there is nothing, but for example I need to explain the use of the stove and the gas, or also that here, because we have some rules about them going out at night because there are men who are bad, so this is one of the ways that I take care of them, and then in making the food that they want. I take a lot of care, thanks to God because I have been very careful with the hygiene and everything, this is a way of caring for them too. The food, the cooking, the cleaning, everything I do is for their health. This is manner of caring for them too.

We can hear in this excerpt that, for Selena, the extensive care work she does is not just about welcoming the volunteer and making them feel at home (which is also talked about at length), but also about explaining the everyday household rules, keeping the volunteers safe, and keeping them from getting sick. This echoes the concerns for safety that we heard about in the previous chapter.

Initially, when I asked host mothers whether having a volunteer was extra work for them, they would say no, that volunteers were adopted as a member of the family. However, when I asked

further about the work they did or about the accommodations they made, it became clear that host mothers were responsible for a significant amount of labour to care for volunteers. Carlita told me that she "need[s] to clean their room, make sure it is better for them." Similarly, Mia told me that she was a stay-at-home mom and, so, there was no extra work for her. But when I asked about how she cared for the volunteers, she told me, "directly, I cook for them food. I clean their clothes because they can't really do it, so I help them. We also take trips, so that they can know the areas, the mountain, to get to know the country." She continued to say "[the work] is a bit difficult, but not really that hard, because as I said, between them we help each other." A lot of our interview time was spent talking about the care the host mothers took in cleaning, preparing for the volunteers' arrival, trying to welcome them and, especially, preparing their food, and keeping them from getting sick.

Host mothers also took on additional responsibilities, in terms of teaching the volunteers how to stay safe. Mia worried about the volunteers staying out late at night: "I don't let them go out at night. Sometimes they just go to the hostel to meet with their group, but not too late at night, like at 8, but then they come back. They've been good, but others might not be this good." Some of the volunteer programs had curfews for their participants. For example, Angelina talked about how their organization had rules where volunteers were not allowed to stay out after 9PM and also that they were not allowed to drink alcohol. Host mothers told me they felt responsible to tell the volunteers where the walking routes in the city were, and also where to go and not to go, and some general safety precautions, such as not walking alone at night and taking taxis in groups. They also were responsible for enforcing program rules such as curfews and dry policies. All of these stories recount the amount of time that goes into planning, programming, and creating an experience that caters to the bodily needs of the volunteer.

Facilitators also felt that meeting the volunteers' daily needs took up a lot of their work time. When I talked with workers from Ambientalistas, an environmental organization, one of the facilitators told me that while working with volunteers was supposed to fall within her regular work hours, she was also expected to work with volunteers by "teaching them how to take the bus, by picking them up from the airport, by [giving] travel advice. More than having my family, it is like being a family." This facilitator connected the work she was doing with the volunteers, as like being a family. This meant that she was responsible and available to the volunteers' needs

even after her work hours. She also talked about volunteers needing her on her days off and about getting phone calls from volunteers, at all times of the day, seeking advice on topics as wide ranging as what to buy at the grocery store and what bus to take for their weekend vacation to the beach. When I asked further about this, another facilitator in the group explained,

> It is someone coming from abroad and who is going to need support in everything when they first get here, that they are going to help a lot, but that you are also going to have to direct them, support them, help them. They need support. I could put them on a theme to work but they need to have an understanding of the theme, but also that they are coming from abroad.

Thus, while the host families and facilitators do a lot of care work for the volunteers, they also have to explain the work of the organization, the topic of the work the volunteers will be doing, and orient them to the project they have been assigned.

Jessica told me about how, in the first few days (or sometimes weeks) of working with a group, she would have to accompany them everywhere and that this was "very, very tiring." Marcia told me about the significant amount of work that she had put into one group, in particular, that was having difficulties adjusting. This group required a lot of emotional and organizational support; in particular, because they were rarely content with the work they were assigned. They were unenthusiastic about learning Spanish, but they complained about their host families. For Marcia, working with these volunteers completely took over from the rest of her work. She had to manage conflict, try to appease people, and make adjustments to the plan for the duration of their time in Nicaragua – this included changing their meals with families, rearranging homestays and ensuring volunteers did not get sick. Marcia had spent a lot of time thinking about the activities that she wanted to do with these volunteers, had honed them over time. She also wanted to talk about Nicaragua's history and present with volunteers. But in this experience, she was only able to put out proverbial fires.

It is important to think about all of this labour, as work that the hosts felt was necessary. It was also a labour that took time away from facilitating the pedagogical encounters the hosts had in mind. This is not to imply that the challenges of living life differently is *not* pedagogical, but rather that the institution of the volunteer abroad program denies the labour involved in

responding to these needs, and effectively renders this care work as "cultural." Therefore, it is not possible for hosts who spend such a significant amount of time on this type of work to also teach about history or politics. Indeed, many of these barriers are unavoidable. For example, the changes to how volunteers live are central to the hopeful pedagogies of the hosts involved with the volunteers who live *alongside* of them. Yet, the labour required to serve the volunteers' needs keeps hosts from their pedagogical aims of politically transforming them.

Hosts were responsible not only for caring for the daily needs of volunteers (cooking, cleaning, ensuring they are not sick), but also their emotional needs (debriefing, talking about homesickness, appeasing some of the changes they want) as well as programmatic needs (ensuring they meet curfew or respect dry policies. This significant amount of labour is coded, often, as familial and thus is not a labour that need to be compensated, nor is it one which sees hosts as pedagogical experts. Rather, their labour is deemed pedagogically important to the continued presence of volunteers, but not to *facilitating their learning.* For facilitators who spoke about this care work, they found that these demands went hand-in-hand with colleagues in the North not seeing them as leaders or professionals in the field. Thus, hosts (both facilitators and hosts) are required to complete significant amounts of care labour, which in turn takes time away from other kinds of pedagogical work. This lack of time for teaching is exacerbated by the structural ways in which hosts are not considered as pedagogues.

Hosts as Pedagogues of the Body

While host mothers, such as Selena and Carlita, told me about the family histories that they wanted the volunteer to know about, and how they wanted to teach them about their country, most of the work that they did with volunteers was to care for them. This lack of time for teaching exacerbated difficulties in communication because of the volunteers' lack of language skills. Host mothers are expected to teach, not through histories or lessons, but rather through introducing volunteers to the "Nicaraguan lifestyle" (as discussed in Chapter Three: *Transformation through Proximity*). Thus, the relegation of host mothers as responsible for the bodily care of volunteers comes at the expense of the pedagogical formation host mothers wished to facilitate. This care labour is pedagogical labour, but it overshadows other pedagogical work and also hosts' hopes of what they would achieve.

Hosts were often seen as caretakers of the body rather than as pedagogues with their own pedagogical ideas and hopes. Yet, hosts were central to the formation of volunteer experiences. It was clear that the facilitators were responsible for coordinating and cultivating the volunteers' experiences. Jessica talked about her responsibilities when working with groups:

> I am in contact with the professors there [in Canada] and I work with them to make their itinerary and plan their educational activities because, in the communities, they spend time with families and they also work with the community and they also do community service. But, they also spend time in Managua, when they do educational things like learning about the social life, or history.

Jessica was responsible for providing and planning all of the programming, from booking buses, to planning guest lectures, to buying food, all in conversation with the professor from the North. She noted the biggest challenge she faced was actually in working with group leaders. She found this the most frustrating. She said that often these teachers did not see themselves as learners, but rather as people who were already experts and who were making a sacrifice to be there for their students. While Jessica would spend a lot of time planning group activities, she said that often teachers "don't participate in activities, even though they are for everyone and not just the students. They have very little interest sometimes, and this is the difficulty because they are all participants and they are here in Nicaragua and so they should be interested in learning."

Jessica recounted a specific experience she found frustrating: she and a community group she had been working with had planned an activity to do with the volunteers. But a teacher who did not want to do the activity cancelled it, despite Jessica and the community group's preference and desire to do the activity. Here we can see that the teacher's actions caused Jessica's decision-making and expertise as well as the community group's excitement over the activity to be ignored.

Other facilitators affirmed this experience of not being understood as experts by those around them. Angelina told me about her struggles to talk about specific topics with the volunteers, and how they often did not see her as credible. The inability of volunteers to see Angelina and other Nicaraguans as credible pedagogues confirms further recent scholarship on the ways women of

colour are presumed to be incompetent (Harris and Muhs 2012). In particular, Angelina noted this attitude was present when she would try to talk about race and privilege.

> …in the last group, there were three supervisors, someone from El Salvador and then one who was born in Canada, but her origins were Ethiopian. So we were three non-white people who were teaching a group of twelve white people. People with a ton of privilege who come from good economic situations, so when we were discussing something about privilege, for example, for them it was offensive that in this social aspect, the privileges that they have, and we would show our privileges... It's hard that they won't accept this, that they have privilege it is a shock.

This was a struggle for both Angelina and her co-supervisors, and they spent a lot of time thinking about how to change programming so as to address this topic in more depth. That the volunteers did not listen to the facilitators because of their race was an everyday occurrence in volunteer abroad, not only in the seminars. The volunteers would not trust Nicaraguans with whom they worked and they were not disrespectful in the workshops Nicaraguans organized for them. Angelina recounted how the supervisors' approach to this difficulty was

> …the supervisors first to talk and to say, 'okay, what are we going to do, this is bad, they have the opportunity to learn something and they just are acting like it doesn't matter.' And so we were thinking what will we do, this can't just be the worst group in the world, so how can be make this better. So, we are always trying to evaluate, to think about how to make the program better.

Two aspects to this situation are important for understanding volunteer abroad and the interruptions of the hosts' pedagogical goals. First, in volunteer abroad, there are difficulties in recognizing hosts as professionals and as credible in facilitating learning. Second, the care facilitators take in *pedagogical* decisions. Rather than consider the group as exceptionally bratty, or to simply say that volunteers were unwilling to talk about race with racialized women, these facilitators took time to reflect on their process. We can see the importance that hosts place on their pedagogical labour despite the many ways in which it is undermined.

It is important to understand this dynamic as related to racialized understandings of who does and does not count as "knowing subjects." Host mothers are further seen as not experts in

volunteer abroad because they are not understood as being knowing subjects other than through the bodily. Host mothers thus come to stand in as objects of culture through which volunteers interact with and mimic (i.e. approximation) in order to learn about culture, and as mothers who care for them, and thus are not afforded the authority (or time) to enact their pedagogical ideals.

The denial of hosts as knowers is a defensive reaction to an encounter with knowledge that threatens the coherence of the self. To see Nicaraguan facilitators as experts, to confront privilege and to grapple with relationality (while in the throes of learning Spanish, adjusting to heat, and often feeling useless in their volunteer labour) can threaten the world that volunteers know. We should read this defense as *both* a part of the racist and sexist underpinnings of programming that imagines learning as catalyzed through being close to racialized bodies, but also as defenses against encounters with what Britzman calls "difficult knowledge." Moreover, drawing upon Britzman, the fantasies that fuel volunteer abroad programs assume that education functions "as if education could precisely set the time of learning" (Britzman, 1998, p. 4). But not only do the time of the pedagogical encounter and the time of learning not necessarily coincide, but learning itself is unpredictable, surprising, and tends to catch us off guard. Psychoanalytic perspectives on learning help to open up the ways we think of learning as more than simply the acquisition of new information: "learning entails… the messier and less predictable process of becoming implicated in knowledge" (Pitt 1995, 298). Learning in the psychoanalytic sense is both an external social process as well as a psychic internal process – to learn is not simply to absorb new information, but also to evoke our experiences, memories, desires, and as such it is also intensely affective. To approach volunteer abroad borrowing from psychoanalytic understanding of learning means to read, for example, a denial of difference not as an ignorance or an inability to grasp the structural components of inequity, but rather to ask after what knowledge it is that the self cannot bear to know. Todd (2012) writes that a major assumption underlying education is that

> [l]earning to become predicts well the ontological stakes in learning, both in terms of the benefits of change and the high price to be paid in terms of the coercive nature of subject formation… there is something profoundly at risk in coming to know, involving renunciations and sacrifices that are sometimes too great to bear (20).

Encounters in volunteer abroad are fraught with the wishes of volunteers and of hosts for a better world. These wishes and the pedagogical activities they compel, however, are complicated by the ways in which the everyday and the structural interrupt the time and possibilities for learning. While in the section above I have shown the ways that hosts think carefully about the pedagogical structure of programming, including the tensions between their and volunteers' hopes for transformation, in the next section I explore further "sticking points" of the pedagogical logics of volunteer abroad by looking at what other learning interrupts the possibility for politically transformative learning.

The Demands of a Hopeful Pedagogy

Hosts talk about how transformative learning (i.e. the transformation of volunteer through witnessing and remembering) was often "too much" for volunteers who arrived without the cultural capacity to talk about politics, without Spanish language, and who were overwhelmed with the historical and contemporary realities of Nicaragua that were presented to them by hosts. Thus, the cultural and historical capacities that volunteers lack become barriers to transformative learning. Volunteer abroad programs are focused on volunteers and their expectations to learn about themselves rather than those of hosts. Thus volunteers arrive unprepared for the learning and encounters that hosts ask of them. While in the previous section I outlined how hosts are denied pedagogical authority, this section demonstrates that the kind of pedagogy shaped by volunteer abroad programming does have room for the pedagogical transformations imagined and hoped for by hosts. Not only are hosts responsible for an immense amount of bodily labour but also for pedagogical labour. There is a dual demand on hosts – the first is the demand to care for the body of the volunteer. Subsequently, hosts do not have time to act as pedagogues. In this section, I show that the demand on hosts for pedagogical labour is directed at institutionally defined outcomes and so relegates them to *enacting pre-defined* pedagogy rather than *imagining and creating* it. I conclude this section by paying attention to the challenges that hosts see as getting in the way of their hopeful pedagogy. In the following section I explore the dreams and desires that fuel this hopeful pedagogy.

Institutional Focus on Volunteers

Hosts described the contrast between their pedagogical hopes for political change and volunteers not wanting to talk about politics. They understood these very different motivations of hosts and volunteers as a pedagogical struggle that takes place across broader institutional frames. While hosts are integral to volunteer abroad in that they care for and teach volunteers, they are often not enough a part of the volunteer abroad organizations to truly influence volunteer preparation. And often they know little about the specifics of how organizations prepare volunteers prior to their arrival. The desires of hosts for change are directed not only onto outcomes in volunteers (i.e. changed mentalities) but also in the actual volunteer work happening in communities. The hopes for transformation differ greatly between hosts and the organizations. In Chapter Two: *Politics that Motivate Hosts and Volunteers*, I outlined how volunteer abroad programs are often presented as a self-making adventure for volunteers; in this section I suggest the primacy of the promise of a self-making volunteer experience clashes with the hosts' *pedagogical desires for transformation*.

In my interview with Isabella she identified a shift over the past 30 years, from solidarity to individualized models of volunteer programs. Current models, she told me, do not show much concern for the communities in which they operate. She told me that her organization

> know[s of] a lot of organizations that also work with volunteers and they come, but not in a responsible manner… for example, there are some that say okay, any volunteer can come, so a group comes from Canada… but they want to work in social studies, so if the organization doesn't have a project that matches this, they make it.

She described this mode of volunteering, where the desires of volunteers are prioritized, as sad. In one project in a community that her organization works with, a volunteer group came and "they made a school… it has a solar roof, but the community didn't need to do anything for the roof and now the roof is broken and they don't have supplies, they're not going to do anything to fix it." Isabella saw her organization as different from many others in that they had shifted their focus in such as ways as to prioritize projects communities truly want, to develop capacities in the community, and to focus on the education of volunteers. For Isabella, it had taken a lot of work to shift the focus and she was worried what it would mean for their partnerships with schools in the U.S.

Throughout my interviews, I heard about how the institutional goals were often aligned with profit making or resume building and thus did not seem concerned with either structural change or poverty alleviation. Isabella advised me for my research,

> You are going to hear from many NGOs that they don't want poverty to end. If poverty ended, then they wouldn't have work. So, what they prefer are projects that are not sustainable, that don't change the attitude or the mentality of people. These social volunteers with this sentimental attitude feed into this, the population knows they come with money and they have this attitude so they say they don't have money and they need help and it creates a dependency… and since we are an NGO we need to fight against the politics that sometimes are really against the mentality of solidarity and that have this sentimental outlook.

While for Isabella it was important that the work of her organization contributes to ending poverty and helping communities, it was also about working with volunteers to build a mentality of solidarity. Yet, the structure of programming was such that volunteers arrived with the mentality that she calls "sentimental" – as centered on feeling good and gift giving. In connecting the self-making project to the western saviour subject, Isabella highlights that through the positioning of some places as "in need" and white bodies as being able to "give," volunteer abroad reproduces de-contextualized understandings of poverty, inequity and injustice.

This difficulty, she went on to tell me, translated not only to her work with the volunteers but also the interactions of volunteers with communities,

> …we have had times when volunteers, whose families are very, very rich, so they come and they feel uncomfortable, they don't want to sit, they treat people like employees not as a part of the program… because when your mentality is that you think you're superior or that others are inferior… it's hard to be with others. But, nonetheless, we try to work with them and to understand their context and that we need to have a sense of the situation.

For Isabella, the struggle was to manage the tension between fulfilling the expectations of volunteers for a self-making adventure catered to them, while at the same time responding to the desires and wishes of host communities.

This focus on volunteers was not only found in the sorts of projects that volunteers participated in, but also their interactions with host families. When I asked Isabella if she had ever sent volunteers home or switched their placements because of how they were interacting with others, she said no. The only time they had sent someone home was because of a medical concern. The volunteer's parents did not trust the medical system in Nicaragua. She did, however, tell me of volunteers changing houses and placements because of their personal preferences. It is striking that even when people think and act like they are superior (as she describes above), the framework of programs is to consider the context and preferences of volunteers. Similarly, while Michel told me about volunteers switching host families in his organization, he also said they "have never had a bad experience with a host family. It is the bad adaption of the volunteers." Thus, while host families, according to Michel, are not the source of problems, the adjustments made are to suit volunteers and result in the host family no longer hosting. One wonders what happened to the financial arrangement in these scenarios. If host families had been planning on an income from hosting and a volunteer switches host families, what were the financial consequences for the host family? We can see here that the needs and desires of volunteers are prioritized in a multiplicity of ways: in project choice, in host families, and in conflicts. In my own interviewing practice, despite my concern for hosts' experiences, even I failed to follow up on the repercussions for hosts when volunteers wanted to switch families.

I heard from hosts that many of the changes that happen in placement are because increasingly there are concerns for keeping volunteers safe. For example, Isabella told me that the vehicle they had for transporting volunteers needed to be insured for their University partner, despite the very different context in Nicaragua wherein insuring a vehicle is both costly and ineffective. She also recounted to me a story of how one student was injured when they went to a rural farm cooperative on their weekend off. The North American school's reaction to this incident was to ban their students from volunteering in rural areas. Due to these new rules and the new concern for the safety of volunteers, the organization had to shift the focus of their programs. They were no longer able to send the students from this school to the community where they previously had done the majority of their work. This also has significant financial and long-term impacts on her organization including how to continue their commitment to a community where volunteers are no longer able to go because of risk management. Thus, an additional barrier to hopeful pedagogy is the requirement that activities on the ground assimilate to the regulations and

requirements of the programs in the North. We can see here that while hosts are central to the everyday experiences of volunteers it is the program and Northern partners who are prioritized in setting rules and regulations. It is not only that *volunteers* are prioritized, but the regulations and requirements of the program often founded and run in the United States with whom they travel are also prioritized.

This focus on the institutional regulations and requirements directs our attention to the organizations that are sending volunteers. While much of this dissertation has focused on the everyday encounters in volunteer abroad between volunteers and hosts, it is important to consider how the institutional choices impact these interactions in seemingly mundane ways. As Isabella told me,

> I think sometimes young people say, I want to go to Nicaragua to be a volunteer with this organization in the community, but they don't look up anything about the country, nothing about the community, and nothing about our organization. The first thing they do is find a hotel and some fun things to do, or where to eat, but they don't seem to study anything about the place. They should have to look at contracts and agreements.

This difficulty is amplified in that programs are designed for agreements and contracts to be between the program and the community, rather than the *volunteer* and the community. This is an important distinction to draw attention to – where sending organizations are making partnerships with communities, they concurrently make agreements with volunteers. Thus, in organizational accountability there is no connection between the roles and responsibilities of volunteers and communities other than through a middle organizer. Subsequently, Isabella sees that this influences the experience and expectations of the volunteer in that they arrive knowing little about the country or the community. Indeed, looking at most volunteer abroad programs, the contracts volunteers are required to sign are generally created to manage risk and liability. They do little to address ethical concerns, expectations of the community, or the specific work project.

The focus on volunteers is not only found in larger-scale programming where hosts are denied the opportunity to have institutional influences, but also in the experiences of working closely volunteers. Angelina told me about a time when they took volunteers to

…work with women in a cooperative who make ceramics and sell it and we go, and they
are going to teach us how they do their work and this group was trying it, how do they
shape it, cook it etc. The women were so excited to share with us, but these volunteers
were complaining about how hot [the weather] was, and so they wanted to do the part
that they wanted to do *only* and this kind of thing, when there is so much attitude that is
childish and so selfish, it is shocking.

For Angelina, one of the biggest shocks working with volunteers was how volunteers were
focused on their own experiences and work rather than those of community members. This
amplifies what Isabella told me about volunteers lacking knowledge about where they would be
going or whom they would be working with. It also highlights the focus on cultural learning; the
process and politics of this cooperative were uninteresting to volunteers and thus not something
they should have to engage. Learning *from* Nicaraguans was to happen on the volunteers' terms,
not on Nicaraguans'.

The focus on the experiences of volunteers is also a pressure that hosts felt in their work. I heard
in my interviews more than once about the importance of making the experience meaningful for
volunteers because it was a unique experience for them. While host families were likely to host
more volunteers, it was unclear if volunteers would have an opportunity like this in the future.
Natalia told me that knowing it is a "unique experience for their [volunteers'] whole life" is
something that "really makes me think it is worth it." Other facilitators told me about having to
switch host families, change meal plans in host families, and adjust what volunteers learn - all to
facilitate a unique experience for them.[15]

Hosts struggled with this focus on the volunteer in many aspects of their work. When I first
interviewed Michel, I asked what he thought of volunteer abroad programs, he told me that
overall it was positive and that they can "help us develop, doing it with someone who has the
right attitude, it is a cultural exchange even though 'exchange' the word, it is supposed to be in
two directions, but now it is only one." From the outset of our interview, Michel was clearly

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[15] It is worthwhile to note that some of my volunteer participants talked about having volunteered in other places,
and wanting to volunteer elsewhere in the future. One participant had volunteered in Cuba in the past and was
reluctant to go to Nicaragua because she had "already been in" Latin America. This move to a "collection" of
volunteer experiences would be an important new phenomenon to study.

articulating the inequity that is embedded in the uneven mobility of volunteer abroad programs and how this focus plays out in the everyday of their programming. Michel astutely pointed to the material causes for this focus. When I asked about ways to improve programming, he suggested making

> …the exchange equal – in both directions; to maintain relationships on honesty and solidarity. We have volunteers who say they have conversational Spanish but no one tests them and when they come they don't speak anything, or another who seem to say they have volunteers, but then later this organization is taking money from these volunteers. This isn't right because we don't get any money, but they do. We understand that they are volunteers who know about solidarity.

For Michel, charging volunteers is unjust because his organization does not see any of this compensation despite of all the work they do with volunteers. This includes, for example, the creation of his job in the organization that is solely focused on working with volunteers. For him, this cost undermines the spirit of solidarity in volunteering. For Michel, this dynamic and the material reality of programs not only undermine models of solidarity but also learning for volunteers. He told me,

> The difference is that we don't take money because they come here to work with us. We give them the opportunity to come, to try living here like a Nicaraguan, to learn about the difficulties we all face and that this helps them know more and to be better people and then in the future maybe they can collaborate with our mission and the vision of the organization. We are not talking about money; we are talking about labour for humans.

What is difficult for Michel to accept here is not only how little volunteers know before coming to volunteer with their organization, but also that there would be a cost for an activity that he thought should be happening in solidarity.

There is Too Much for them to Learn: Volunteers are not Prepared

In this section I explore volunteers arriving without many of the basic skills that were required for the pedagogical encounters that hosts were hoping for. One of the frustrations that hosts talked about regarding their pedagogical work was that volunteers often arrived with "too little"

knowledge, or that they were not prepared enough. Volunteers don't *need* to do preparatory work, because all they are expected to bring is themselves; the institutionally imagined crux of transformation resides in the volunteers' encounters with others, not in their knowledge, work, or community engagement.

Angelina, a facilitator, spoke about her experience and struggles with volunteers when she told me that she has seen "…volunteers who don't come with any idea of help, or symbiosis, they come with the idea that they are going to learn Spanish, I'm going to know Nicaragua, I'll go to a volcano." For Angelina, it was difficult to work with students who came without attention to the work that they would be doing in their placement or without caring to learn about themselves or their place in the world. One of her biggest sources of frustration was volunteers' desire to only learn Spanish and to know Nicaragua as a cultural region, rather than a nation-state. Volunteers are encouraged through their programming to have a passive empathy towards Nicaragua, where their own lives remain unconnected from what they witness and interactions are not historicized. Nicaragua, for volunteers, was a benign cultural destination to move through and enjoy, rather than a political place whose history and present needed to be understood. This mentality was a block for the ways that hosts wanted to challenge volunteers. For hosts, they saw volunteers often coming with a saviour complex - that they were going to work with communities, transform them and return home without learning about their own lives or place in the world. This saviour complex is one that we see affirmed in the advertising and motivations of volunteer abroad in *Chapter Two*.

Angelina said it would be nice if volunteers came without expectations of Nicaragua. The expectations they did have were generally ignorant. For example students might say they were surprised that there were roads or vehicles in Nicaragua. However, when I asked if she thought coming without expectations was possible, she said no and that they would learn from the experience of being there. Angelina's wish that volunteers would arrive without expectations is a wish to ward against there being "too much" for volunteers to learn. That which is "too much" for volunteers stems from not knowing or often knowing "wrongly" about Nicaragua, thus there is much scaffolding needed before hosts are able to engage with the political pedagogical work of volunteer abroad. There are many basic practicalities that students need to learn, including Spanish and how to use the water. And there are many basic things for hosts to undo, such as the

notion that Nicaraguans are only "in need" and that volunteers can save them. Given the extent of the learning and unlearning required, the capacity to encounter the difficult knowledge that animates hosts' hopeful pedagogy is foreshortened. And volunteers do often not welcome it.

In addition to the amount of learning that hosts identified as needed on the part of volunteers, they also saw that volunteers remained reluctant to learn because they felt the *weight* of the curriculum of programming was "too much." Thus, while it is "too much" to try and learn Spanish, to conserve water, to navigate a city, and to unlearn what volunteers thought they knew about Nicaragua, it is also "too much" to encounter the difficult political knowledge of entwined histories and presents.

Encountering Difficult Knowledge

Hosts talked with me about how emotionally weighted the kind of learning they wanted from volunteers was for the young people they work with. For example, Jessica, a facilitator who had worked with multiple volunteer abroad programs, talked at length about the difficulty of what she was asking from volunteers. Most of the volunteers in her work were in Nicaragua for less than a month. So the demand to see the world politically and historically, and, especially, to understand the contemporary reality of Nicaragua in relation not only to the volunteers' country of citizenship but also in relation to the lives of volunteers personally, was a burden. In her experience it was a burden that often proved too much for volunteers. She said that often volunteers

> … feel culpable, I don't really know how to say it… it's not really that it is their fault, but it is that they have to know about what happened, and it isn't a thing that is about what I think, it is the reality and they need to know it. We can't do anything about what has happened, but we can do something in the future. They pay attention to these things, and to the things that have happened, and what was allowed to happen. I hope that it helps them have a different perspective. They feel like this, like with responsibility of what their government has done, and on this, many of them want to hear stories.

Jessica is signalling here the complexities of the learning that she is asking from volunteers. This is exacerbated when they did not arrive anticipating encountering people who would ask them to see their histories as connected to (and responsible for) Nicaraguan suffering. It is this difficulty

of attending to pasts, which are distant from our own, that call us to responsibility. Simon (2005) discusses this and Boler (1997) calls this "testimonial readings." This idea of testimonial reading, which hosts discuss and Boler (1997) outlines, calls volunteers to listen and learn in ways that "instantiate the proximity of self and another; another who calls, who summons me, and who, thus, puts me under an encumbrance in which I must consider my response-ability" (92). In Jessica's excerpt above, she recognizes the difficulty of this learning but also hopes it will "help them have a different perspective." As Boler argues, the practice of testimonial reading calls for the reader to listen to what they are being told, but to also pay attention to the ways they are listening. The position of the listener in this framework is crucial as they are called to bear witness. Central to this reading is the co-implication of self and other: "at stake is not only the ability to empathize with the very distant other, but to recognize oneself as implicated in social forces that create the climate of obstacles others must confront" (Boler 1997, 257). This testimonial call to bear witness requires the listener to see themselves in relation to the speaker, the history, and the testimony. Hosts talked about this co-implication when they wanted volunteers to see their histories as entwined, but also to see the possibility for different futures.

While Jessica is clearly invested in volunteer abroad because of its potential to create a future through testimonial readings, she also felt very weighted down with the everyday work of facilitation. I asked her to tell me about the biggest challenge that she faces in her work. She told me,

> …the challenges are in making it a real exchange. Superficial relationships between the families and the participants, and between us are easy. It is hard to think about how to make these relationships work when there is a lot of pride, that the participants do things to hurt people, but then also with facilitation, that their language is basic, they can't communicate well with their family, their dreams come along with them, and so to make really profound relationships, that have meaning, because if not, it remains in something, in reality it is hard because it can be hard to communicate and these experiences affect us. But, there are ways to try and make these relationships stronger, if the person is going to work on them. *Not just on the project, but also on the relationships, and that they want to build them.* They have to be a person who can do that. It isn't just that I am a translator. And so, the experience is much less meaningful if there is only a translator.

When volunteers come without much knowledge about the country and context nor about their own context, when they are largely unskilled, not able to speak Spanish, and display a hurtful mentality, then the pedagogical possibilities are stagnated. And, on top of this, she is only perceived as a translator. She felt she had to fulfill the needs of the volunteers. This often took her from the work that she was passionate about, which is building profound relationships that impact the future through pedagogical transformation.

For many hosts, learning about the history of volunteer countries of citizenship in relation to Nicaragua's history was crucial. Remembering the traumatic past of a dictator funded and supported by the United States and the subsequent ten-year U.S. supported war against the Sandinistas, were central moments from which to learn for a different future. These were the histories that she wanted volunteers to encounter. As we see what hosts find important for volunteers to learn, it becomes clear that hosts and volunteers are often encountering each other with very different cultural capacities for knowing and understanding historical and social contexts. They also attach very different hopes to the pedagogical impetus of volunteer abroad programs.

While Jessica recounts volunteers not knowing about Nicaragua is difficult for her practice in working with volunteers, it became clear that she saw it also as difficult for volunteers themselves. Asked about how volunteers handled learning about those topics she said

> In general they are very surprised, much of it they didn't know and many of the things they learn through the focus on this history [we tell] and so it is something that takes them time. They also need to know that other people made the decisions about the intervention or about the violation of human rights that have happened, and that this was something that happened in a different country. Remember, these people are very young people, they are in high school and so it is really new for them to think about being complicit in things, it is already shocking to know about the reality and then to learn what their government has done in the third world.

There are two components of this excerpt of my interview with Jessica that I want to draw attention to. The first is about the difficulty she recognizes that volunteers face as they arrive not knowing about Nicaragua, while also not knowing about the histories of their own countries.

While Jessica was one of the firmest in terms of demanding a different future through volunteer abroad, she was also very clear that she knew this learning was a challenge for volunteers. Second, as Jessica talks about how volunteers need to understand that it was other people who made decisions about U.S. intervention, she is signalling the work that she does as a facilitator is to help volunteers understand their complicity in the contemporary situation in Nicaragua. This is the work required to guide volunteers to a testimonial reading. I also asked Isabella how students responded to these topics. She said

> … some of them don't really understand the political context, and that also includes the social context even in the United States, so I have seen they learn more here [than at home], but it is really hard for them. Additionally, it is that they, they don't have many… ideas or details about politics. They don't really know about that kind of thing.

Thus, it is not simply that there is not enough time or that volunteers do not come with sufficient background knowledge, but, they are not prepared for the genre of testimonial reading, or for a pedagogical experience that includes an encounter with past historical traumas. Hosts see that volunteers arrive with ideological differences in that they are not prepared to talk about politics.

The expectations that volunteers have for their experiences was an important topic in my interview with Isabella, a facilitator, in terms of challenges to her pedagogical hopes for volunteer abroad and how the idea of "saving" became a barrier to this learning. She thought volunteers should come with the expectation that they would learn. She talked about some of her biggest difficulties being in balancing what volunteers want with what the communities wanted. When I asked what her biggest difficulty was in her work with volunteers was, she told me,

> …it is difficult when, in Nicaragua there are many who come here and make us out to be victims. They don't respect us, the foreigners. And this, I don't like. I don't like it because I think that to ask for help, we also have to not be made victim. This is very hard for me. At the same time we of course want to help foreigners not to fall into the vicious trap [explained by her subsequently as "a psychological game where I have to do something to ask for money, and that to give money is something to feel good, not to help"] – many foreigners come and say okay, I want to help and I feel good giving this,

but almost always we say what is going to happen next? You're giving this gift, but this
also creates a dependency.

In this excerpt, as in some of the difficulties that Jessica and Angelina articulate above, it is often
the case that volunteers come with the expectation of giving and feeling good, while Nicaraguans
are relegated to receiving and needing help and gifts. This is another articulation of the
consequences of what Jessica called the "saviour complex." This idea of "feeling good" that
Isabella talks about also goes against what psychoanalytic understandings of education give us,
in that learning is a risk to the self, or the kind of testimonial reading that we can hear hosts call
for that put volunteers in relation to the lives of hosts.

This saviour complex that hosts identified in volunteers resulted in an apolitical understanding of
international development and volunteer presence and was a barrier to hosts' desires for learning
– indeed, it demanded work from them in terms of "unlearning". As Boler (1997) argues, passive
empathy often does not require a rethinking of the self, or a reflection on what Simon (2005)
calls the "obscene questions" asked when learning about traumatic history. Passive empathy,
such as those that we hear articulated in the saviour complex, does not facilitate thinking through
relationality. Hosts saw this engagement with passive empathy as not conducive to the
transformations they wanted to facilitate. Indeed, they talked about passive empathy as a *barrier*
to the work they wanted to accomplish with volunteers.

For Michel, a facilitator with a local NGO, it was important for him to think about how
volunteers were coming and with what mindset. He said that their organization felt it was
important to recognize that volunteers were coming as complex humans. When I asked why he
thought volunteers came to Nicaragua he told me it was to learn about poverty but also "to
establish what it is that they want in their life. It's not just about helping us; we know they come
with their own problems. Sometimes problems with parents, with their families and the
experience here can help them be a bit more clear about what they have." While for Michel this
was also a learning that turned volunteers back to seeing what they had in relation to others, he
was also talking about the expectations that volunteers bring to their experiences in terms of
figuring out what they want in their lives. We can see here that Michel highlights the contexts
from which volunteers are coming from – a capacity that is often lacking in volunteers in their
perception of hosts.

In these excerpts we can hear that hosts are trying to facilitate experiences where volunteers are transformed politically, but in a context of programs that have volunteers arrive unprepared. Again, it is important to note here that hosts that I talked with remain committed to volunteer abroad and its potential – it is not that they see volunteers themselves as problems, but rather the problems largely lie in the contexts from which volunteers come (both in terms of an individualistic focus, but also in the broader institutional programming of volunteer abroad). For these facilitators, this experience was a struggle in that volunteers often came not knowing enough – not enough language, not enough about Nicaragua and not enough about their own countries – for these facilitators to really feel like they were able to accomplish what they wanted. Their interactions with volunteers constituted a pedagogical crossroads with many demands on the learning for volunteers (to undo a deeply embedded saviour complex as well as to re-imagine a different world), but with volunteers who were coming with too little, in their experience, to really take in the work that they were doing. These struggles are often found in volunteers coming with expectations that are contrary to the goals of the pedagogy of the hosts they are working with.

Conclusion

We have seen in the above sections the hopes that hosts have for the pedagogical transformation of volunteers through encounters with difficult knowledge, as well as the structural and programmatic problems that interrupt this learning. I suggest that everyday living in Nicaragua poses challenges that trouble the possibilities for learning for volunteers. Knowing this can increases our understanding of the complexities of hosts' pedagogies of volunteer abroad.

As Todd (2012) notes in her book *Learning from the Other: Levinas, Psychoanalysis and Ethical Possibilities in Education*, learning is a challenge to the ego that is violent in the ontological change it asks for. The risk of learning about and for social justice, for Todd (2012), lies the ways it impacts self-perception.

> In gaining insight, one risks altering the very parameters of self-perception and one's place in the world, and risks losing, therefore, one's bearings and conventions. And this riskiness manifests itself through the dynamics of affect mobilized in order to, for

example, defend against, identify with, or disavow the Other in the learning encounter (11).

Hosts' narratives acknowledge this risk to the self when they acknowledge the difficulties that volunteers encounter in their learning; difficulties that often prove to be too much for them to bear. The difficulties included knowledge about inequity, about the historical connection to current and past traumas and between Nicaragua and the United States, all which called volunteers to responsibility. For volunteers this learning was risky to the self. But furthermore, there were basic components that volunteers did not arrive with (such as language skills), which makes it difficult for hosts to facilitate the kind of learning they were passionate about. Hosts often imagined this learning (and subsequent political transformation) as accomplished through a remembrance of the past – specifically through knowledge about the revolution, the Contra war, international relations, and through the witnessing of present circumstances. I suggest that hosts are attached to a fantasy of transformation made possible through pedagogical encounters with testimonials, which they believe have the potential for subsequent structural change.

The institutional and everyday experiences of volunteer abroad are mutually constitutive. The focus on volunteer abroad as a self-making adventure creates more work for hosts who, at the same time, want to create transformational, political learning for volunteers. The volunteers' bodily demands together with hosts being structurally reduced to *bodily teachers* cuts short the time available for pedagogical encounters planned by hosts. Thus, while hosts come to volunteer abroad with a hope for a different future through planned and thoughtful pedagogical plans, the institutional structure reduces their ability to do so. Hosts are relegated to performing care labour important to pedagogy, but kept from being recognized as pedagogical actors or experts.

While it may seem that some of the key reasons why volunteers simply are ill prepared could be remedied with Spanish lessons, by cultivating a desire to talk about politics, and better preparation in terms of bodily challenges, I suggest we think about the affective difficulties inherent in volunteer learning. While hosts are interested in facilitating learning for volunteers in the spirit of solidarity in order to create transformative experiences, a pedagogy that remembers traumatic events is unruly. The learning asked of volunteers – to see the world and their place in it anew and to live differently because of this – is one that challenges their sense of self. Psychoanalysis teaches us about emotional risks that coming to know and the position of the

learner entails. Hosts understand many of these difficulties as stemming from unprepared volunteers, and a gap in the capacity to approach history politically and as a way to understand the present. These difficulties should also be understood as a dynamic strengthened by the institutional relegation of Nicaraguans as bodily workers and caregivers rather than as experts.

Conclusion
Looking forward, looking back

I began this dissertation with a story of an encounter between two volunteers, their host family, and myself. As I sit in Edmonton in January and snow slowly falls, I think back to that moment. I remember the concerns the host family had regarding the experience of the volunteers and remember volunteers struggling to make sense of their experiences, and of the heat. I wonder where these participants are now. The students I interviewed are likely starting the winter term on their campus. I wonder how often they think about their host family and their experiences in Nicaragua? The host father is likely tending to their animals, while the host mother is likely preparing lunch, and the children are at school; do they think about the volunteers they hosted? It is the rainy season now in Nicaragua, and so it is likely that the draught they told me about has ended, at least to a degree. I wonder about where these participants are now. This wondering is not curiosity about the "outcomes" of the encounters that I have been exploring. But rather it considers the trajectories that follow volunteer abroad. Ahmed (2006) argues that there are trajectories that bodies trace, trajectories that bring volunteers and hosts together. But what are the trajectories that follow these experiences, as volunteers and hosts part ways? How could these trajectories look different?

In some ways, the encounters at stake in this dissertation resemble the Craigslist "missed connections" section: "I was hosting you and trying to teach you about the political context of Nicaragua while showing you how to do laundry. You were too nervous to talk about politics and didn't speak Spanish." Or, "I was volunteering at your community organization and didn't feel useful; you kept finding work for me and helping me figure out how to get around the city." While these may be missed *connections*, in that they were not what participants were looking for nor what hosts were expecting, they are not missed *encounters*. Despite the ways that hosts and volunteers arrive invested radically differently in the pedagogical possibilities of volunteer abroad, they nonetheless *encounter* one another. And they encounter one another's imagined pedagogies. I have focused on encounters in the dissertation so as to understand better what is taking place *on the ground* and *in the practices* of volunteer abroad. Studying the pedagogical formation and justification of volunteer abroad allows us to understand the unpredictable nature of learning. Because of the multiplicity of desires, attachments, and imaginations, learning rarely turns out as participants anticipate. I have traced how volunteer abroad has moved from relying

on discourses of development to justify their work to the possibilities for pedagogical transformation. And I have also revealed the ways in which the anxieties surface in pedagogical encounters when different subjects are brought together without attending sufficiently to power.

The pedagogical formation of volunteer abroad is implicated in the systemic inequalities that enable volunteer abroad. The world is structured in such a way that volunteers without skills find themselves in Nicaragua for eight weeks seeking to contribute to community development, at the same time, that Nicaraguans with skills struggle to obtain visas to visit Canada. These inequities, many have argued (Angod 2015, Mostafenezhad 2014, Vrasti 2012, Heron 2007), are obscured in volunteer abroad programs. Where institutional programming has focused on a neo-liberal self-making project, volunteers develop social capital and empathy, both of which help them on the job market. Host communities are imagined to benefit from the labour (and sometimes donations) of volunteers. My focus on the encounter, however, has shown ruptures to these disparate imaginings of volunteer abroad and the inequities that drive them. These inequities are revealed both through the analysis of my interviews, but participants also articulate these inequalities. Thus, in the discussion of catcalls we saw the ways in which fantasies of intimate and meaningful relationships with Nicaraguans within a humanist and color-blind "we are all the same" framework are ruptured when volunteers are asked to begin thinking about their gender, whiteness and privilege. While these moments may be recuperated into neo-liberal frames for volunteers and may be difficult for hosts to attend to, they nonetheless demonstrate that the *process* of volunteer abroad is not only unpredictable but also filled with possibilities for learning other-wise.

As I have outlined in the dissertation, there is much at stake in volunteer abroad programs for both hosts and volunteers. Given the limited time they take up in the lives of participants, how is it that such experiences are weighted so heavily with hope for a different future by those involved? Given the extent of the struggle of hosts why is it that programs continue? As hosts talk about the difficulties and lack of real benefit, what are the attachments that continue involvement? I have built throughout this dissertation the argument that, for hosts, there is a continued attachment to the possibilities for volunteer abroad as a transformational pedagogy with structural change.

Possibilities of Pedagogical Transformation

I was hopeful for my research that looking at the encounters of volunteer abroad – processes and practices on the ground as they happen – would provide not only an analysis of volunteer abroad practice and discourses, but also contribute to changes in programming. It would be foolhardy to take from this dissertation simply that volunteers should arrive knowing more Nicaraguan history and Spanish in order for volunteers and hosts to be more likely to connect with one another. This would make a difference, and these were in fact changes the hosts I interviewed asked for (alongside of more institutional changes such as facilitating actual exchanges). However, my analysis shows the profound ways in which these programs are inequitable and how experiences both obscure and reveal these inequalities – inequities that are not remedied by language learning. Importantly, the larger contexts, such as the lack of capacity on the part of volunteers to learn and think about politics, and the amount of labour required of host mothers were obstacles to connection. Rather than suggest practices to enable encounters where connections are not missed, this dissertation shows that as practitioners and scholars we must pay more attention to experiences *as they are lived*, and to the ways inequity surfaces even when it is forcibly obscured. Most volunteer abroad programs provide some pedagogical framing prior to departure and sometimes upon return. Looking to the moments of rupture during the encounters of hosts and volunteers, we see some of the possibilities for transformational learning in volunteer abroad.

Granted, my perspective is that programs *should* be focused on systemic and structural change, and as we have seen many of the programs do not operate this way. Thus, we can see the ways in which volunteer abroad remains an uneven process, and for practitioners these are the moments when mentorship, reflection and contextualization can expand learning for volunteers. Yet, given the research that demonstrates volunteers often "lose" much of what they learn while in placement (Tiessen 2008, Georgeau 2012), or that much of the learning enacts colonial mentalities (Mathers 2010, Heron 2007, Cook 2008). I believe we need to consider if these programs are ethical given the detrimental cost to the environment in the constant shuttling of privileged youth to the global South in the hopes that they will be transformed (whether politically or professionally).

That the pedagogical hope and justification of volunteer abroad relies on volunteers as previously people who are uninterested in knowing about the world, or caring about others is significant. There is much at stake and obscured in the desire for transformation of young North

Americans into global citizens – a transformation also desired by hosts. What this dissertation points to, however, is how the centering of host desires reframes ideas of transformation. For example, hosts talked about their desires for cultural exchange that is political. The activity suggested by one of my participants, which I discussed enthusiastically in Chapter One, could reorganize some of these orientations. It asks volunteers to consider what "respect" means in the Nicaraguan context and how it may differ from what they may consider "respect." This activity could be accompanied by considering the histories that guide white bodies to occupy space in the homes of others through a desire to help and to learn. This history would talk about the creation of subjectivities in relation to histories and presents of colonization, sexism and racism. To center the desires of hosts and facilitators might be to also upend these assumptions that bring white bodies to the south, by bringing Nicaraguans to the United States[16].

As I have shown, rhetoric of self-transformation and self-discovery shape the advertising and justifications for volunteer abroad. The institutional structures of programs continue to prioritize volunteers through practices such as housing them in middle class families, adjusting programming to suit their needs and not demanding a fluency in Spanish. These are all in contradistinction to what we hear hosts asking for. It is crucial to keep an eye not only to the individual encounters between volunteers and host, but also to imagine what this means for encounters of pedagogies and desires of transformation. It is not simply that volunteers are naïve and do not learn, but often the organizational structure *keeps them from* politically transformative learning. This critical perspective is brought to light through the attention to host experiences. Bringing their voices into the conversation *is critical work*.

As Roddick (2013) shows, it is often upon return that volunteers learn to tell coherent narratives, stories that their friends and families want to hear and in which the volunteers are interpolated as "knowers:" about where they volunteered and the people of that place. A critical programming practice could be to help volunteers develop stories to share that displace them as knowers and doers. In looking at these encounters *as they happen* we see that there are possibilities for thinking differently about culture, inequality, gender, race and privilege, and for telling different

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[16] Here we should be attentive the institutional regulations that restrict this possibility. Recently, I spent time working with volunteers who had spent three months in the Dominican Republic. They were hoping to bring representatives from the community group they worked with to Canada on a speaking tour about Canadian mining in the Dominican Republic. The visas for these speakers were denied and they were unable to attend.

stories. Nicaraguans, who work in programs for multiple years, are invested in their potential to help create a different future. Yet their ability to do this work with volunteers is curtailed by racist and sexist imaginaries of their role in volunteer abroad as argued in Chapter Four: *The Intimate in Volunteer Abroad*. These imaginaries deny them the authority needed to change programming, and instead relegate them solely to the realm of the bodily. In so doing, they are not recognized as teachers to volunteers.

I have presented many times my research on volunteer abroad. Sometimes I have even called for ending these programs, because they are so deeply flawed. Given the amount of labour required from those receiving volunteers, given the environmental impact of these trips, and given the research that shows they are not transformative and sometimes detrimental, it would *help* structural problems to stop sending volunteers. Each time after my presentation, someone suggests that while trips are not worthwhile for everyone, it is obvious that my experience volunteering abroad (where somehow my nine years of graduate work researching and thinking about transnational volunteering remain invisible) transformed me to think differently about the world. Frequently audience members have a story to share with me about their experiences and how transformative it was for them. There is often little regard for the experiences of hosts in these conversations. In these moments, I think about how useful it might be to add up all of the hours host families and facilitators spend on volunteers and on programing staff, add to that not only the cost of the flight, but the cost of the environmental impact of volunteer abroad, find some way to price the differences in mobility and then ask: is my transformation,, or the possible transformation of others worth this enormous expense? Adding together, this still does not take into account the tuition, the time of my mentors and supervisors, and the time of those in the majority world who have taught me so much about inequality. And so, a research project that began with the hopes for seeing moments of transformation ends with wondering whether programs are worth it and with asking about the real *costs* of these programs – financial, emotional, and environmental – and what are the *effects* of the ways in which they continue to sustain inequality? Are the possibilities of transformation worth the continuation of these programs? What about the effects of the *lack* of transformation? This dissertation doesn't answer that question – and I'm not sure it is a question that can be answered, given the *variety* of programs that exist.

Both hosts and volunteers are brought to volunteer abroad through fantasies of transformation, often fantasies that do not take into account that learning is both unruly and affective. While there are suggestions, such as those that I outline from hosts, to increase the possibilities of creating meaningful connections, learning and the defenses and reactions of participants are unpredictable – indeed this is true for *all* participants of volunteer abroad. An understanding of learning as that which we cannot predict is not the same as giving up on the possibilities for programming. Rather this work seeks to imagine the ways in which feeling, attachments, and desires are evoked, challenged, and created in encounters. Positioning hosts as experts I have looked to them for insights into how to improve programming in ways that might honour their wishes for volunteer abroad and to learn from their insight based upon years of working with volunteers. The specificity of Nicaragua is important for my case study in that hosts arrive with specific experiences that orient their expectations for relationships and work with volunteers toward solidarity. However, the insights from this study can be applied more broadly. Indeed, while Mostafenezhad (2014) found that hosts she interviewed were not as attuned as my participants to structural and systemic change, she sees the ways in which programming and experiences are deeply structured by inequality. Thus we might begin to try and create different channels of mobility, to recognize the expertise of hosts not only when we talk with them and create programming but also in compensating them for their labour commensurate with their expertise. I think, too, of the stories I heard from hosts about hurtful things volunteers might say, or how they have been disregarded by volunteers or by educators should give us pause to consider how volunteers are accompanied on their journeys. As I have shown, there are multiple moments of possibility for learning in encounters of volunteer abroad, but they are often lost because there is not sufficient mentorship and hosts are already overtaxed.

To situate this project as one committed to transnational feminism and critical pedagogy is to begin from the assumption that pedagogical projects, while unpredictable, should attempt to initiate structural change. The focus on futurity for hosts and volunteers in their pedagogical aims is one which is echoes in my work too – I look to these encounters as they are lived to understand how volunteer abroad pedagogies may be oriented to the future in a way that calls attention to and challenges inequality. I am invested in this. I work with volunteer abroad programs, and I need to believe that transnational solidarity is possible. I am reminded here of the insight from transnational feminist theory that solidarity and allyship require *work*: they are

not processes that feel good, or affirm the subject, and this process evokes a multiplicity of affects, including anger and guilt.

Transnational Encounters

Volunteer abroad is a site to think about transnational encounters. They are one practice amongst many that bring bodies together transnationally, focused around ideas of "helping" and creating change. By looking to the systemic relations that structure these encounters, it is clear that "avoiding the encounter does not help Westerners move away from our dominant positions" (Mahrouse, 2007, p. 259). Dominance is not challenged by avoiding encounters, nor is it challenged by ignoring difference – these are tactics that *reinforce dominance* such as through identifications of "color blindness." Avoiding encounters with others is, indeed, a privilege of those with the money, time and space to do so. Nicaraguans, on the other hand, encounter North Americans on a daily basis through trade regulations, tourism, media and their increasing presence as retirees, not to mention the long history of intervention that continues to structure the present. Thus, while it is important to think about the practices of volunteer abroad as being possible *because of* these relations of dominance, these structures are so forceful that the removal of international experiences for young Northerners centered on "helping" and "self-making" would not destabilize their power.

As a significant body of scholarship has shown (Ahmed 2000, Mohanty 2003, Pratt 1992) coming to encounters with difference, coming to confront inequality, and working with others is an emotionally rife project. I have shown the ways in which volunteer abroad, as a practice among many other transnational encounters, is one that resists an articulation of complex emotions. Volunteers were expected to bond and feel only love for their host families, while host families found it difficult to talk about resentment for the space students have. While guilt was an emotion that was articulated often by volunteers, it was one which became "stuck" – there was little room for them to process this emotion other than to simply "feel grateful" for what they have; thus guilt quickly moves from feeling badly and not knowing what to do to feeling grateful. Volunteer abroad, and other practices of transnational encounters, must begin to make room for these messy emotions that are present in encounters, and that learning also provokes. What would volunteer abroad programs look like if they attended to these emotions?

On a few occasions when I have presented my research, students approach me afterwards and tell me they are about to depart to volunteer abroad and now they are conflicted – should they go or not go, and what do they do if they go? I suggest that in challenging the very foundations of these programs – such as the ability to go, the right to do something elsewhere – is to begin to open up spaces for complex emotions for participants. When participants feel they shouldn't go, this might be a time to consider what it means to have assumed they *can* go, and how this relates to global mobilities. As transnational feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty reminds us, we must come back to the ways we are co-implicated – how is my right to travel and do something relying on the inability of Nicaraguans to travel and the unimaginability of their ability to offer labour in Canada. Indeed, while the image of Northerners volunteering in Nicaragua can be one which provokes warm feelings of benevolence, which often reaffirm the benevolent, western subject, the opposite, the mobility of Nicaraguans coming to Canada, evocates fears: of the Canadian welfare system being overrun, and of people migrating illegally. Looking into these feelings that are evoked can be sites of learning for volunteers, if they are given space to admit that they are feeling them. The embeddedness of the white saviour complex in volunteer abroad makes the articulation of these feelings often impossible. Volunteers know they are supposed to love, feel grateful, and be transformed through these experiences, rather than feel resentment, anger, hurt, or defensiveness. Indeed, as I have shown, the kind of learning for structural change volunteers are asked to engage carries a heavy weight. As I have also shown, aside from the messiness of this learning and the emotional risks it poses for the volunteers, it is also risky for the organizations who are profiting from these excursions: would people continue to pay for learning that was messy and difficult?

Concluding Thoughts: Sustaining a Hopeful Pedagogy

A significant, although perhaps not surprising, finding of this research concerns the amount of work and effort that host families and host facilitators put into their time with volunteers. This finding should have three different kinds of impact on programming and on how we imagine volunteer abroad. The first, is that we need to re-imagine where we see learning taking place. We tend to imagine that it is an encounter with difference alone that teaches volunteers. We hear the confusion this provokes among volunteers as well as the work that hosts do to set volunteers up to think about difference, and to help them process it. Thus, programs should take into

consideration the insights and experiences of hosts. Hosts and facilitators should be involved in developing workshops and pre-departure work, and should be recognized as experts who can advise volunteer abroad programs. For example, community members could have a seat (or more) on the boards of the sending organizations.

Second, we need to better compensate and recognize hosts for this labour. While host mothers and facilitators are usually paid for their work, it is not enough given the emotional work and stress that these jobs entail. If we recognize host families and facilitators as experts in this work, as I argue we should, then they should be compensated as experts. This would also include changes such as having clear policies on what happens when a volunteer changes a host family and the financial compensation this should involve. As I heard from many hosts, they did not feel capable of doing some of the emotionally taxing work. So they should be offered professional development opportunities.

Third, it is hard to hear about the hurtful things that volunteers do and say while they are learning – much of this is the result of volunteers encountering their own ignorance when they thought they knew something, and the difficulties that this and learning other-wise entails. Yet, it is not ethical for us to put this labour of listening and processing solely on hosts. For too long people of color have had to teach those with privilege about the habits and violence that we enact without knowing it (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015) Programs need to take on the labour of preparing volunteers and processing with them. Moments where there are ruptures to the neoliberal frame of volunteer abroad can provoke anger, disgust, frustration, and defense from volunteers for they are challenges to the self. Other people than the hosts, who have and are struggling with this from similar vantage points should be working with volunteers. As I suggested in my methodology chapter, part of allyship entails working with volunteers to think through some of their assumptions. Those of us in the field who have already been supposedly transformed by this learning (and the countless hours of reading and reflecting and being called to be different) should do the processing work with the volunteers. It should not be done on the backs of those most hurt by the defensiveness of the volunteers and certainly not by hosts, who are underpaid, and who are living the results of the unequal system that leads volunteers to assume that they are able to give while others are in need. Thus, volunteer abroad programs should provide in-

placement mentorship by people from the minority world who have been trained both through academic modes of training as well as by hosts in supporting a hopeful pedagogy.

It is with a heavy and conflicted heart that I end this dissertation. Seven years ago I found myself in Nicaragua mentoring five Canadian students who were volunteering. In some ways I feel stuck in this experience. Over the past seven years, I have seen programming become shorter and offer less preparation. My interest in volunteer abroad programs is not simply about this first trip to Nicaragua though, or about programming as such. As I hear about famine in Syria, about the loss of land because of global warming, about the lack of resources on First Nation reserves in Canada, I wonder how could it be that we can be undone by these stories, so that we can see the implications between worlds and mobilize to work for change and a different future. And yet, somehow I sit still at my desk, drinking my coffee and watching the snow fall, and trying to conclude this project. Following Black Lives Matter on Facebook, I am reminded that I must show up for racial justice. And, as I write this last page of my dissertation, I wonder whether doing this work is me showing up. But not unlike the participants I worked with and the students who approach me at conferences, I am not certain. This is the trouble with learning. To understand the unpredictability of learning is to somehow be open to the possibility that, try as we might to construct a pedagogy of transformation, it might go awry and that we might go awry doing so. But, there are insights into how to do better, how to be better, how to approach volunteer abroad better in this work. These insights come from the interviews with the hosts and volunteers who show us the uneven and problematic ways in which volunteering plays out. It has been through my ongoing relationships with Nicaraguans that I have learned and continue to learn about how better to be present to their struggles. This involves learning about how they are living, to teach myself, and to see myself, my identities, and citizenship as being in relation to others. Thus it is vital that the insights of hosts as experts should be brought into discussions to inform pedagogical planning, particularly given the ways that inequities structure the possibilities for these programs.

It is not simply that we are able to discover how to run programs without conflict or tension, but that encounters across difference are necessarily and always fraught. Learning is unpredictable, as are the relationships we build with others in encounters. A focus on the encounter as it is lived, a facet of volunteer abroad often lauded for its transformative promise, sheds light on the

unpredictability and messiness of encountering others as a mode of learning. What I have demonstrated is that encounters as they happen are confusing, off-putting and can be difficult for both volunteers and hosts to navigate. Transnational feminism, critical pedagogy, and psychoanalytic approaches are useful to elucidate both the possibilities and the problematic of volunteer abroad *as it is lived.* While transnational feminism attends to the relationality of the encounter, bolstered in my work with the centering of hosts as experts, critical pedagogy and psychoanalytic approaches help to locate the unpredictability and the difficulty of learning. We see the ways in which volunteers arrive with ideas of what learning and will look like and what knowledge they need and will gain. These ideas, however, prevent them from acknowledging their hosts both as subjects and as knowledgeable. Hosts experience the limitations put upon them by these ideas volunteers bring, but also by institutional programming, in that they are not seen as educators and do not have time for educating because they are overburdened with care work. Transnational feminism traces how these relations are constituted by power, while the focus on the encounter shows how the ideas students arrive with, and the experiences of hosts, are much more complicated as they are lived. Bringing transnational feminism, critical pedagogy, and psychoanalysis together sheds light on the complicated desires and experiences of both volunteers and hosts in volunteer abroad in Nicaragua.

The unpredictability of learning does not mean we should give up on learning, or that we should not have aims in our teaching and in our pedagogical formations. Rather, it is to suggest that we cannot structure programming that does not take into account the messy nature of learning and the encountering and feeling other-wise that this involves. Nor can we ignore the ways in which learning and encounters are enacting power structures. For, it is not just that we are asking volunteers to learn to *act* otherwise, or to *think* otherwise, but we are asking them to rethink themselves in relation and to *feel* differently about others and themselves. This involves a risk to the self that cannot be accomplished simply by purchasing different coffee, or taking shorter showers. But rather this rethinking the self asks them to risk their frameworks of understanding of both themselves and their place in the world in relation to others.

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