The art of social consciousness: An exploration of the impact of formal education, non-formal adult education and informal learning on international students

By

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We acknowledge and respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

Being an international student comes with its own unique set of challenges and privileges. While many studies explore the difficulties associated with being international students, there are only a few that look at the positive implications of pursuing education and living abroad, and certainly almost none that focus on the pedagogical impact international students experience as far as their awareness regarding social issues is concerned. This study aims to bridge that gap.

This study, the first of its kind to combine the fields of adult education and higher education, seeks to investigate the role of adult education and learning approaches – formal, nonformal, informal – to the development of critical consciousness amongst international students in the context of complex social issues. This study also seeks to gain a better understanding of the various ways of 'how' international students become cognisant of injustices from their standpoint.

The data for this study was collected through one-on-one interviews as well as a three-day arts-based workshop utilising visual-based methods namely images, collage and photovoice. This study found that students benefitted from their formal education when they were exposed to diverse knowledge and perspectives in terms of their awareness on social issues, but the learning that was most effective and transformative for them was experiential and informal. The majority of the students were engaged in a variety of nonformal activities outside of their classroom and gained valuable insights on social issues.

The results suggest that universities should facilitate the integration of Indigenous and excluded peoples' knowledge into its curricula, as well as the amalgamation of non-formal adult education and informal learning approaches into formal higher education amongst other things.

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For my loving parents, Masrah and Dzulkifli
who were my first educators,
and remained to be my biggest supporters.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Economic globalisation has been a life-changing phenomenon that has had an impact on every sector in society. Higher education, one focus of this study, has been so affected that the majority of institutions worldwide have altered their policies and practices. One area of adaptation to the demands of a globalised/ing market has been the active recruitment of international students, a practice known in the university world as 'internationalisation' (de Wit et al., 2017; Lomer, 2017). Internationalisation of higher education institutions is not a new occurrence as scholars have traced the practice back to the sixth century (e.g., Altbach & de Wit, 2015). However, what is new is the acceleration and breadth of internationalisation in the late 20th and now 21st century and the changes this has brought to teaching, learning, the curriculum and the lives of students around the world (e.g., Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009; Lomer, 2017).

According to Knight (2004), internationalisation in higher education can be defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p. 11). Many higher education institutions are actively implementing policies and programmes to promote their countries and their learning institutions as intellectually and culturally valuable destinations to live and to study. Two examples are the Canadian and British *International Education Strategy*. Central to these documents is a call to diversify and increase the number of countries from which students are recruited and in fact, as Altbach et al., (2009) and Lomer (2017) have found, recruiting international students and developing new inter-institutional partnerships is now a key strategy. And it is working. The number of students studying abroad has increased substantially since late

last and the turn of this century. The majority of international students, the *University World News* (Guhr & Furtado, 2014) report found, come from the global South to study in the global North.

The OECD (2020) describes international students as people who are not citizens of the country where they are pursuing their studies and have obtained prior education in another (often their home) country. International students experience different types of education systems on offer in their new host countries, as well as different cultural contexts, which offers them alternative perspectives on the world including other international students. In addition, Brewer (2011) reminds us, international students also "bring new perspectives to classroom discussions" (p. 198). Both of these enrich learning for students and faculty.

In my explorations of the literature, I found that the majority of the studies on international students focus on the challenges they face. Studies by Bastien, Seifen-Adkins and Johnson (2018) and Handa and Power (2005), for example, concentrated on the issue of academic integration into the host university, in particular on differences in classroom teaching and set up. Scholars also focus on issues of social integration into the new culture and language as a key barrier (e.g., Boafo-Arthur, Attah, Boafo-Arthur & Akoensi, 2017; Gbadamosi, 2018; Lee, 2017). The literature raises other challenges too, such as peer connections and interactions, particularly in making friends with the local students, as well as financial stresses and encounters with racism (e.g., Belford, 2017; Brown & Jones, 2013; Calder, Richter, Mao, Kovacs Burns, Mogale & Danko, 2016; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018).

As an international student, I can relate to many of these challenges. I am from Malaysia and some of my (white) Canadian friends would undermine my knowledge of the English language, clueless to the fact that English is widely spoken in Malaysia, both colloquially and

professionally. The English I learned in schools in Malaysia was British English as Malaysia had been colonised by the British. I was therefore accustomed to British English words that Canadians were not necessarily familiar with such as lorry (truck), lift (elevator), boot (trunk), or zebra crossing (crosswalk). When I would use these words in conversations, some of my friends would look confused and would doubt my understanding of English. I have also faced racism as part of my experience of living and studying in Canada.

Past studies of international student experiences, and my own experiences, are extremely important to understanding the trials and tribulations we face as international students, and they certainly arose in my study. There are, however, other sides to studying abroad which I too have experienced. There are more positive sides including new and diverse knowledge advancements from studying in countries like Canada. Studies by Arkoudis et al. (2013) and Brewer (2011) show the value international students bring to higher education institutions in terms of different viewpoints, cultural experiences and traditions, and prior education which enrich interactions and knowledge creation in classrooms (e.g., Saavedra & Opfer, 2012; Strong, 2007). These more positive studies of studying abroad are, however, few and my study expands this literature with its more positive look at international student experience.

Building on this, there is another gap in the literature. As a graduate student in Leadership Studies, I learnt a lot about the critical social issues of our time (and in Canada) which I had not fully known or understood in and from my past life or studies. My formal classes focussed on multiple issues (gender, epistemic injustice, environment, poverty and so forth), and I took part in numerous other nonformal learning opportunities such as workshops and conferences. I also learnt a lot by just walking around the campus – the Indigenous house and story poles, gender neutral washrooms and the rainbow sidewalks spoke loudly of (in)justice,

diversity and change. Yet few studies focus on this type of learning and its challenges or benefits to international students. Yet the campus and its spaces are 'pedagogical' spaces and opportunities that the university, the new culture and community, provide for international students like me to learn to encourage them to see and think more deeply and critically about social (in)justices. To focus on all types of learning in the university around social injustices and justices is important for many reasons and particularly, because studies show that many international students are often quite privileged (as I am) and lack a critical consciousness (as I did) about issues that do not often affect them directly, or upon which they have done little reflection (as I did) (e.g., Wang, 2012; Waters & Brooks, 2010). Without a critical consciousness of society's injustices (and acts of justice making), without having our eyes opened we may not always recognise the discriminatory practices in which we ourselves engaged. Feminist scholars such as Moreton Robinson (2014) call this educating a new 'standpoint epistemology', a new, broader perspective of the world that could encourage us to contribute to change. Not seeing or having to know problems due to one's own exalted position in society is one way we maintain a status quo of injustice worldwide. For Moreton-Robinson (2014, p. 333) "standpoint theory provides a valid starting point for research and analysis whereby the subject can recognise and claim the partiality involved in the process of their knowledge production." Freire (2000) interestingly describes this situation as being 'oppressed'. For more powerful groups to have true freedom they too must come to a new consciousness which involves seeing the injustices of the world, and their role in their maintenance. This very different view of oppression was the position that I began this study, and it gave me such food for thought that I knew by taking it up, there would be much to learn for me and my study participants.

Taking up this different 'pedagogical' focus adds another dimension that too illuminates another gap in the literature which my study aimed to begin to fill. Teaching and learning happen in many ways on a university campus, as I alluded to in my informal encounters noted about in terms of the Indigenous poles, gender neutral washrooms and rainbow crosswalks. Most campuses, including the University of Victoria, the location of my study, have art galleries as well as other types of works such as sculptures, paintings, murals inside and outside buildings. In none of the studies of international students is there any focus on these as pedagogical encounters, as contributors to learning, although there are important studies that focus on using the arts in the higher education classroom with immigrant populations (e.g., Brigham et. al, 2018; Butterwick & Selman, 2020).

My study emerged at the intersections of these gaps: the critical consciousness being developed (learnt) by international students, and the diverse pedagogical activities or encounters that are key to meaningful learning that contribute to new consciousness and hopefully, a greater sense of agency for international students, that is, to do something with what we now know when we return to our home countries or if we remain.

Purpose of the study

Based on my own experiences, my study centred on higher education, international students, pedagogical opportunities (formal, nonformal and informal), and issues of social (in)justice including issues of epistemic (injustice) and consciousness which are central to adult education. For this study, I worked for a number of months with a group of six international students (myself included as participant researcher) at the University of Victoria (UVic) to explore how we were coming to consciousness about social issues and injustices and the implications of this new consciousness once we returned to our home countries (or wherever we

would be post-graduation). I asked the participants to think about these issues as well as the arts around campus to encourage their reflections (and more imaginative thinking), I used a qualitative arts-based approach which included images, making collage and photography to explore how formal education (classes), non-formal education (workshops, seminars, clubs) and informal and experiential learning (riding the bus, volunteer work, visual representations in the community and on campus and so forth) were enabling participants to come to new understandings, new consciousnesses about the world. The five participants and I explored together how we had come to learn or to be taught (formal and nonformal) to think more critically and creatively about injustice. We also explored the types of informed actions and work this new knowledge would encourage us to do when we returned to our own countries (or the place we would call 'home' next). What I found, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, is that sometimes our education and learning were positive, and other times, they were not. Either way, it was always powerful. I also found that much of our learning was intentional such as participating in a workshop on racism; it was also unintentional, such as what we learnt from the visuals around campus or by riding on the bus.

Research questions

The question that guided this study was: How does living and studying in Victoria and at UVic encourage a critical consciousness about social injustices in a group of international students and what are the implications for change work in the future? I was interested in the pedagogical roles of formal classrooms, nonformal education activities and informal and experiential learning. Which of these helped to transform what we know the most, how and why?

A number of sub-questions guided me towards my primary question:

1. What does social justice (and injustice) mean? (a before and after question)

2. What and how are we as international students learning about social issues? How are we experiencing it?
3. What roles are informal and experiential learning and formal and nonformal education playing in raising consciousness?
4. What injustices were participants seeing and where?
5. To what degree are experiential and informal learning enabling new consciousness? To what degree formal and nonformal education?
6. What challenges are we facing? Are these simply remaining as challenges or are we using them differently?
7. What impact will students' new learning have upon their actions when we return home?

Although not central, I also focussed on the research process and particularly, the arts-based methods to enable a critical consciousness. Feminist and arts-based researchers remind us that research and the arts can be an important space for deeper dialogue and learning about injustices (e.g., Knowles & Cole, 2008; Leavy, 2015; Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). My study was grounded in and informed by discourses and theories of social justice, formal and nonformal education and informal and experiential learning.

Situating myself in the research and the global context

As noted, I played the role of participant researcher in this study due to my own experience as an international student in Canada. I wanted the opportunity to think more deeply about what and how I had learnt with a group of other international students. I have had the opportunity of living and studying at a post-secondary institution located in the Eastern provinces of Canada for my undergraduate studies, and I am currently pursuing my doctorate

degree at the University of Victoria (UVic) in the Western provinces of Canada. I had to learn a new culture, get used to a different climate, adapt to a new education system and build a new community of friends and colleagues to create a sense of belonging for myself. As an international student, I have faced 'implicit' racism and stereotyping. I often felt that my voice was not heard and my opinions and experiences were not taken seriously in universities that have a history of white (masculine) privilege, colonialism and exclusion. For example, when I was in my undergraduate, my perspectives during class discussions were sometimes dismissed, ignored or viewed as 'invalid' by my peers and occasionally professors/teaching assistants especially when I shared views in the Malaysian context due to the dissimilar worldviews that we have both adopted. In these moments, I felt that I was silenced. Because of that, I would often find myself hesitant to speak up in classes. This predicament that I was in impacted my being and self-worth where I felt 'lesser than' and for quite some time I felt 'invisible' because my own experiences were not being acknowledged, hence felt nonexistent.

When I entered graduate studies, my silencing of experience shifted. I found spaces at UVic that not only allowed me to speak my mind more openly and honestly without being judged, but also honed my own critical thinking skills and made me conscious of a diversity of social injustices in the Canadian context and around the world. This is not to say that I did not have any awareness prior to moving to UVic and Canada, but the act of being silenced and the discriminatory treatment that I endured in my undergraduate discouraged me from speaking up to avoid feeling embarrassed and foolish because of the different *weltanschauung* (how one views the world) that I carry, having lived in Malaysia for almost my whole life. But having the liberty to voice out my opinions analytically without the fear of being ridiculed in these spaces at UVic made me realise the new forms of consciousness surrounding social issues that were

happening in Canada of which I saw the similarities that were also happening in my own country and other parts of the world.

One of these social injustices was the struggles of Indigenous communities in Canada due to colonialism, and a renewed connection this enabled in me with the Indigenous peoples of my own community back home in Malaysia. Indigenous peoples and issues were not something that I had been exposed to in my Malaysian education as colonialism was seen as just an occurrence that happened in the past. In reality, Malaysians including 70% of its Indigenous populations of which the majority are Malays or *Melayu* in its native language, are still grappling with the effects of colonisation in different ways. I have also become more conscious of gender struggles such as the oppression of women and children, such as the murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls in Canada. This consciousness happened during my graduate studies in higher education at UVic.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, I have come to realise that gender-based violence and other forms of injustice do not only happen in Canada. There are many countries that face similar injustices such as Malaysia, but it goes further still. In recent years, India has been under the spotlight with countless gang rape cases and murder of girls and women (Narayan, 2018). In her article in *The Guardian*, Narayan (2018) highlighted that "India can arguably be accused of the largest-scale human rights violation on Earth: the persistent degradation of the vast majority of its 650 million girls and women" (n/p). In Myanmar, the government has carried out a systemic ethnic genocide of the Rohingyas, a minority self-identified Indigenous ethnic group in the country with thousands killed and hundreds of thousands displaced (e.g., Human Rights Watch, 2013). Having fled Myanmar, many Rohingya refugees found themselves in refugee camps in Bangladesh. However, the violence did not stop in Myanmar. Rohingya women and girls were

gang-raped and faced other gender-based violence in refugee camps, according to the United Nations Population Funds (UNFPA, 2017), the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. UNFPA (2017) describes these situations as "one of the fastest-growing humanitarian crises in recent times" (n/p). These are just some of the on-going horrific examples of injustices and violence against Indigenous peoples, women and children happening worldwide.

Issues regarding racism have also become more visible, particularly in the United States (US). Notable was the senseless killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor which has also drawn sharp attention to the police brutality in the country. The fight for justice by most of the people in the US were brought into the streets where a nationwide Black Lives Matter (BLM) rally was organised on June 6, 2020. The *New York Times* (Buchanan et al., 2020) reported that the BLM may be the largest movement in the history of the US. The fight was also brought to social media where 'Blackout Tuesday' was participated by other people worldwide in showing solidarity against racism and police brutality everywhere. This urged me to continue to stay 'awake', keep informed and speak up against issues of racism in Canada, Malaysia and everywhere else. It has also given me the space to reflect on my own experience with racism (as opposed to being silenced and suppressing my frustrations as noted in my experience above), how that had impacted me and the kinds of changes I want to make to contribute to the dismantling of systemic racism in my personal and professional life.

Methodology and methods

Mine was a qualitative study that included interviews (before and after) and a three-day workshop which used a number of arts-based methods. I chose qualitative research because it enabled me to discover "how human beings understand, experience, interpret and produce the social world" and in my case, problematic issues (Sandelowski as quoted in Hammersley, 2013,

p. 1). I chose to use the arts because I had been introduced to their research and pedagogical power as well as their capacity to work across language differences (as we all came from different countries) and to induce emotion, disrupt, disconcert, challenge assumptions and potentially, be a catalyst for new thinking for change (Eaves, 2014; McGregor, 2012). To borrow from McGregor (2012), arts-based and informed methods "as a design for provocation is a promising practice that has the potential to enable deeply transformative forms of…learning" (p. 322). Specifically, I combined individual interviews with three types of arts-based activities: images, collage and photography. Although this was not a feminist or community-based participatory research study as I had chosen the topic and directed the study around my own interests and experiences, it was informed by some of the elements of these approaches, including relationship and trust building, knowledge co-creation and equitability in research participation. Our similarities and differences, as well as the arts-based process made for very rich conversations about our education and learning about justice and injustice.

Overview of this dissertation

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. This Chapter is the introduction of the study where I shared the purpose, positioned the study in the literature (briefly), outlined the gaps my study aimed to fill and made myself fully present. In Chapter Two I provide an overview of the theoretical frameworks and a more detailed look at the literature that provided the framework and backdrop to my study. This included discourses of social justice, epistemic injustice, knowledge democracy, studies of the international students and critical consciousness, and adult education as a practice of critical consciousness. Chapter Three is where I discuss the methodology and methods that I used in my study in more detail, specifically my interview and arts-based approaches. In Chapters Four and Five, I outline the findings of my study, including

images created by the participants through collage and photography. For me, these visuals represent their new ways of thinking and consciousness as much as their words. Chapter Six is a discussion of the findings and in Chapter Seven, I draw my conclusions and offer some recommendations to UVic specifically, but of course which can apply to other universities.

Significance of this study

This study is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is significant to me and my participants because although there have been numerous researches on international students, there are still inadequate studies that emphasise specifically the impact of their learning about social justice issues on their studies in a foreign country. Through the international students' lens, this study is especially pertinent to bring consciousness, identify new and similar injustices in Canada and our home countries, and generate positive change through identifying informed actions towards the improvement of the ever-increasing injustices that are happening in the world today.

Secondly, this study contributes to the knowledge and discourses of social justice as I explored and highlighted the different understanding of social justice through Indigenous and global South worldviews that many are not familiar with, bridging the gap in the normative understanding of social justice in the Western worldviews. Acknowledging that epistemic injustice is an issue in higher education, there has not been a lot of literature that speaks of these Indigenous and global South worldviews in the context of social justice.

Thirdly, this study is also significant in terms of what it brings to the literature of higher education. This study investigates the role of higher education environments in encouraging critical consciousness (or the lack thereof) among its students. The finding of this study is

pertinent in making recommendations to universities in providing opportunities for students to realise their critical consciousness especially at the undergraduate level.

Lastly, this study is significant in the field of adult education as it contributes pedagogically to the field. For the first time, this study combines formal education, non-formal education and informal learning, and within a higher education context. Consequently, this study also contributes to the studies of 'how' adults come to consciousness in terms of social justice issues pedagogically at the three levels of learning.

Chapter Two

Conceptual framework and literature review

My study is centred around the issue of social justice, in a context of adult and higher education and learning. Social justice is a contested term with no specific definition, but it has become a central concern of late and even more so with the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Although social injustice has existed for centuries, the pandemic brought it more clearly into view, spotlighting often unseen (or at least ignored) negative social and economic impacts (e.g., Gregory, 2022). The restrictions of having to quarantine and thus adapting to working from home with nowhere to go left many people, and particularly international students like me, with extra time to think about injustices. This for me was both painful and hopeful. Painful because the global pandemic has uncovered and magnified the harsh and brutal reality that many 'less fortunate' people have been having to endure; hopeful due to the rising voices of the people who are courageous enough to speak and be heard publicly in the streets, on social media, or even just privately with their friends and families. But what do we really understand by 'social justice'? What did *I* understand by 'social justice'?

I begin this chapter with a discussion of various definitions and discourses of social justice, how they differ, their potentials as well as their limitations. From there I explore notions of critical consciousness as it relates in particular to adult education and learning. I then outline studies which form the backdrop to my study. These address the practice of critical consciousness raising in the interests of social justice making through formal and nonformal education, informal and experiential learning.

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Eurocentric concepts of social justice

Historically, European scholars defined 'justice' as a concept that speaks to fairness and equality, deriving from the idea of distribution in wealth and other material resources during the industrial revolution (e.g., Lorenz, 2014; Rawls, 1971; Reisch & Garvin, 2016). Lorenz's (2014) scan of literature on social justice illustrates how social justice was often referred to as "social policies and other rights-based initiatives that protect vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of national or global society from oppression, discrimination, and exclusion or that support them materially" (p. 14). He goes on to say that the concept of social justice evolved politically and culturally primarily due to the pronounced, problematic relationship between capital and labour, or what we call the class system. Labourers were separated from historically sharing economies to become heavily dependent on the capitalistic, profit-driven economy resulting in their exploitation. Within this context, social injustice was understood as a social construction rather than a natural state of exploitation, and therefore, social justice could be a process through which the oppressed and exploited could negotiate their liberation. This understanding created the foundations for society to be able to exercise autonomy and individual freedom, although as Lorenz notes, this was in fact very restrictive as they still had to operate "within principles which reflected the interests of society overall, like the principle of equality" (p. 15). In other words, people still had to play their part in the existing social and more specifically, capitalist order, a 'social contract' between society at large and the State. Within this order, society needed to be organised and governed in order to function well. Lorenz states that this restrictive utilitarian ideal also promoted the market as a 'fair' system. All it required was the unrestricted ability and autonomy of distribution. Problematically, this favoured the rich, creating economic and social hardships such as "poverty and [ironically] inequality which called into question the 'justice' of

this individualized principle of social and economic relations" (p. 15). Scholars recognise that while we are still dealing with class inequality (e.g., Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013; Hardoon et al., 2016), there are an array of different sets of injustices that modern-day society faces today.

Justice is also taken up in the Western context in other ways. It is defined as commutative justice (individual justice of equality), and distributive justice (fair and just distribution of rewards and costs) (e.g., Lorenz, 2014; Rawl, 1971). What I highlight here is the centrality of 'individuality', 'fairness' and 'equality' as the operative ideas of much of the past discourse of social justice (e.g., Rawl, 1971). Maguire (2014) defined social justice as "all citizens [having] obligations to the common good" (p. 33). However, there is a disconnect with this definition where he viewed social justice more as meeting peoples' needs that involved sacrifice, but yet lacked space for freedom or equality. In other words, "freedom out. Equality out. Sacrifice in" (p. 33).

Critical, feminist and global South scholars raise three major challenges. Firstly, the framing of social justice within a purely class context, although class continues to be an extremely important 'injustice' worldwide, is limiting because of what it excludes, which I take this up below. In addition, 'equality' is not 'equity', as so many critical scholars have pointed out repeatedly (e.g., Neira et al., 2021). Fairness for the 'individual' – central components of patriarchy and capitalism – is problematic for societies and groups (e.g., women, Indigenous peoples, global South cultures) who place an emphasis on the 'collective' good or what is good and fair for the collective (Akimoto, 2014; Dzulkifli et al., 2018; Palakkappillil, 2014). This problematic view of fairness for the individual was demonstrated in multiple cities in Canada during the pandemic by the so-called 'Freedom Convoy' as reported by many media outlets (e.g., Leichnitz, 2022). In her report for *IPS*, Leichnitz (2022) described that the convoy was made up

of (mostly white male) truckers who claimed to be protesting against the country's COVID-19 mandates despite evidence of the virus' deadly consequences to society. As part of their protests, they deliberately and excessively blared horns while driving around towns aggressively for hours, interrupting the peace of the public and creating noise pollution and traffic congestion. Digging deeper into the issue, Leichnitz (2022) uncovered that the protest was driven by the "increasing threat of home-grown populist, right-wing extremism and revealed deep problems in Canada's democratic institutions" (n/p), underlining the profound issue brought on by the approach to justice that emphasises on fairness for the individual, and not the collective. Thirdly, "social justice has been proposed as a universal idea for humankind" (Akimoto, 2014, p. 104). While that is important, universality is never neutral, and it is certainly not in our globalised world. Problematically, 'universal' has in fact meant Eurocentric or Western and mostly masculine worldviews presented as not just one way to see the world but as 'the' single story and therefore, 'superior' way to view the world. This means that there is a lack of appreciation (or the absence of it) when it comes to other worldviews that are not from either of the categories mentioned above. This idea of universalism becomes problematic especially when the world is so rich of many cultures and ways of knowing that are neither Eurocentric nor Western nor masculine. Subsequently, it creates a phenomenon called epistemic injustice when other knowledge is not recognised of which I explain more later. In that sense, social justice needs to be understood contextually and should be recognised that way to avoid this universalism and thus, the silencing of other cultures and worldviews.

Social justice in the global South

Several global South scholars problematise, disrupt, re-frame and expand the idea of social justice in ways that speak to the realities of diverse groups, positionings, needs and

worldviews. In Indigenous and global South civilisations, the concept of social justice is often understood, and expanded beyond fairness and equality (e.g., Akimoto, 2014; Datta, 2021; Dzulkifli et al., 2018; Dzulkifli, 2020; Palakkappillil, 2014; Sen, 2009). Firstly, these Indigenous and global South worldviews offer more holistic approaches and understanding of social justice that are not restricted to liberation as material fairness and equality as between sovereignty and different groups of disadvantaged people. Secondly, the focus is on the exigency of co-existing and harmonising for the sustenance and balance of a just community beyond just human beings, which includes animals and nature as well. Thirdly, Indigenous and global South worldviews highlight on the need of collective effort to ensure social justice. Contrary to the Eurocentric approaches of social justice, collectivism is viewed as an important aspect in upholding justice in society because it allows for a sense of responsibility for and belonging with others (Datta, 2021).

Thus, in these Indigenous and global South cultures, social justice as a concept was viewed as organic, collective, spiritual, and balanced, whereas the Western perspective brought more of a secular understanding. In order to function as a just society, and to co-exist and harmonise in their community, the Indigenous and global South worldviews highlight each of their own local knowledge, culture and values relevant to their context. I will expand on these three key aspects of Indigenous and global South worldviews on social justice below using the examples of Malaysian, Indian and Japanese cultures.

In my culture in Malaysia, the comprehension of social justice is guided by the indigenous Malay philosophy of *sejahtera.* The *sejahtera* philosophy could not be easily translated to other languages due to the cultural nuances in its meaning, but it carried “a positive connotation referring to abundance, happiness, prosperity, peace, and tranquility” (Dzulkifli et

al., 2018, p. 211). More specifically, the concept of *sejahtera* in relation to the Indigenous Malay perspective of social justice was based on "coexisting with common shared values and prosperity … beyond [the] well-being of individuals, institutions, organisations and society" (Dzulkifli et al., 2018, p. 213). This view of holistic co-existence is similar to the local knowledge of social justice for both Indian and Japanese societies as well, as a crucial aspect in a just society. The notion was also extended to the sustenance and well-being of other Earthly species including animals and nature. In fact, there were four different tiers of balance in *sejahtera* as alluded here: "balance encompassing the relationship of [human] with his or her 'inner' self, [human] with the creator, [human] among fellow humans and [human] with nature or the environment" (Dzulkifli, 2020, p. 11). Thus, *sejahtera* was understood as a holistically balanced way of life in realising and maintaining a just, harmonious and balanced society. Further, as mentioned above, *sejahtera* highlights the connection with inner-self as one of the balance tiers, thus to be just, we must be in harmony within ourselves first. As a matter of fact, this 'inner' balance must be between these ten elements of the acronym SPICES: spiritual, physio-psychological, intellectual, cognitive, cultural, ethical, emotional, ecological, economic, and societal dimensions (Dzulkifli et al., 2018; Dzulkifli, 2020). When humans could maintain a harmonious balance with these ten elements inwardly, they were also able to maintain their balance with the larger societal framework (Dzulkifli, 2020). And when that happens, the society (including other non-human species) can then co-exist and function justly, harmoniously and sustainably. This understanding of social justice offers a more integrated approach to this study that is beyond fairness and equality, and one which encompasses all living things.

In India, the Gandhian perspective of social justice is based on the foundations of *Dharma*, generally defined as "that which support[ed] or sustain[ed] (the universe, the

relationships) … it [could] also mean religion and duty. … For Gandhi, it [was] a spirituality based on his religion that inspires his action" (Palakkappillil, 2014, p. 84). This perspective established that "social justice [could] become a reality only in a world where diverse presences have a rightful claim to co-existence as manifestations of the 'absolute truth'" (p. 84), which referred to the "plenitude of justice" in the human term (p. 87). Gandhi saw a combination of several other contributors besides equal distribution as a necessity to create a just society: trusteeship (generating and utilising wealth for the common good), *swaraj* (self-rule instead of state power), *swadeshi* (self-sufficient local communities), dignity of physical labour (giving the same respect to physical labour as intellectual labour), protection of animals, and *antyodaya*, which was described as "the fight against untouchability and promoted the uplift of society's 'pariahs'" – the low-caste group in Indian society (Palakkappillil, 2014, p. 93). The Gandhian view of social justice emphasised on the elements of spirituality because of his belief that a (spiritual) revolution had to begin with the individual, as many have quoted his famous saying that is along the lines of 'be the change you want to see in the world'. This notion is similar to *sejahtera* which puts importance to connection with creator and inner-self as well, thus to live in a just society is a collective responsibility by holding everyone accountable. The idea that justice is a collective responsibility expands the view of social justice.

In the Japanese society, the notion of social justice was not based on "absolute value norms for justice" and had a broader width that was based on "a true honest heart" as the "distinct definition of justice" (Akimoto, 2014, p. 108). Nakamura (as quoted by Akimoto, 2014, p. 54) highlighted that "the Japanese [justice or] 'rightness' reflects people's day-to-day ethics within a community or group, while Western justice involved independent (subjective), sovereign, and individualised ethics aimed at representing, defending or creating a community or

a group." Similar to the Malay and Gandhian perspectives of social justice, there was an element of the importance to co-exist in a community as a way to maintain its justness and harmony as brought forth by Dairin who emphasised that "harmonizing with surroundings should be the first priority" in the Japanese society (as quoted in Akimoto, 2014, p. 107). As Gandhi spoke of collective duty, so did Akimoto, underlining that every member of the community relying on other members is an obligation where "*seii* (faith), *shinshaku* (allowance), *chusei* (loyalty) and *hairyo* (concern) are tacitly 'dealt'" (Akimoto, 2014, p. 54). Thus, justice in Japan that spoke to this collective consciousness as an obligation in its society was distinguished as preventive justice, which was broken down into two aspects: remedial justice, "an approach which corrects injustice and is the primary focus of discussion" and preventive justice, which "prevents injustice from happening and is necessary to eradicate it" (p. 108). Though I had not found any scholarly literatures that explicitly connect the Japanese concept of *ikigai* which could be loosely translated as "purpose in life" or "life worth living" (e.g., Kono & Walker, 2019, p. 328) to social justice, I would add that this concept parallels the approach to social justice in the Japanese society as maintaining balance and harmony in society. When a person knows that in the bigger picture, the reason or purpose for his or her being is to be a part of a just society, they will then be more inclined to do all in their power to uphold the justice in their society. After all, *ikigai* is believed to be the key path that leads a person to their well-being in life as *ikigai* is "more future-oriented than happiness, … related to one's sense of self more strongly than happiness, … [and] is associated with one's values more strongly than happiness" (Kono & Walker, 2019, p. 329).

The approach to social justice in Malaysia, India and Japan offer a more comprehensive understanding of social justice as they emphasise the importance of maintaining a just, balanced

and harmonious society in their own unique way, relevant for each of their local contexts that is not limited to fairness and equality only. They also highlighted social justice as a collective responsibility. Further, in my study where participants were international students from different backgrounds, it was important to include and uphold knowledge beyond Western perspectives, and especially in a study that discussed social justice. This is one effort of preventing epistemic injustice since Western perspectives are often seen as dominant, 'superior' and valid as noted above, which I will explore more below.

Epistemic injustice

Fricker (2011) speaks of epistemic injustice as a particular kind of injustice that wrongs individuals and entire groups, such as Indigenous peoples and women, in their capacity as 'knowers.' It is "about distributive unfairness in respect of epistemic goods such as information or education" (p. 1) which makes some knowledges superior and other knowledges, invalid. Epistemic injustice is perpetuated through many social, cultural and institutional forms and particularly, through higher education institutions (Byskov, 2021). Other dimensions of epistemic injustice that are important are ignorance and resistance. The first is how people with privilege can ignore injustices based on that privilege. They might see them elsewhere, but they do not see them in their own context, something which arose in my study. Resistance for Fricker is to resist any changes that might upset one's epistemic privilege or to knowing something that is uncomfortable or inconvenient. However, current changes in universities in the global North such as UVic, show a movement toward 'epistemic justice', particularly in the areas of Indigenous education (e.g., Indigenous studies departments, courses, programmes, and First People's House). Many of the decolonising efforts taking place across Canada, although there is still a long way to go, are in fact practices of epistemic injustice.

de Sousa Santos (2014) argues that "global social injustice is therefore intimately linked to global cognitive injustice" (p. 196). Fricker (2011) calls this 'epistemic injustice', as noted above, and it has brought about 'epistemicide', the killing of existing knowledge systems and cultures which has led to the many social injustices being experienced worldwide (de Sousa Santos, 2014). Epistemic injustice in many ways is about silencing and alienating a certain knowledge due to baseless biases and stereotypes, such as a person's accent when speaking, which often times "carries an epistemic charge", giving the speaker with a 'less favourable' accent a "credibility deficit", while giving the speaker with a 'favourable' accent a "credibility excess" (p. 17). She calls this "testimonial injustice" (Fricker, 2011, p. 17). Fricker explains that

> prejudice will tend surreptitiously to inflate or deflate the credibility afforded the speaker, and sometimes this will be sufficient to cross the threshold for belief or acceptance so that the hearer's prejudice causes him to miss out on a piece of knowledge. (p. 17)

Many international students including myself experience this testimonial injustice based on our accents or the grammatical errors or different words we use, as noted in Chapter One and which I also outline in my findings. Drawing on Fricker, Byskov (2021, p. 116) speaks to epistemic injustice as an "idea that we can be unfairly discriminated against in our capacity as a knower based on prejudices about the speaker, such as gender, social background, ethnicity, race, sexuality, tone of voice, accent, and so on." Thus, some knowledge is viewed and perceived as 'inferior' compared to other knowledge which has been positioned as 'superior'. The questions for me in my study, as noted in Chapter One, were how did we as international students recognise (epistemic) injustice in the past, come to recognise it through our study and living at UVic and in Canada, and what could be the implications of this for the future?

Additionally, de Sousa Santos (2014) makes the case of the epistemic injustice between knowledge of the global North and the global South whereby the former is seen as 'superior' and the latter as 'inferior' due to the imbalances of power of the two since the "global South … has been sacrificed to the infinite veracity of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy" by the global North (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 16) as I briefly mentioned above. This unequal (or non-existent) exchange of knowledge resonates with my experience of being dismissed in my classes as I previously shared in Chapter One. He faults the inadequacy and arrogance of the global North to acknowledge and accept knowledge from the global South as a result of how "colonialism has disabled the global North from learning in noncolonial terms, that is, in terms that allow for the existence of histories other than the universal history of the West" (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 38). As mentioned before, epistemic injustice contributes to what de Sousa Santos (2014) calls "epistemicide" or "the murder of knowledge" (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 149). He highlights that "unequal exchanges among cultures have always implied the death of the knowledge of the subordinated culture, hence the death of the social groups that possessed it" (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 149). According to Williams (2019), many Indigenous groups around the world have and continue to experience epistemicide. Learning from Indigenous peoples and/or about Indigenous issues was a central theme in my study. So too was understanding and acknowledging unequal exchanges of knowledge cultures because we had either come from colonised nations or found ourselves situated in and learning about both past and present practices of colonialism, as well as how we were experiencing colonialism and epistemic injustice ourselves, what opportunities were available through our formal and nonformal education and informal learning to prevent epistemic injustice and equally importantly, how had we been perpetuating these injustices consciously and/or subconsciously.

Addressing epistemic injustice

There are several ways in which scholars approach the idea of how to address epistemic injustice (e.g., Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991; Hall & Tandon, 2021; Rowell & Hong, 2017). One of it is the concept of knowledge democracy, the acknowledgement of the existence and significance of multiple epistemologies or ways of knowing "such as organic, spiritual and land-based systems; frameworks arising from social movements; and the knowledge of the marginalized or excluded", and the different forms that these epistemologies are created and presented (Hall & Tandon, 2021, p. 7). Knowledge democracy is "fundamental to our thinking about understanding that knowledge is a powerful tool for taking action in social movements to deepen democracy and to struggle for a fairer and healthier world" (Hall & Tandon, 2021, p. 8). Knowledge democracy is important in giving visibility and validity to knowledge that are excluded from the narratives of the global North. More importantly, for the groups that have been historically silenced and excluded, it provides ownership to their local knowledge and courage to take their own action because it recognises "knowledge as a key mobilizing and organizing strategy … centred within the lives and places of those who are seeking recognition of their rights, land claims, access to jobs, ecological justice, recovery or retention of their languages" (Hall, 2016, p. 9). In my study, we took this up by discussing the legitimisation of other knowledge that was outside of academia, and how that informed our learning in nonformal education and informal learning settings regarding social injustices. Knowledge democracy also provided a pathway for us to use the arts as a way of knowing, as a creative cognitive practice of knowing, as I discuss in more detail in Chapters Three.

Critical consciousness

Another discourse that shaped my study is critical consciousness, since a key part of my explorations with my participants was 'how' we were coming to a new critical consciousness and what that meant to us. Critical consciousness as a concept was popularised in adult education by Freire (2000). He referred to it as 'conscientization' (coming to consciousness), or in the original Portuguese, *conscientização*. He argued that through a diversity of community-based participatory research, education and learning processes such as workshops, dialogue, formal classes, direct action arts-based (specifically, visual practices) people could come to their critical consciousness because these activities promote reflection that can lead to action. The combination of reflection and action is the basis for praxis. Freire (2000) stated "action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world" (p. 123). Thus, the balance of learning, investigating, reflecting and taking action is required for us to develop our critical consciousness. Coming to a critical consciousness is important because it helps us to see the world in a different way, to challenge our own assumptions and biases, and to realise that we have the agency to make the change.

For many adult education scholars, and as noted above, one method towards critical consciousness is through dialogic interactions, active conversations and debates about ecological and social issues (Freire, 2000; Larnell et al., 2016; Nesbit et al., 2013). Central to this practice is knowledge – in what people know and how we draw out that knowledge as well as the addition of new knowledge. Without new knowledge and the opportunity to think about, acknowledge and reflect on issues of injustice, it is difficult to know what types of actions one could take up to combat them. According to Strong (2007), "with an inability to challenge dominating values, students [found] themselves entrenched in this system even as they progress into higher levels of

education" (p. 53), leaving them frustrated and disheartened. In other words, without the realisation that a change is needed, international students may not have the critical awareness that they could, and in fact should take part in the process of change. Freire (2000) labelled this lack of critical consciousness as being 'oppressed' which is discussed below.

The oppressed and the oppressor

Freire (2000, p. 65) speaks to oppression in two ways which I used as lens of analysis in my study. The first is the need to "liberate the oppressed" which means ensuring their "reflective participation in the act of liberation … [and to not] include them is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building" (p. 65). In other words, a person cannot be 'liberated' if they see the injustices they face as something that is 'normal' or 'natural' due to their familiarity with a situation in which they have identified with as part of their day-to-day life. This 'learned helplessness' puts a restraint on their potential in being an agent of change for their reality, and consequently the other injustices in the world.

For El-Amin et al. (2017), critical consciousness is "the ability to recognize and analyze systems of inequality and the commitment to take action against these systems" (p. 18). They go on to say that it can be a "gateway to academic motivation and achievement for marginalized students" (p. 18). With the presence and the exercise of critical consciousness, students acquire new understandings that render visible the injustices that either affect them directly or affect others in ways they were unaware of before. To see and feel the injustice can enable them, as noted above, to become agents of change in their own lives. El-Amin et al. (2017) refer to this as a process of radicalisation whereby people change their perspectives fundamentally and then, act upon them positively. While radicalisation can have negative connotations, for adult educators, it is a positive and empowering change (e.g., Clover et al., 2016; Earl, 2018). As Freire (2000, p.

39) believes, “the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled.” How does critical consciousness come about and become radicalised and exercised through the education and learning possibilities of higher education for international students is a fundamental query of this study.

The second way that Freire (2000) looks at critical consciousness is through the lens of the oppressor. He argues that oppressors are people who “oppress, exploit and rape by virtue of their power” (p. 44). In many ways, oppressors are much worse than the oppressed as they “cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves” (p. 44). As an African American student in a teacher education programme at a predominantly white university, Baszile (2008) studied this dichotomy of oppressors and oppressed in her environment. As a professional, she spent over 10 years teaching prospective and practising teachers in predominantly white universities about race and racism, but not without its struggles. She confessed that it was an “almost inexplicably difficult job [where there were days that she] might lose [her] mind [trying] to confront the resistance of privileged white students without locking the few students of colour into a teaching role” (p. 372). Baszile compared her teaching experience to her experience as an African American student in a teacher education programme where she realized there was “little qualitative attention [had] been given to the preparation of nonwhite students” (p. 373). Freire’s argument about the oppressors’ lack of strength of power to liberate tended to be true as Baszile found this burden she and other non-white students were left with to ‘liberate’ the white students on topics related to race and racism. Freire (2000) reiterates that “only powers that spring from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both” (p. 44). However, the oppressed must be careful as they can sometimes become

oppressors or "sub-oppressors" (p. 45), misunderstanding that they need to identify with the oppressors instead of aspiring to liberate through gaining critical consciousness and praxis. This misunderstanding is dangerous as sub-oppressors would perpetuate the conditions of the other oppressed members.

It is important to note that although Freire separates 'oppressor' and 'oppressed', we know from feminist discourses of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2010), that it is more complicated than this, as people can be both at once and this comes out in my study.

Adult education as a practice of critical consciousness

Central to this study are also three key dimensions of education and learning: formal and non-formal education and informal learning (Schugurensky & Myers, 2003; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009). Formal education refers to organised programs with set learning objectives that are typically offered by accredited education institutions such as universities and leads to a certification in the form of a diploma, degree or other qualifications upon successful completion of the program (Smith & Clayton, 2009; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009). Formal education is always intentional from a learner's perspective, for example, to gain knowledge and/or competences guided by a fixed curriculum that the education institution provides (Smith & Clayton, 2009; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009).

Non-formal education is not as formally organised in that it does not result in a formal diploma, degree or other official qualifications (Ivanova, 2016; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009). However, non-formal education is intentional, facilitated and includes a set of important learning objectives which correspond to the needs of the participants and also, of society. Knowledge acquired through non-formal education can be the "basis for formal knowledge" or vice versa (Zagar & Kelava, 2014, p. x).

Informal learning refers to sometimes unintentional, although it can be very intentional, unstructured learning that arises from a person's surrounding in everyday life and through work, hobbies, family, social or leisure activities (Perulli, 2009; Smith & Clayton, 2009; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009). Because the learning is often unorganised and unintentional it can sometimes be "so invisible that people just don't seem to be aware of their own learning" in that moment (Tough, 2002, p. 2). Although all three formal and non-formal education and informal learning are different in comparison, they can still occur in education institutions such as universities (Marsick &Watkins, 2001).

Formal education and critical consciousness

Adult education scholars believe that critical forms of education and learning can work to create new knowledge and a greater sense of agency toward positive change. This includes educational processes that provide opportunities for students to discuss, explore and debate issues of such as social, cultural, gender, and ecological oppression and justice (e.g. Freire, 2000; Mezirow, 2003; Nesbit, et al., 2013; Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2015). One of the ways that universities respond to social justice issues is by offering credit courses that explore and focus on these issues. One of the frameworks used when teaching these courses is what scholars call anti-racism education based in anti-racist theory (Dei, 1996; Dei, 2001; Scheurich, 2002; Dei, 2013; Dei & Lordan, 2013). Anti-racist theory is based on "the salience and centrality of race, the recognition of the relative saliencies of different identities, including ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, disability, languages and religion, and the situational and contextual variations in intensities of oppressions" (Dei, 2013, p. 3). The anti-racist framework approached multiple oppressions through "integrative anti-racist lens, notably the intersectionality of oppressions" recognising the complexity and the different layers of marginality one can face (p. 4). Dei's

studies have shown that when educators apply the anti-racist approach, they deal "directly with the marginalisation and exclusions ... by centring all human experiences in the process" (Dei, 2001, p. 151). Based on his studies, he argues that anti-racist frameworks encourage people to critically think of the oppressions within themselves and to work with this knowledge which we typically neglect (Dei, 2001, 2013; Dei & Lordan, 2013). For Dei, anti-racist framework is about praxis. It is about action and practice, and it seeks to bring about transformation through education when it is applied.

In her study, Obidah (2008) reflected on a course she taught titled *Cultural Identity* to master's students. She uncovered five themes in the course including identity, culture, positionality, oppression and allies. She invited the students to engage with these topics through a combination of activities including poetry, journal reflections, discussions, as well as other readings. Of particular importance in her study was how one white student who grew up poor was unable to accept the notion of white privilege due to the socioeconomic status of her upbringing. Five weeks into the course, however, the student reflected that "what I see now is that the privilege was embedded in facets of my life that were invisible, like maybe the fact that I got a job when I was 15 over a person of colour" (p. 64). Obidah's findings also show that students were able to understand "the injustice of overt racist acts" but found it harder to grasp "systemic elements of racism" (p. 65). However, she concluded that overall, the course gave students space to reflect, discuss and to challenge the "worldview they hear around them to which they no longer want to subscribe" (p. 66). The outcome of this, she noted, was that the students were then able to transform their reflection and discussion into actions by sharing their new worldview with peers and loved ones, although what change occurred as a result was beyond the scope of her study.

Another framework that is closely linked to the critical anti-racist theory that professors in universities highlight through their courses is decolonisation. Discourses of decolonisation – or anti-colonial as it is also referred to (e.g., Dei, 2019) – derived from debates and discussions on postcolonialism framework. Scholars argued that although postcolonial theory was important, it was very limiting. They explained that term "postcolonialism" indicated that colonialism had come to an end, with the word "post-" describing that it was the after of colonialism when in fact colonisation was still happening in other contexts than just the traditional definition of physical domination over one's territory (Altbach, 2006; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Fanon, 1963; Wane, 2006; Krishna, 2009; Said, 1978; Simmons & Dei, 2012). Indeed, "to speak of the post-colonial is to mark the end of an epoch falsely by placing a break where none exists" (Werbner, 1996, in Wane, 2006, p. 95). In the same vein, Dei (2019) pointed out that

> decolonization is not a thing. It is not an obvious manifestation either. It is instead the end goal on a long journey to reach minds, souls, spirits and bodies as we collectively seek to transform our communities and connect both the physical and metaphysical realms of existence … decolonization is a process of working to bring change by foremost helping to rid ourselves of the complexes of subordination and acquiescence (p. vii).

Decolonising gives us the awareness and reality check that colonisation is in fact a continuous occurrence, contributing to most of the injustices that some of us are experiencing today. It is not something of the past. Fanon (1963), one of the earliest writers on colonialism recognises other types of colonisation including colonisation of the mind, culture, language, just to name a few. In fact, Wane (2006, p. 88) highlights that "political and economic control of people will never be complete or effective without mental control. To control people's culture and way of thinking is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others."

In one study based in South Africa, researchers Mampane et al. (2018) explored the decolonising work in higher education in Africa using what they called 'glocal' solutions. For their study they recruited 180 participants from multiple African countries, including both students and lecturers who found that while globalisation had its advantages it could also lead to "the loss of identity, and the devaluation of [I]ndigenous languages, culture, history, religion and the norms and value systems of the communities" which worsened some of the implications from colonialism (p. 4). The researchers noted that some of the participants admitted that while they could speak their local language, they were not able to write it well, and their children could not understand the language at all. This devaluing of culture and language could result in a "loss of self-worth" when "identity, social connectedness and cohesion" were threatened, thus decolonising of education would be crucial (p. 4). In doing so, Mampane's study highlighted,

> decolonising education has to include adding greater value to [I]ndigenous languages, incorporating their language and culture in education, incorporating local history into the curriculum in a more systematic way, and stopping the use of [I]ndigenous languages as a punitive measure in assessment. (p. 4)

The authors concluded that it would be important to integrate local Indigenous perspectives as a way of decolonising education, while using "some elements of the global worldview" (p. 5).

Both the anti-racism and decolonising thoughts were important frameworks in bringing consciousness through learnings and discussions in formal education in my study. However, as mentioned above, our learning is not restricted to just formal education. In the spirit of lifelong learning that adult scholars advocate, we also learn from non-formal education and informal learning, which I took up in the two respective sections below.

Non-formal education and critical consciousness

Non-formal education has not always been recognised as a valid learning and/or educational process and in fact, is often seen as secondary to the importance of formal education (Rogers, 2005). Yet adult educators worldwide had always seen learning as a continuum in a person's life that was beyond formal education (regardless of their scope and level of formal education) and complementary to formal education (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009). For many adult education scholars, non-formal education plays an important role in tackling the problematic issue of our time and new knowledge creation (Brown, 2018; Ivanova, 2017; Rogers, 2005; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009; Zagar & Kelava, 2014). As Zagar and Kelava (2014) put it, "knowledge acquired by a non-formal route can become the motive power of personal and personality development, and it can become a driving force in the development of society" (p. x). Moreover, non-formal education "embraces concerns of social inequities and often seeks to raise the consciousness of participants towards action" (Dudzinska-Przesmitzki & Grenier, 2008, p. 11).

As a response to the complex social issues in the world, universities are incorporating non-formal education in higher education, recognising that higher education plays a vital role in shaping the students' "cognitive, affective and behavioural development" to assist them to become aware of "their own assumptions about what exist" (Fried & Zull, 2012, p. 15). Universities complement formal education with non-formal education by organising weekly talks and seminars, hands-on learning and/or service learning, conferences and other on-campus activities that students can partake outside of their classrooms (Joseph & Rouse, 2017; Kindon & Elwood, 2009; Lee & Kelley-Petersen, 2018; Terrazas-Marin, 2018).

There is a dearth of studies that look at how non-formal education in higher education settings works and its impact. However, one study by Terrazas-Marin (2018) did use non-formal education to complement formal education. Terrazas-Marin (2018) discovered that non-formal education was a useful platform to develop different competences in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) students. These competences included values, leadership skills, social skills, team building and attitude development. This discovery was important as it recognised that STEM education typically focused on the "development of technical knowledge and often [forgot] other important issues" (p. 118). In the study, STEM lecturers at a northern university in Mexico had to develop a pedagogy that combined formal education and non-formal education activities outside of the classroom over the course of 30 hours across five sessions. Examples of these activities include "structuring non-formal learning situations," "developing dialogic communication" and "creating challenging non-formal STEM activities based on real life problems" (p. 120). At the end of these sessions, the lecturers found that students "confronted their fears, developed leadership, showed values, talked about their problems and found solutions to complex challenges" (pp. 121-122). Terrazas-Marin concluded that non-formal education also promoted critical reflective learning since the study "incorporated critical reflection and dialogism as part of the problem-solving methodology" (p. 122). Other scholars too remind us that critical reflection enables a person to transform their perspectives, and to acquire the sense of agency that is needed to bring about positive change to social issues (Annette, 2009; Freire, 2000; Larnell et al., 2016; Nesbit et al., 2013).

Through non-formal education exposures, students develop (or heighten) their consciousness as well as their civic competences. These enhance their ability "to make connections between their personal stories and society; improve their higher order [of] creative

and critical thinking skills, their communication skills and their overall academic achievement" (Hoskins & Crick 2010, p. 132). The presence of critical consciousness and gained knowledge in civic competences through non-formal education, students would be able to be more involved in making a difference as they become more attuned with the happenings around them. They also would be able to empathise better with the marginalised groups of people facing social issues.

Informal learning and critical consciousness

For adult education scholars Duguid, Mundel and Schugurensky (2013), informal learning is a significant way that adults learn despite its unstructured or often unintentional nature. Informal learning scholars, including the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2009), see it as referring to the fact that we are constantly learning through our surroundings, experiences and/or observations in our everyday life (e.g., Clover, 2015; Lai & Smith, 2018; Scheerens, 2011; Werquin, 2010). While informal learning was thought to be simply "unconscious", others argue that "upon further reflection or elicitation" informal learning can in fact, become more conscious (Duguid et al., 2013, p. 26).

A number of studies call for greater recognition and validation of the importance of informal learning because of the value it brings to people's lives through its very ubiquity (e.g., Kaminskiene & Stasiunaitiene, 2013; Perulli, 2009; Singh, 2015; Smith & Clayton, 2009; Werquin, 2010). For example, for Singh (2015) it is important to recognise how informal learning paves the way not just for training and qualifications development but as a means to propose "solutions to the biggest socio-economic challenges including poverty reduction, economic development, the enhancement of employability, social inclusion and cohesion, personal and professional development as well as democratic citizenship in society" (p. 63). In their report, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2009) notes that incorporating

informal learning in every aspect of our life can bring about awareness-raising of social issues, which can create "a greater interest in participating actively in social life and contributing to change" (p. 70). Takayanagi (2019) reminds us that informal learning is important for marginalised groups such as women as it gives them a sense of agency, which can encourage them to become agents of change.

One of the gaps, according to Kaminskiene and Stasiunaitiene (2013), is that "higher education institutions are still at the initial stages of assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning achievements" (p. 30). Similar to non-formal education, there is a dearth of studies on informal learning in higher education settings. However, adult education scholars have looked at how informal learning took place in various institutions such as libraries, museums and art galleries which have a history in colonialism like universities (Clover, 2015; Dudzinska-Przesmitzki & Grenier, 2008; Hooper-Greenhill, 2004; Kim et al., 2016). For example, in her study, Clover (2015) focused on the informal learning in museums and art galleries through exhibitions, recognising how the selected visuals and artefacts could be problematic in favouring one narrative (e.g., white male), and silencing others such as the experiences and lives of Indigenous women. At the same time, the visuals and artefacts could take up complex social issues such as colonialism and patriarchy.

Kim et al. (2016, p. 189) focused on informal learning in museums as happening "socially and individually in various ways, such as having a conversation with others, interacting with collections or artefacts and even participating in diverse educational activities in museums" (p. 189). Thus, as museum and art gallery visitors interact with exhibitions informally, they are learning through the textual and visual representations. Although these studies were not situated in universities per se, it is useful as learning informally on university campuses too happens

through objects and visual representations (and texts such as posters) in the surroundings (Clover et al., 2013). Indeed, one could argue that university campuses are filled with exhibitions, artefacts, paintings, posters and other visual representations that students could absorb.

In another study that looked at informal learning with Maasai women in Narok County in Kenya, Takayagani (2019) found that the women became "active agents of social change through informal learning." In their urgency to resolve identified issues in their community, the Maasai women organised a small group to tackle these issues. He found that "through analysing social issues, taking initiatives for solving the issues and reflecting the outcomes, the women in Narok have experienced a form of empowering" (p. 30). Hence the importance of recognising the positive impacts of informal learning in this study and advocating for the validity of this type of learning.

Experiential learning and production pedagogies

Another framework relevant to this study is experiential learning and production pedagogies. Experiential learning can have a transformative impact on an individual's educational journey. Scholars found that learners must be actively engaged in their contexts in order to acquire applied knowledge (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Yardley et al., 2012). In an effort of providing an intellectual basis for experiential learning, Kolb and Kolb (2017) produced the experiential learning theory, of which they described it as "a synthesis of the works of those great scholars who gave experience a central role in their theories of human learning and development" (p. 10). Kolb and Kolb viewed this theory as a "holistic" (p. 13) process of learning as it is "driven by the integration of action and reflection and experience and concept", the four modes required in experiential learning (p. 14). They emphasised that many of the challenges faced by proponents of experiential learning in higher education was due to "the

failure to view experiential learning as encompassing all four modes of the learning cycle and as applicable in all learning situations both in the classroom and in life" (p. 14). Consequently, for learning to be transformative, it is imperative for educators to integrate reflection, analysis and scholarly knowledge, as much as the hands-on experience in the learning process.

There are various approaches to experiential learning, and one of them is through engaging in innovative and creative forms of pedagogy and knowledge creation such as video production, photography, and drawing. This approach of which scholars call production pedagogy or pedagogy of production focuses on the teaching and learning activities that require learners to create artifacts to be shared with known and unknown audiences (de Castell & Jenson, 2006; Smythe et al., 2014). In one study, de Castell and Jenson (2006) utilised "other forms of literacy to create a bridge between the kinds of representation youth saw to be meaningful and useful to them, and those more conventional, text-based literacies" when engaging with queer and questioning youth (p. 240). In the study, the participants worked together through the 'doing' of research, in this case, using experiential ethnographic and video-based methods to collect data. de Castell and Jenson emphasised that these "multimodal re-conceptualizations of literacy and its practices are particularly important…for populations with whom conventional text-based literacy has been used largely to discipline and punish, through schools, family services, the courts and child welfare systems" (p. 240). Through the "multiliteracies" (p. 240) of production pedagogy, de Castell and Jenson gave them "access to conceptualizations they were not hearing anywhere else and to identities which they had not been able to occupy anywhere else" (p. 241).

Similarly, in a self-study, McGregor (2012) found that the integration of experiential aesthetic engagement in a graduate-level social justice leadership course that she taught in the

span of a three-year period "illustrated the ways that aesthetic texts can provoke deep, engaged and reflexive learning among adult learners" (p. 310). Using arts-informed productive practices such as photovoice and zines in her courses, McGregor described these practices as "learners' creation of texts while engaged in learning." She explained that through these hands-on aesthetic practices "understanding emerge[d] through the processes of production, rather than the reproduction or reiteration of knowledge which is an important feature of arts-informed learning processes" (p. 310). McGregor also discovered how "both the product and the process [gave] voice to [the] personal and collective…while simultaneously shaping the performers' beliefs and understandings of the self as agent (a self-reflexive process)" (p. 312).

The experiential aspect in the act of 'doing', or 'producing' in production pedagogies as mentioned in the studies above highlights how these practices are designed to support learners' own learning through invigorating forms of engaging in more complex critical thinking and reflecting. When it comes to discussing social justice issues, participating in these creative and critical hands-on processes is key for challenging presumptive standpoints and transforming non-critical ways of thinking and start viewing oneself as an agent of change.

I turn now to Chapter Three to discuss about the methodology and methods I used in this study.

Chapter Three

Methods and methodology

In this chapter, I outline my methodology and methods. I begin by re-stating the research question and the aims of my study. From there, I move to my methodology, discussing how I combined more traditional and arts-based approaches in response to calls to both create and present knowledge "in multiple forms including text, image…and more" (Hall & Tandon, 2021, p. 7). I then turn to the specific steps I took, share information on the participants and how they were selected (including myself as a participant researcher) and finally my visual and data analysis processes. I include a discussion of some of the ethical issues and challenges of this study, in terms of using photography, finding participants and undertaking a study during COVID-19.

Research questions and purpose

The primary question that guided my study was: How does living and studying in Victoria and at UVic encourage a critical consciousness about social injustice in a group of international students and what are the implications for change work in the future? Sub-questions that guided me towards my primary question included:

1. What does social justice (and injustice) mean? (a before and after question)
2. What and how are we as international students learning about social issues? How are we experiencing it?
3. What roles are informal and experiential learning and formal and nonformal education play in raising consciousness?
4. What injustices were participants seeing and where?

5. To what degree are experiential and informal learning enabling new consciousness? To what degree formal and nonformal education?
6. What challenges are we facing? Are these simply remaining as challenges or are we using them differently?
7. What impact(s) will students' new learning have upon their actions when we return home?

Qualitative and arts-based approaches

Mine was a qualitative study that was informed by community-based participatory research and included arts-based methods. For Creswell (2013), amongst other things, qualitative research is a process that enables the researcher to address social or human problems by collecting data in a setting sensitive to the people and places under study" (p. 44). My study took place on the UVic campus, which was a familiar setting for all the participants. Participants also used the communities where they lived, in particular through the photography element of the workshop. Flick (2007) defined qualitative research as research that "starts from the notion of the social construction of realities under study, is interested in the perspectives of participants, in everyday practices and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study" (p. 2). This was ideal for my study as I was interested in investigating international students' coming to critical consciousness about social (in)justice issues through their different education and learnings in formal, nonformal and informally, as expressed by their own voices, stories and experiences. Flick (2007) also added that "methods should be appropriate to that issue and should be open enough to allow an understanding of a process or relation" (p. 2) of which I explain more about the choice of using individual interviews and the arts as my methods below.

A current important tool of qualitative research is community-based participatory research (CBPR) and there are several aspects of this approach that I applied to my study. Firstly, CBPR is about relationship and trust building amongst participants. I dedicated the first day of the workshop to activities that could foster trust and relationship building between the participants to ensure that they felt welcomed, heard, and included in the group setting, explained more later in the chapter. The second element of CBPR is knowledge co-creation. The participants and I worked together to collect the data and to analyse the findings. Also, whenever I needed more clarifications after the workshop, I would reach out to the participants to ensure that what they said was accurate. I also sent them the transcripts from the workshop for their review if they wished to do so, again to honour the accuracy of their voices/stories. The third element of CBPR which is the equitable inclusion of participants to be involved in. During the study, I offered and provided some resources (within my means) such as meals and bus tickets for their ease of participation in the study during the three-day workshop.

I also used the arts as a research tool of exploration and investigation. As Gauntlett (2007) reminds us

> people have been producing visual and artistic expressions of the self and their existence, stretching back over thousands of years ... these research methods are not 'alternative' in a random, illogical or pointlessly 'novel' way, but rather they connect with a deep pool of long-existing human expressive practice (p. 92).

McNiff (2008) defines arts and research as the

> the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies (p. 29).

One of these is the use of visual-based methods in research, as demonstrated in this study. I used three arts-based methods, in particular visual-based methods to encourage 'visual' reflection and to depict how we were articulating 'social justice' and injustice. These included images, collage making and photography of which I discuss these methods in more detail below. While there are numerous aspects of arts-based research that make it important, five of those were particularly key to my study. Firstly, arts-based approaches work well when there are language barriers. As Malherbe et al., (2016) argue, arts-based methods do not necessarily "depend on spoken language [and therefore] participants may feel more confident in their ability to express themselves and may do so in a manner that is not susceptible to the kinds of mistranslation or developmental issues connected to linguistic expression" (p. 595). Secondly, scholars also remind us that arts-based methods can help create critical consciousness. Researchers such as Leavy (2015) has used arts-based research practices with the specific intent of raising "critical consciousness, promoting reflection, building empathetic connections … challenging stereotypes, and fostering social action" (p. 292). How were we as international students learning formally, informally and nonnormally about issues and stereotypes? What actions might we take a result? These were all important questions I used as a basis for our conversations. Thirdly, arts-based practices help us to create new knowledge in more critical-imaginative and boundary-scaling ways. Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2019) believe that "critical arts-based projects have the potential to elevate the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge we have about people in meaningful ways" (p. 20). They go on to say that arts-based methods also create new knowledge by disrupting taken for granted ways of understanding" (p. 20). For example, as I describe further in Chapter Four, all the participants reached new heights in challenging their own privileges which consequently enabled them/us to see things in a different light. Fourthly,

while the cognitive and affective are often separated, they are very much part of each other. As Leavy (2015) argues arts-based methods are powerful because they "evoke emotions, promote reflections and as a result, transform the way we think, and come to know, certain social (in)justices" (p. 292). In other words, arts put you in a situation to 'feel' for and with others, something that is called empathy. For Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2019, p. 20), creating "empathy for the human condition" is central to how we change ourselves and the world for the better. I therefore looked to how 'empathy' was manifested in my participants (and myself), to how we were learning to feel the social injustices that we had not experienced and/or were being experienced by others. Finally, the arts encourage creativity and imagination and in my case critical creativity and imagination. Haiven and Khasnabish (2014, p. 2) call this establishing a "radical imagination" when dealing with issues such as social injustice. The radical imagination is the capacity to envision a better future which is a fundamental component of all aspects of our lives, including social, psychological, and spiritual experiences. Without this belief, without "visions of how the world might be different" humans are inclined to surrender to hopelessness due to the harshness of reality that exists (p. 64). I focussed on how by using the arts as investigative tools, the 'radical imagination' was playing out in my study. How being creative was helping us to think more deeply about the world, and where did we see and find hope when we talked about taking actions for positive change.

Arts-based methods

As noted, I used three arts-based methods. The first was photovoice. McGregor (2012) described photovoice "as a process for critical consciousness raising with multiple social goals of actively engaging participants in listening, dialogue and critical reflection to facilitate community change" (p. 72). Kyung-Hwa Yang (2014) adds that it is a process of "photographic

documentation of one's own life or surroundings" (p. 233). Photovoice differs from ordinary photography by allowing us to take photos consciously and in this study, the opportunity to reflect and discuss our lives in Victoria, and our education and learning at UVic, including issues of social (in)justice that we and/or others might be facing. Consequently, photovoice can lead to meaningful conversations amongst participants about making change. When photovoice is used in research, participants use cameras to respond to research questions, exploring, as in my case, ideas of social (in)justice through the lens of the camera and then speaking or 'storying' – the voice part of photovoice – the meanings of the images. I outline in detail how we used photovoice shortly.

Another arts-based method I used was collage, a visual-based method that "refers to the bringing together of a number of elements displaced from their usual context and the sticking of these together to produce an artefact" (Burge et al., 2016, p. 732). Butler-Kisber (2019) defines collage-making as "the practice of gathering fragments and then cutting, tearing, folding, or crumpling these remnants taken from pre-existing pictures, found objects or fabrics, or a mixture of these, and gluing them onto a flat surface to communicate a visual message" (p. 2). Collage is useful because it is such a "non-threatening medium where an individual does not need to feel 'artistic' in producing their piece of work. The parts of the pictures have already been created – the individual now takes these and transforms them into new meaning[s] which can then be shared with others" (Williams, 2000, p. 274). The technique is to take text and images, cut them out and arranges them "to make new combinations" (Colderley as cited in Burge et al. 2016, p. 733). To create the collages, I supplied the participants with a stack of magazines that I began collecting from various places since knowing that I would be using collage as a method in this

study. I also bought some magazines from thrift stores. In addition, I supplied them with scissors, glue, coloured markers, glitters, and construction papers to create the collage.

I also used images lent to me by my supervisor whose use I describe below.

Individual interviews

A central tool of qualitative research is the individual interview. Interviews are defined as "face-to-face verbal exchange, in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons" (Maccoby & Maccoby as quoted in Brinkmann, 2013, p. 2). They are useful because they allow interviewers to get to the depth of an issue by asking a set of follow-up questions, and interviewees can express how they view and make sense of the world, including share their concerns using their own words (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). I used individual interviews twice in my study and I describe this process in detail below.

Recruiting participants

For this study, I recruited five international students. There were challenges in this process, and I take those up at the end of this chapter. The participants came from five different countries in Asia (China), Latin America (Ecuador and Mexico), the Caribbean (Bahamas) and the Middle East (the United Arab Emirates), and I am from Malaysia. Six proved to be the ideal number of participants for this study as I was interested in going in depth with the participants, a key element of arts-based research. Out of the five participants, two were undergraduate students and four (including me) were graduate students. We were from different faculties across the university including one in Social Sciences, one in Science, two in Education (from different units: Curriculum and Instruction, and Leadership Studies), and two from Human and Social

Development (one was a master's student, the other a doctoral student). Five participants self-identified as female and one as male.

To recruit, I sent out a campus-wide call out by putting up posters around campus, sending out call out emails to all undergraduate and graduate faculties, posting the call-out poster on social media, specifically the UVic International Centre for Students (previously International Student Services) and the UVic International Student Association Facebook groups as well as relying on the word of mouth. I also connected with the staff at the UVic International Centre for Students in getting some assistance to recruit international students for my study and they offered to put my poster up in their office.

Twenty-one students responded via a short 'expression of interest' questionnaire (see Appendix 1) I used to identify and select the eligible participants. The eligibility criteria outlined in this questionnaire were:

- Be a (self-identified) international student at the University of Victoria;
- Be a full-time undergraduate or graduate student at the University of Victoria, OR a recent graduate from the University of Victoria;
- Have lived and studied in Canada for at least eight months or two semesters;
- Be physically available in Victoria at the time the research was to be conducted;
- Own a reliable photographic device such as a camera or a smartphone;
- Demonstrate active involvement in on-campus events and activities that 'preferably' were social justice-oriented

Participant researcher

Traditionally, and especially in the positivist approaches to research, researchers have been strictly observers of participants. However, community-based, and feminist researchers

such as Fals Borda and Rahman (1991), Hall (1975), Leavy (2015), and Schubotz (2020) argue for an alternative approach to research known as participatory research. The aim of participatory approaches to research is to provide "a critical perspective to existing research practice and in response to concerns about its lack of social impact, relevance and usefulness for those who were the subjects and the centre of this research" (Schubotz, 2020, p. 12). As an international student at UVic, I was one of the participants of this study, known as a 'participant researcher' as mentioned in Chapter One. I took part in this study to explore my own experiences, education and learning, and critical consciousness about social (in)justice and its implications together with other international students at UVic to amplify our voices and experiences, and inspire (further) action which I outline in Chapters Four and Five. In fact, I had noticed this 'shift' in critical consciousness within myself through my own education and learning journey, and living experiences, which was what inspired me to design and conduct this study in the first place.

Initial meeting

I organised an initial meeting with each participant with four main intents. The first was as a means to build rapport and get to know one another. Participants shared some details about their background as international students. Secondly, I shared in detail the purpose and logistics of the study. Thirdly, we went through the consent form for the study which also had information regarding the purpose and objectives of the study, the importance of the study, as well as what was involved in the study (i.e., the three-day workshop). We also discussed the importance of respecting confidentiality and anonymity in this study. Finally, during this meeting, the participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions and/or concerns they had.

Pre and post individual interviews

As noted above, I used interviews in my study. To set the stage for the workshops to come, I organised individual interviews with each of the participants. As for myself, I separately reflected on the questions being asked and how they applied to me and my experiences. The overall purpose was to explore each participant's overall understanding and perspectives on social justice through their involvement inside and/or outside the classrooms of the university, and the exposure they had (if any) with using arts as a learning tool. I allocated a maximum of 60-minutes for the pre-workshop interview activity, and asked a number of questions (see Appendix 2).

I began by asking about their backgrounds and the journey that had brought them to pursue their post-secondary education in Canada. From this, I gave them a space to outline their understandings of social (in)justice, what they understood by those two words, how they defined it and what they identified as unjust situations. We then discussed some of their involvements (e.g., going to events and workshops, volunteering, donating) in activities concerning social issues in their home country and/or Canada specifically, their formal and nonformal education, their informal learning and if they saw any similarities in the social issues or injustices between those countries. After that we discussed their experience (if any) in using the arts to discuss social issues as part of their learning. Lastly, we reflected on any actions we had taken in the past or in Victoria to address social issues.

In reference back to language issues, I printed out a copy of the questions for the participants to facilitate the interview process as both hearing and seeing the questions helps. For example, the participants could refer to the paper for the questions if they needed to. While I had prepared a set of questions, I also asked other questions based on what I was hearing from the

participants typically to get more clarifications on their responses such as asking them to elaborate on a particular educational project or activity, since my focus was on education and learning.

I also conducted a post-workshop individual interview with all participants. This post-workshop interview gave students a space to discuss on their own any challenges they had faced in doing the research, changes to how they now perceived social justice, and how the issues they had raised might be affecting them. It was also an individual space to reflect on the use of the arts as a medium or tool of critical consciousness. I allocated a maximum of 60-minutes for the post-workshop interview and had their permission to record.

For the post-workshop interview, I focussed on some similar questions, excluding about their backgrounds. I added questions about their experience and the impact of the arts-based aspects of the study/workshop (see Appendix 3). On their understanding of social justice, I inquired about any changes or enhancements regarding their perspective on social justice through the discussions that took place at the workshop, and if they were made aware of any new social issues by other participants. I also focussed on the impacts the arts might have on their perspectives in learning and discussing social (in)justice issues using arts-based methods during the workshop, for example, if the arts might influence their ability to express their thoughts better. Now that all of us had experience using the arts, I asked the participants if they had any suggestions for formal education in regards to social justice and the arts. I also asked if they were able to be more involved in the arts as part of their formal and/or nonformal learning (self-initiated) after the workshop. Finally, I focussed on taking actions. I asked if there were changes in how they identified informed actions, and if they had contributed or expanded their involvement in caring for social issues through any actions since the workshop. In thinking of the

future, I asked what were some of the actions they would take to improve social issues personally and professionally.

Three-day arts-based research workshop

Many components went into designing and facilitating the three-day workshop which was the core activity of my study. As some participants faced economic challenges and all were giving so much of their time to my study, I provided them with breakfast, lunch and snacks during the workshop. I also offered them bus tickets if they required some, but all students either had U-Passes (student bus pass) or lived on-campus where the workshop was held. Prior to confirming the dates of the workshop, I sent out a poll to the participants to select the best day(s) and time for them to participate in the workshop.

The workshop was divided into four different activities over three days which had their own purposes for the different dimensions of education that this study was investigating. The four activities included an icebreaker activity and the three arts-based methods mentioned before namely images, collage, and photovoice. I video recorded the whole workshop (with consent) for data collection purposes which I discuss in Chapters Four and Five.

Day 1: Introduction, guidelines discussion, and 'This Is Who I Am' icebreaker session

The first day of the workshop was dedicated to giving more information on the workshop and to building relationships amongst the participants. This would be the first time that some of them had met each other and would be working together for the next few days. However, some of them recognised each other from other events or activities they happened to be at together.

To get started, the participants shared their names, faculties, reasons for being involved in the study and what they were hoping to gain from their participation in this study. Following this, I shared the objectives and an overview of the workshop days, and the use of arts as the

methodology. I then outlined the three different dimensions of adult education and learning (formal, nonformal and informal) that would be the centre of the workshop. I also discussed my role in the study as a participant researcher and reminded them about the details in the consent form and their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

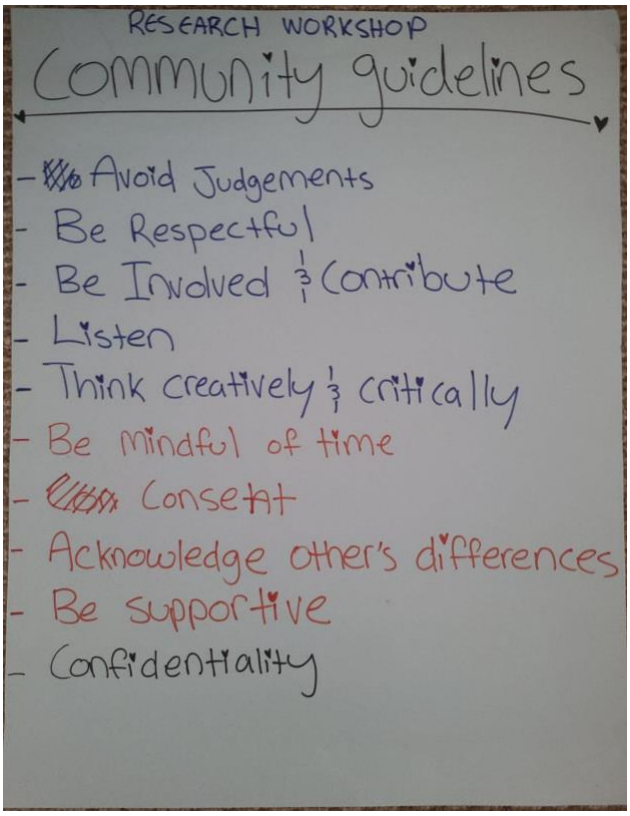

Figure 1. Community guidelines co-created by participants

It was important to build trust and respect amongst the participants so that they would feel included and heard while still being their authentic selves. Hence, one of the main objectives of this session was to get the participants to know one another thoroughly and to build trust. In the next portion of the session, I facilitated a community guideline discussion with the participants, where we co-construct a set of guidelines for the three-day workshop together. One of the participants volunteered to write down these guidelines on the presentation paper I provided as we discussed and created them collectively (see Figure 1). Then we taped the

community guidelines to one of the walls in the room and came to the agreement that all of us had the responsibility to respect these guidelines throughout the workshop in order to create a brave and safe space for discussions.

Following this we moved to a very low-risk icebreaker activity that involved drawing. I named this activity 'This Is Who I Am'. This icebreaker activity was for them to be familiarised and get to know each other in a creative way. This icebreaker activity was also a way to build confidence and be comfortable with using arts as part of their learning. The icebreaker required them to draw their own depiction of who they are and how they view themselves as people, hence 'This Is Who I Am'.

Intentionally, the icebreaker activity also was created to ease participants into exercising their visual literacy and analysis since most of them had not had the opportunity of using visual-based methods in their learning as I discovered in the pre-workshop interviews. Once everyone was done with their drawing, we folded our drawing and dropped it into a box. At random, each person took turns picking a drawing that was folded. Then, as a group, we tried to decipher the drawing before it was revealed to whom it belonged to. The person whose drawing it belonged to then explained the actual meaning of their drawing and how they identified with it. I used this activity as an opportunity to emphasise the different perceptions that we had regarding each drawing based on our positionality. When done, another person picked a new drawing until all drawings were picked, deciphered, shared, and everyone had a turn.

Day 2: Sharing experiences of formal and nonformal education

The second day of the workshop was divided into a morning and an afternoon session. The morning session was geared toward their sharing of experience in formal education and coming to critical consciousness regarding social justice issues, while the afternoon session

focussed on their experience in nonformal education at the university and coming to critical consciousness regarding social justice issues.

Morning session - 'Critical show and tell' (Sharing of experience in formal education)

The objective of this activity was to get the participants to think critically and discuss social justice issues that they might have been exposed to through their formal education at UVic. Participants did this by using photographs and images that were made available to them as a tool of expression and discussion. At the beginning of this session, I reminded and explained to the participants the use of arts as a tool in expressing their thoughts and perceptions regarding social injustice issues that were happening in the world including the power of creativity and imagination that I explained above.

For this activity, I brought in a collection of photographs and images that I had borrowed from my supervisor. I asked each participant to pick two photos in the context of formal education and social justice based on a set of questions I provided as reflections which were:

- How did you first become aware of social justice issues at home and/or in Victoria?
- Through your engagement in formal courses at UVic, what did you understand by 'social justice'?
- Through your engagement in formal courses at UVic, what new issues and/or ideas did you became more aware of (if any)?
- Since taking classes at UVic, how did your perspective regarding social justice issues change (if any)?
- Since taking classes at UVic, did you see a connection between the social justice issues that were happening in Canada with the issues that were happening in your hometown community?

- What were some of these issues?

The participants had time to reflect on these questions before picking the two images. I provided some paper for us to scribble down our thoughts. Then we reflected on the images we picked out to make meaning of them in the given context of our experiences in formal education surrounding our awareness of new knowledge in social justice issues. Once time was up, each of us shared our chosen two photos and explained to the group how we perceived the images in the framework of social justice and our formal education experience. We also shared the meaning-making process we did through a reflection activity.

At the end of this session, I briefed the participants about the next part of the workshop that was happening in the afternoon. As mentioned, lunch was provided for the participants and all of us ate together and bonded with each other casually.

Afternoon session: Making arts consciously

The objective of this activity was to get the participants, as international students, to be engaged in discussions on social justice issues in a nonformal education setting through collage making. During this activity, participants were assigned into three groups of two at random by picking out a piece of paper with numbers that would pair us up. I provided materials to create a collage such as magazines, scissors, glue, coloured markers, glitters, and construction papers. Individually we reflected and jotted down on paper of our non-formal education experiences at UVic based on these questions:

- What activities have you been involved in at UVic besides your formal courses?
- How does this impact your learning and awareness on social justice issues?
- What were some of the social justice issues you became aware of?

In our groups of two, we discussed our reflections and chose a common social justice issue for the collage. Then, we co-created a collage representing the chosen social justice issue through our discussions and reflections of our nonformal education activities. We had approximately 40 minutes to create the collage using various photographs, texts and images in the magazines. At the end of the 40 minutes, each group was given 20 minutes to present their collage to the whole group, and this included the opportunity for discussions and questions and answers.

We did not have the time to do aesthetic reflections at the end of this activity, but before ending our session I briefed the participants about the last and final activity of the workshop which would take place on the next day. Since we were doing a photovoice activity, I reminded the participants to have their photographic devices (e.g., their smartphones or camera) fully charged. I also reminded them to ensure that they had sufficient memory spaces on their devices to store new photographs for the next activity.

Day 3: Photovoice activity (Sharing of experience in an informal learning setting)

We started the day by sharing our processes and reflections on making the collages since we ran out of time on the previous day. Then we got into the activity of the final day of the workshop which was photovoice. The objectives of this session were to replicate the informal learning that the participants might have observed or been engaged with the surroundings (e.g., objects on campus such as posters and paintings) of the UVic campus, and to explore the impacts that the arts (particularly photovoice) have on the participants' creativity and perception regarding social justice issues. The objective was also to reflect on our thoughts regarding the process of participating in creating arts consciously in this workshop, whether it has heightened our views regarding social justice issues or otherwise.

Since most of the participants had never done a photovoice activity, I gave a short presentation on the practice. Then I shared with them some of the boundaries and etiquettes of taking photographs pertaining to this study. The participants were free to choose any social issue inspired by the surroundings on campus, as long as it was still related to social justice. This is so that the social justice issue they chose were genuine to their informal learning experiences. However, they were only allowed to take abstract photos and photos of objects only. I made it clear that no photos of human faces were allowed. I explained how using their creativity, imagination and visual literacy were important in this activity as a way for them to explore their creative interpretations of injustice without using human subjects. As a group, we decided to choose between three to five photos to present to everyone, but we could take as many photos as we would like. I also shared with them some tips on taking good, clear photos, and invited the other participants to share other tips they might know about taking good photos. Then we had one hour to roam around the campus individually and execute this photovoice activity.

When the hour was done, all of us gathered in the room again. The participants transferred their photos to my laptop to be projected onto the big screen for their presentation. One by one, we presented the series of photos we took and explained the meaning and representations that were behind the photos. We discussed in depth regarding the social (in)justice issues that our photos represented. Everyone was free to chime in at any time. We also shared and discussed the aesthetic experience we had in a focus group setting. At the end of it, we reflected on the overall photovoice activity we did and the aesthetic process that each of us took. The discussions were so meaningful and engaging that all of us lingered and stayed behind to continue our conversation for an extra hour even when the activity was over.

After the three-day workshop ended, I had wanted to organise a celebratory lunch for all participants as a way to thank them for their contribution and participation. However, it was hard for us to get together once the Fall semester started since all of us had different schedules. In determination to make it happen, I ended up organising two separate lunches to accommodate everyone's schedules and ensure that everyone was treated to lunch.

Data collection

As described above, central to CBPR is collaborative knowledge creation. As this study sought to explore our critical consciousness on issues of social justice through our different learnings, the approach to co-creating knowledge enabled the "exchange of information and knowledge but is opposed to any form of teaching or indoctrination" (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 17). This, in turn, contributed to the "process of self-awareness-raising through collective self-inquiry and reflection" needed for conscientization as discussed in Chapter Two (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 17).

The aforementioned activities in this study were designed methodically from the beginning. Each activity in the workshop was categorised into the three major themes of formal education, nonformal education and informal learning using different visual-based methods that this study focussed on. As also central to the study, there were consistent discussions revolving around social (in)justice in the context of education and learning. In being specific to explore our critical consciousness about social (in)justice, the purpose of these activities was focussed to discuss in-depth on the 'how' and 'what' we learned (or wished we had learned) in relation to social justice through these three key dimensions of education and learning. The activities were also used to reflect and discuss the implications of using the arts as tools of learning.

For each arts-based activity, we used the same process of data collection during the workshop, however, we voiced our experiences both individually and collectively. So firstly, we individually shared and presented our thoughts on the images we selected, the collage we created (although in pairs, it was important for every participant to express their thoughts and experiences), and the photos we snapped to highlight our awareness on social justice issues through our education and learning. Secondly, we invited other participants to share their thoughts and perspectives in relation to their experiences to highlight their relationship with learning and awareness in social justice issues based on the artefacts that others shared. Thirdly, we discussed the emerging themes based on the similarities and/or differences in our stories, experiences and perspectives regarding social (in)justices represented through our interpretation of the artefacts. After each activity, we also reflected and discussed the aesthetic process we took in informing our choice of images, the creation of collage and photographs we took.

There were also the pre- and post-workshop individual interviews that were conducted with each participant as mentioned above. These interviews were used to assess the growth (or not) of our understanding and (new) knowledge regarding social justice and learning. As for my own data, I reflected on the same questions I asked other participants for all activities including the individual interviews. I made notes of my own learning process and progress since I first moved to Canada and compared the difference in my critical consciousness about social justice prior coming to UVic (if any) and following my graduate studies at UVic. During this process, I was critically reflective on how the scholarly knowledge I gained from my formal education combined with the practical knowledge I acquired through my nonformal education and informal learning engagements at UVic contributed in the transformation of my own awareness on social justice issues in today's world. I also recalled and reflected on some of the informed actions I

took in my personal and professional lives as a result of this transformation. Additionally, in my exploration, I reflected on the process of this study and how I conducted myself as a participant researcher which I share further in the last chapter.

Then I applied thematic analysis to examine the data I collected in this study of which I share more below.

Thematic analysis of data

To analyse the data of this study, I used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data…[which] organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Qualitative scholars describe this method of analysis as "a foundational method for qualitative analysis" especially since qualitative approaches are "incredibly diverse, complex and nuanced" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Furthermore, according to them, a theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Due to the manifold nature of qualitative data, "researcher judgement is necessary to determine what a theme is…[and] need to retain some flexibility" when applying thematic analysis in research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Braun and Clarke (p. 82) emphasise that the uniqueness of "a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question." Although arguably there are many ways of approaching thematic analysis, in this study I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide which comprised of six phases: familiarise oneself with data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name themes, and lastly, produce the report.

Familiarise myself with data

I was familiar with the data from the onset as I was a participant researcher. Furthermore, I transcribed the recordings of all individual interviews and workshop discussions manually, only using the help of a transcription foot pedal to allow for a somewhat seamless process. I was aware of various transcribing software, but opted to do a manual transcription for my dissertation. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) highlighted that "the process of transcription, while it may seen time-consuming, frustrating, and at times boring, can be an excellent way to start familiarizing yourself with the data." Although the process of transcribing manually was tedious and took copious amounts of my time, I found it beneficial as this process allowed me to become more familiar with the data: it helped me to develop a more thorough understanding of its contents and to make initial notes on the patterns of the data. For example, I was able to identify some of the social justice issues that were discussed more in-depth and vice versa.

Once the transcriptions were done, I did repeated readings of the printed-out copies to further immerse myself within the data. These repeated readings were done actively in the sense that I was searching for meanings, patterns, and other identifications of the data.

Generate initial codes

With the initial notes that I made from my repeated readings of the transcripts, I began to organise my data into meaningful groups that pertain to the research question(s) of this study. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 89) suggestion, in the coding process, I "work[ed] systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item, and identif[ied] interesting aspects in the data items that [might] form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set." In extracting the data, I used various coloured highlighters to signify the different segments of the data. I highlighted as many potential patterns as possible

while paying attention to the context of the data, rather than numerical factors, for example, the quantities of words mentioned. I share an example of the worksheet below.

Code	Colour	Excerpt
Initial thoughts before coming to Canada/UVic	Blue font	*Before I came here, I thought that North American countries are quite similar. For me, there was no clear division between U.S. and Canada.* *Coming here to Canada and…knowing the number of Muslims there were in Canada, I was so excited to come here because I was excited to be a part of that community. And not being looked at in a strange way…I was just expecting better from Canada.* *It was the same thing with the Indigenous peoples, I knew nothing of that history [before] I came here, so I came with the understanding that Canada was this happy-go-lucky place, where everybody loved everyone…But that's not the case at all. It was a growing process to me.*
Own experiences of injustice	Green highlight	*…when someone would come sit next to me, they would take a look at me and then they would get up and sit somewhere else or sometimes the bus would be super pack, but no one would want to sit next to me.* *I think [experiencing racism and Islamophobia] also kind of shattered me in a way. And so I spent the whole day crying after that. I was like, "I'm ready to get out of Canada. I'm not about it anymore" I was like, "Please take me away."*
Moments of realisation	Pink highlight	*When you read [UVic] strategy framework of fostering relationship with Indigenous communities or when [UVic] say they're taking action towards reconciliation but at the same time, all the things that you don't see where they invest in, the projects that they collaborate in, it sets a different tone*. *I just had so many bad experiences on this bus [but] I never thought much about it.* *But with the experience I realized not everyone is going to be welcoming of other people's differences regardless of where you come from, what you believe in.*
Taking actions	Yellow highlight	*I started becoming a human rights volunteer…the past year I worked as a coordinator under a human rights advisor, and I learned so much about inclusion and discrimination and*

		understanding more of what was happening to me as well as how I can prevent that from happening to other people. *Whenever I go to a different country, if they have an Indigenous community, I would look it up so I'd be aware of whom actually does the land belong to… I try to learn more on how they've come to be there and that also tapped into my own reflection on my own identity.*

Since data sets were "not without contradictions" (p. 89), I repeated the process of coding and uncoding as relevant. I consulted the transcripts from the interviews and workshop numerous times to ensure I had not missed out on any important data. As previously mentioned, I reached out to the participants when I needed more clarification on their perspectives.

Search for themes

In search for themes, I analysed the list of codes I collated. Then I considered how the different codes could be combined to create overarching themes. In doing so, I thought about "the relationship between codes, between themes and between different levels of themes (e.g. main overarching themes and sub-themes within them" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 90).

As mentioned earlier, the activities during the workshop were designed methodologically to focus on the three approach of learning – formal, nonformal, informal – as this study investigated the contributions of these learning approaches that heighten (or not) the critical consciousness of the participants. I knew that the contributions of these different types of learning would be some of the overarching themes. Then I began to search the relationship within these themes. For example, based on the coding I shared above, we spoke a lot to our learning experiences in informal settings, on how these experiences influenced our critical consciousness. We went through experiences that were hurtful, but at the same time these experiences were transformative to our learning that catapulted us to becoming agents of change. I saw power in our informal learning experiences. This also spoke to the realness and

complexities of our experiential learning. Thus, I created the initial themes of 'The power of informal learning' as well as the subtheme of 'The complexities of experiential learning' while keeping in mind the "[uncertainty of] whether the themes [would] hold as they [were], or whether some need[ed] to be combined, refined and separated, or discarded" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91).

Review themes

Once I formed initial themes, I reviewed them to ensure that the themes and the data within them made sense. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 91), "data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes." For this, I read and re-read the extracted data for each theme to ensure that they were coherent. I reworked my themes several times by moving, adding or completely discarding some of the data extracts within a theme as I saw fit. There were instances when I created a new theme to find "a home for those extracts that [did] not currently work in an already-existing theme" (p. 91). This process was imperative to ensure that every theme appropriately captured the outline of the coded data.

Then I reviewed the entire data set to refine them. For this process, I "consider[ed] the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set" while making sure that they accurately "reflect the meanings evident in the data set as a whole" (p. 91). In the event that they did not, I consulted my coding worksheet for any pertinent data that I could miss in the prior coding stages. This process of re-coding is not out of the ordinary as "coding is an ongoing organic process" (p. 91).

Defining and naming themes

Once I had a pretty clear picture of what the different themes were, how they fit in relation to one another, and the overall story they tell about the data, I began the process of defining and naming the themes. The objective of this stage is to "[identify] the 'essence' of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall) and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). An important aspect of defining and naming themes is to "identify what is of interest about them and why" rather than simply paraphrasing them (p. 92). This involved conducting a "detailed analysis as well as the 'story' that each theme [told and] how it [fit] into the broader overall 'story' that [I was] telling about [my] data, in relation to the research question[s]" (p. 92). For example, the previous mentioned initial theme of 'The power of informal learning' evolved to include nonformal education as well as it reflected the data better, and thus one of the main themes of this study was finalised to 'The power of nonformal education and informal learning.' Similar to the previous stages, I re-worked the names of the themes several times until they were truly fitting. I created and chose names that were succinct yet captivating and true to its story for each theme as laid out in Chapters Four and Five. For some of these themes, it was necessary for me to separate them into subthemes to allow for "structure to a particularly large and complex theme" (p. 91).

In the final stage of producing a report, these themes were classified and highlighted as our findings in the next two Chapters Four and Five.

Challenges

There were three distinct challenges to this study. The first was recruiting participants as noted earlier. While the study garnered a sizable interest from UVic international students, few met the criteria of the study. Some were newly admitted students and had not completed any

courses at the university yet, whereas others were not able to attend the workshop in the summer. To recruit the participants, I had to use a number of different avenues including email, social media, word of mouth, posting posters around campus, and sending reminders or reposting the call when needed. This was more work than I had anticipated but it did work.

The second challenge was the use of photography as one of the methods. Like other research methods, there was an ethical concern in using photography especially in taking pictures of human subjects of which we discussed during the workshop. In overcoming that concern in this study, I requested the participants to take photos of objects and abstracts representations of social justice issues, and since this was an arts-based research, I was more interested in the participants to utilise their creativity, imagination and visual literacy when taking photos. However, not all participants had the experience of using photography and taking abstract photographs for a study as previously mentioned. I shared with them some examples of abstract photos and discussed about the power of creativity, imagination, and meaning making in the workshop as noted above.

The third challenge was the COVID-19 pandemic. We wrapped up the data gathering process in December 2019 and I was in the midst of transcribing recordings from the workshop and interviews when the pandemic hit. The pandemic had a major impact on my mental health and scholarship journey. I also got the disease and have suffered its long-term effects. I realise I was not alone but the harsh reality of self-isolation and the illness and longer-term impact of the disease made it nearly impossible to be productive and I eventually had to seek assistance from doctors. I have sought several extensions from the university, which takes its toll as well.

In the next chapter, I share the findings from the study.

Chapter Four

Findings: Part one

How does living and studying in Victoria and at UVic encourage a critical consciousness about social injustice for a group of international students and what are the implications for change in the future? The next two chapters outline my findings to this research question. In this chapter, I concentrate on the 'issues' that were learnt specifically environment, mental health and colonialism. Themes include understanding the non-human world as part of 'social justice', the ability to speak 'taboo' subjects, seeing interconnectedness between different social justice issues, linkages between macro, meso and micro levels and the importance of integrating Indigenous ways of knowing the world as a way of decolonising. As the arts were a central method, I include images and connect their meanings to our conversations. But first, I begin with where the study began – our collective understandings of social justice from the pre-workshop interviews.

Equality, fairness and more: The starting point

Scholars argue that language is powerful, and words have different meanings for people depending on, for example, their culture (e.g., de Sousa Santos, 2014; Wang, 2021). As noted in chapter two, there is no single definition of the term 'social justice' because it is highly complex and multifaceted. I realised at the commencement of my study that if we were going to talk about social justice, I had to have an understanding of how the participants understood the term. Obtaining an understanding was also strategic because it enabled me to see how we were growing and changing together through our discussions and aesthetic reflections on living and learning in Victoria and at UVic. The first question of the pre-workshop interview, as noted in

Chapter Three, was therefore, what does social justice mean to you? Perhaps not surprisingly, definitions tended to focus more on western ways of understanding social justice, most particularly, notions of equality or fairness. As Jenny put it, "the first word that [came] to my mind [was] fairness." She went on to say, however, that what social justice meant to her was "the way that people [were] being treated in relation to a series of social phenomena." Maia too defined social justice as fairness and added what she called "equal opportunities in a social context." She argued that "we're all humans and we deserve to be treated with dignity, respect and equal opportunities to grow and to develop our potential as human beings." This idea is important because both dignity and respect are central components, or perhaps better said the starting point, of social justice-orientated practices of education, particularly adult education A lack of respect and undermining dignity are the bases of sexism, colonialism and racism, to name but a few (e.g., Bogard, 1991; Catibušic et al., 2021).

Layla's definition began with social justice as "simple…for me." She stated that it meant "having basic rights for every human." As the workshop progressed, however, she began to acknowledge that there was nothing simple about the concept at all and I will return to this. Exploring the idea quite differently, Rae defined social justice as having "to do with fighting for or defending people's everyday identities [because injustices which] happened day-to-day could potentially affect the way someone moved through life." This definition includes the idea of 'activism', of social justice being something that had to be struggled or worked for, not something that just happens. For many scholars, social justice must be linked strongly to activism, in fact it is an essential element because 'learning' for a more just world needs to be accompanied by the feeling the agency to make that world (e.g., Davids & Waghid, 2021; Gardner, 2005; Hall et al., 2012).

Jorge centred his definition around the word equity. He argued that "equity, I would think, is the most encompassing word for social justice…about access…about opportunity in terms of having equal opportunities for everyone and equal access for all those opportunities to everyone." He added that "equality doesn't mean equity" because not everyone has the same choices or access to services, resources, employment, and other opportunities. This idea of equity is parallel to what was described by the Indigenous and global South scholars in Chapter Two (e.g., Akimoto, 2014; Dzulkifli et al., 2018; Palakkappillil, 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2021) who positioned social justice as collective rather than simply individual, something I discuss later in the chapter.

Each participant spoke to different components of social justice, but my own understandings of social justice extended beyond what I was hearing. I agreed that social justice was about fairness, equality, dignity, respect and very importantly, equity. But I had learnt that social justice should not be limited to human beings. My courses and connections at UVic had already deepened my understanding of social justice particularly through First Nations teaching and the theory and practice of environmental adult education. This led me to make stronger connections with my Indigenous Malay culture and to discover the holistic philosophy of *Sejahtera* I spoke to in Chapter two. Social justice includes balance and harmony, living symbiotically with our inner selves, the people around us, the rest of nature, our 'other' companions and this requires collective efforts, not just individual ones as mentioned above.

As our collective discussions continued throughout the workshops, I began to witness a shift or better said an expansion of the meaning of social justice and the diverse issues about which students were learning, and what were the most important ways they were learning these. The participants began to connect and make more sense of their learnings through different

classes, as well as informally and nonformally, and this learning had some important implications. Some learning was easier and eye-opening; other learning was extremely difficult. Both proved to be important.

Ecological learning: Weaving in the non-human world

The first area of change and growth was around the environment. Through my courses and time at UVic, I had learnt that social justice could not be limited to human beings. My courses and connections had deepened my understanding but particularly, First Nations' teachings and a course on environmental adult education. What was new for me, however, was the stronger connection this encouraged me to make with my own Indigenous Malay culture and to realise that it in fact emphasised the holistic philosophy of *Sejahtera* I spoke to in Chapter two. In my culture, social justice includes balance and harmony, living symbiotically with our inner selves, the people around us, the rest of nature, our 'other' companions and this requires collective efforts, not only individual ones as noted above.

Maia, a graduate student in the Faculty of Human and Social Development, had never considered the environment before coming to UVic. She spoke to us about the impact of what she was learning in an *Environmental Psychology* course particularly the links between the environmental crisis – ecological (in)justice – and social injustice. This learning was so profound that she selected it as a topic in her photovoice project:

> I know the term social justice has been used mainly for marginalised and vulnerable groups…but now if we think [of] it in a broader perspective and context, even climate change…it's a challenge for human species…I think it's very interesting if we treat climate change and other nature[-based] challenges as social justice issues.

Maia, originally from Mexico, took the photo of the whale fluke at the First Peoples House shown in Figure 2. For her, it reminded her of when she had learnt on the news and from discussions with peers (in and outside of the classroom) about the plight of the orcas living off the coast of Vancouver Island in relation to overfishing and other human activities such as small fish habitat destruction. She talked with us about consequences of irresponsible actions and their effects on other species living on this planet which she had learnt through her coursework but equally importantly, her own informal learning.

Figure 2. Whale fluke, photo taken by Maia

Issues we discussed ranged from over-fishing to the destruction of old growth forests to fracking. Many of these issues were entirely new to participants, or like Maia, had been given little thought. Based on this, we were able to explore together the juxtaposition of these practices to Indigenous philosophies of maintaining balance and harmony in and with the rest of nature. As a group, we recognised the significance of integrating these philosophies and knowledge in our different learnings (of which some of us were already exposed to, and some were not), as

urged by Indigenous and global South scholars to navigate social justice holistically and to uphold our traditional practices (Akimoto, 2014; Dzulkifli et al., 2018; Maathai, 2008; Palakkappillil, 2014, Williams, 2021). This also expanded our conversations toward the rampant challenge of greed and profit in the name of capitalism, and how this was often disguised as 'development.'

Maia was also learning at UVic how the problematic environmental lifestyle of the global North was sustained by other cultures from the global South but of particular importance to her was the realisation that Indigenous people should not be included in our concept of 'the North' because

> [Indigenous peoples] around the world, and all the countries that are not considered 'first world' countries are the ones supporting this planet Earth [for us] to be alive. I can imagine them literally holding up the Earth over their heads supporting the lifestyles that we have. It's all thanks to them that we have survived, but now they cannot hold the Earth up any longer so we all need to participate to survive as a human race.

The world we discussed is not as homogeneous as our language sometimes suggests, bringing us back to the power of how we speak and use terms (de Santos Sousa, 2014; Fricker, 2007; William, 2019). Moreover, and as illustrated in Chapter Two, there has been an underappreciation of Indigenous peoples (and their knowledge) in the global North. Thus, equally important was how this new consciousness from studying at UVic and living in Victoria (informal learning) enabled us to think about positive change in our native countries when we returned. Discussing these issues gave us an opportunity to think about the future and the world we could help to make. Layla, for example, expressed her intention to bring about positive

change to her home country in the future, and I discuss this finding further in Chapter Five. I will also return to the importance of action and agency in Chapter Six.

To grow in the area of environmental issues is important to the future because the global environmental crisis is very real (e.g., Clover & Hill, 2013; Maathai, 2004; 2008). Maathai (2008) urges us to see as "imperative" the need for humanity to stop "threatening its life-support system and starts treating the earth and its resources with respect" (p. 27). For her, this is "wonderfully articulated in the word *mottainai*, which is a Japanese concept that means 'do not waste resources,' 'have respect for the resources around us,' and 'use them with a sense of gratitude'" (p. 27). Through formal and non-formal environmental programmes and courses, talks and seminars at UVic but also hosted by the City of Victoria, as well as through informal engagement of attending environmental rallies and events in Victoria (e.g. Fridays for Future), participants were becoming conscious of efforts such as bicycle lanes, charging stations for electric cars, and the by-law which ban the use of plastic bags in stores and restaurants. Indigenous scholars at UVic and beyond are also a source of knowledge creation around "holding on to the old practices" in order to ensure "interspecies survival and well-being" (Williams, 2021 p. 24). Some of us are learning how to integrate Indigenous philosophies and ways of knowing in our patterns of thought as key to sustainability for future generations to come, an important effort to prevent epistemic injustice and subsequently epistemicide as raised by Fricker (2007) and de Sousa Santos (2014) in Chapter Two. I will discuss this in Chapter Six.

Mental health: Speaking what could not be said

Another theme that emerged in this study was the participants' new found ability to discuss openly, complex, 'taboo' and/or 'controversial' issues that could not be discussed in their home countries. An example of this comes from Jenny, a graduate student in the Department of

Curriculum and Instruction from China. As the workshop progressed, she began to speak for the first time about social injustice "issues in my country." Due to the restrictive nature of public and critical discussion in China, Jenny argued that these issues "are not something that can be discussed on the table" by which she means openly, either in public or in her university classes. Fricker (2007) calls this a form of "hermeneutical injustice", the silencing of discussions about issues or experiences that have value for the people to be able to speak to or about (p. 154). It was important for Jenny therefore, that her formal courses at UVic as well as other informal learning opportunities she took advantage of were giving her a sense of agency in the form of the power to speak aloud what she had been denied. What this new found power will translate into when she (or if) Jenny returns to China remains to be seen because although she has become empowered, her home situation will not have changed.

Mental health and/as social justice

Another taboo issue that began to be spoken out loud at the workshop was mental health. Mental health is one of the most stigmatised issues in countries worldwide, and still is today in Canada, despite numerous efforts (Morrow & Malcoe, 2017). Rae, an undergraduate student in the Faculty of Science, and Layla, an undergraduate student in the Faculty of Social Sciences, both chose mental health as the social justice topic for their collage because their learning was having such a profound effect on them. They both admitted that before coming to UVic, neither had really thought about the issue of mental health in relation to social justice or at all, in fact, given it was an unspeakable or at least unspoken subject in public. Worse yet they admitted that it was in fact considered acceptable for people who suffer from mental illness to be seen and treated as what Morrow and Malcoe (2017) call "non-persons" (p. 3). For example, Layla talked a lot about the importance of learning differently about mental health in her Psychology courses

at UVic because “it was at the back of my mind, but I just didn't have the opportunity to talk about it. It is still a stigma back home. So, I didn't have the privilege to explore it.” Similarly, Rae who was from the Bahamas noted, “I think for me, I just first need to say that mental health may not seem like a social justice issue…but I learned about how mental health affects your everyday life, especially personally.” However, how they had learnt about the issues of mental health was different. While Layla had learnt it in her courses, Rae’s mental health learning was primarily informal, most specifically through her involvement in the Global Community, a volunteer programme at UVic that promotes international student integration into UVic. Through volunteering – what adult educators would call experiential learning – Rae was given the opportunity to participate in a UVic event as part of Mental Health Awareness week. What was powerful was that for the first time, Rae was able to speak publicly and on stage about her own mental health issues to an informed and caring audience. This was a very new learning experience for Rae and it took a great deal of courage for her to speak out. It was also for the rest of the participants at the workshop, including me, an important moment in our own mental health learning. What she shared showed us the real value of the experiential learning opportunities UVic was offering and how they work to create a new consciousness, but equally, a sense of agency sufficient to make oneself visible in the interests of others, as her sharing was aimed stigma and the negative effects of invisibility. Rae taught us in that workshop that social injustice is ‘out there’, meaning it is happening to other people but it is also ‘in here’, in our arts-based workshop and our own lives.

Perspective transformation: Interconnections

Another critical learning that was taking place as a result of living and learning in Victoria and at UVic was what I call ‘seeing interconnections.’ This was an emerging ability not

only to see diverse social injustices simply but how they were tied together as well as their politics and structural embeddedness. We acknowledged that these important insights and budding capacities were directly related to studying at UVic and living in Victoria.

Mental health and its challenges

One interconnection we were now making that we explored together was between mental health, homelessness, and capitalism, particularly in relation to availability and accessibility to services. For Rae and Layla, choosing mental health for their co-created collage (see Figure 3 below) was their way of acknowledging the importance of what they had been learning and how it was expanding their understandings of what needed to be part of social justice discourse and action. The image on the bottom corner of the collage that reads 'battle for access' symbolised for Rae her coming to awareness about the fact that "a lot of people cannot access mental health services." She began to see that "as much as Canada [was] very good on that with health insurance, I still [felt] a lot of people [weren't] able to gain access [to support and services]."

Figure 3. Mental health collage, co-created by Layla and Rae

In addition, they related this issue of access to the counselling services offered at the university. As Rae noted, “here on campus, there are a limited number of counsellors [that you could access], and by the time you see them, there is more on your plate and you [hadn't] figured out what was going on in that other time.” The long wait time and shortage of counsellors on campus were some of the reasons why students like Rae felt discouraged to seek support in the first place, especially when the act of reaching out for mental health support was already tough for international students from countries that stigmatised mental health. As Rae ‘unlearned’ this stigma, she learned the value of taking care of her own mental health, as much as she did her physical health. In this case, both learning and unlearning were what was enabling Rae to become an agent of change in her own life and the lives of others.

Building on this, Jorge, a graduate student in the Faculty of Human and Social Development who is from Ecuador, shared how his programme at UVic had helped him to see the connection between mental health and homelessness. Through his formal courses, specifically one called *Global Health Equity*, his knowledge of mental health and its link to homelessness had become more profound including struggles around addiction and substance abuse. He learned, for example, that frequently an unhoused person accessing government housing is required to cease using any substances, which was not an easy feat for those struggling with addiction. He noted that this was an issue he was becoming quite passionate as a result of moving to Victoria and his graduate studies at UVic, especially when he experienced first-hand the difficulty of securing housing in Victoria for him and his family during his move here. Now, as part of his doctoral research at UVic, Jorge is focussing on how to address gaps in drug policy as a key method to address “issues of homelessness and mental health” and what he

was learning about Indigenous oppression, colonialism and racism. Also interesting was the connections Jorge was making now to homelessness in his home country. He argued that

> there's just simply not enough money so you normalise that concept of being in a poor country. But here in Victoria, with the amount of wealth of this country, [homelessness] shouldn't be happening. And then you start making these connections of how one can't thrive through capitalism. I mean, it's impossible to thrive. There's no win-win. There's someone who would always have to lose in order for [someone else] to win. They have to have privilege in order for [them] to be wealthy, but also…someone has to be oppressed, so [another person] can have [these] privileges. So that's the trade-off…when there shouldn't be a trade-off.

As powerful as this learning is, and as the conversations progressed, Jorge began to question the normalisation of homelessness in Ecuador and the fact that it should not be accepted as 'normal'. To represent his learning, Jorge photographed the image in Figure 4. For him, this image represents what many people's 'homes' actually look like, which queried, "it's terrible right?" Jorge was also astonished by the fact that you "can actually get a fine for sitting right there [on the streets]" which means that you are criminalised for being homeless. Around the world, the unhoused face judgements, and unfair treatments.

Figure 4. Could be someone's house, image provided in the workshop

Jorge was also making an interesting link between homelessness and the right to public space. He invited us to consider for the first time "who owns [the streets], is the city the owner? Are we [the people] the owners? Are the people who pay taxes the owners? Who calls for these public spaces?" In addition, Jorge talked about his new consciousness about colonisation and the complexity it adds to conversations about homelessness. Between his formal courses at UVic, his informal learning through observations of the very visible unhoused population in downtown Victoria as well as his own personal struggle of finding housing when he first moved to Victoria, Jorge was able to make these critical linkages, and this new insight and knowledge will have major implications for his future work in this area.

Macro, meso and micro levels

Central to the politics of social injustice learning is how power operates at diverse levels (e.g., Gaventa, 2021; Wang & Palillo, 2016). For Wang and Polillo (2016) learning to tackle

injustice must take into account how power works at macro, meso and micro levels as well as their inter-relationality. This matter because

> from a macro perspective, power is a force that shapes large-scale social formations and outcomes…micro settings refer to small-scale social interactions ranging from ego-environment relationships to dyadic interactions and small-group dynamics…and the meso-level architecture regularizes micro-exchanges, bears the brunt of macro transformation, and constitutes the more immediate environment within which power is experienced, challenged, and reformatted collectively (pp. 47-49).

To illustrate her learning about the interplay of macro, meso and micro levels Maia shared this photo that she had taken (see Figure 5). She explained the juxtaposition between the water refilling station (in the background) which symbolised efforts for a greener campus and the tree stump (in the foreground) that symbolised deforestation, and how they contradicted each other.

Figure 5. Juxtaposition, photo taken by Maia

She related this juxtaposition to what she was learning about the interplay between macro (e.g., Canadian government), meso (e.g., UVic) and micro (e.g., herself) and the environmental crisis. From reading and watching the news in particular, she learnt that

> in 2019, Justin Trudeau declared a climate emergency in Canada, but on that same day, [the government] approved a pipeline project. It was very paradoxical. I was like, 'What!? Two messages that were contradictory' and…there are so many things that being here at the university for me has been nice but also, made me realise, at what cost are the commodities that we have? At the cost of the world or other cultures? I don't know if you remember last fall when we received a notice in our emails that the heaters on campus weren't working well because of an explosion in the pipeline, and they reminded us to bring a jacket. That made me realise, 'Oh yeah, all the heaters were working because of those pipelines.' And I have seen the [lack of resources] on the other side [of the border] when I was living in Mexico, and now I am living this lifestyle [in Victoria], I'm also screwing up [the environment].

What she was now seeing and learning which was most interesting to our group is how we can become complicit in something, simply by making the choice to study in another country. This is not an issue of 'blame', but rather, of responsibility. Social justice learning makes us 'responsible', individually, but equally, collectively. As a consequence of our learning at UVic, and living in Victoria, we were becoming able to understand social (in)justice more holistically, to acknowledge the roles we played in maintain it (whether consciously or otherwise), and also, to see the issues systemically. Knowing these hierarchal linkages between macro, meso and micro levels provided us with the understanding that some of the injustices we see today were embedded systemically and targeted to affect specific groups of people (i.e., marginalised,

racialised groups, women, Indigenous communities). With this understanding, we were able to see the bigger picture of some of these social issues. All three of these levels are critical to what we can do in the future.

Perspective and sense transformation: Colonialism

Colonialism is about the erasure of culture, languages, and knowledge systems around the world (Baker, 2015; de Sousa Santos, 2014; Fanon, 1963; Wane, 2006; Whitt & Clarke, 2019). Today in Canada most people are conscious of how much the country's "sovereignty and political economy is premised on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and exploitation of their land base" (Baker, 2015, p. 44). Colonialism is a practice that is global, and it is something that participants have been challenged to think about since their arrival to Canada. Not surprisingly, colonialism and genocide of the Indigenous peoples was a topic that none of us had explored prior knowledge of this before moving to Canada. Of course, as I learnt, neither did most Canadians, as this was never part of their history (or school) curriculum. But it was central to what many participants were learning.

In terms of coming to Canada, Maia and Layla's first awareness of colonialism came when they heard the territory acknowledgement at the beginning of a class and during the opening ceremony of UVic orientation respectively. This prompted them to enquire into the reasoning for the territory acknowledgement which led to more learning about the struggles of the Indigenous peoples in Canada and equally importantly, the reconciliation process. Jenny learnt of colonialism through the visibility of the Pacific Northwest Indigenous poles on campus which piqued her curiosity as to what they were since "we don't have them in my country." She began to learn more regarding Indigenous peoples and the issues they were facing by frequenting the local Royal British Columbia Museum and "attending lectures there about the history [and

stories] of Indigenous peoples." This nonformal learning that took place off campus allowed Jenny to "relate [the issue] to my country [China] and our culture because in my country we have 56 minorities all together, and I fall in the majority group." I will elaborate more on the impact that this learning has on Jenny in Chapter Five. As for Jorge, he admitted that although in Ecuador where he was from, he had "worked with Indigenous communities, friends, had common goals [as them], and even volunteering and finding funding for Indigenous communities", he felt that his understanding of colonialism "was way off." It was not until he moved to Victoria and started his doctoral programme at UVic in Social Dimensions of Health that he truly understood the complexity of colonialism and its adverse impact as he shared above in relation to mental health and homelessness. There was also a particular impact on his identity that I will delve into the next chapter.

My awareness of colonialism began during my studies at UVic. I also previously had the privilege to pursue my undergraduate studies at another Canadian university in a different province, however, I gained little knowledge about the mistreatment of the Indigenous communities by the Canadian government during that time. This is something that has evolved across Canada, and the province of British Columbia is really raising it. In none of my classes then was a territory acknowledgment the common practice as it is now. Although the Indigenous poles have been on campus for decades, other Indigenous arts were nowhere to be seen. In my UVic courses we openly discussed Indigenous issues and having Indigenous classmates also helped me to learn as I listened to their stories. The First Peoples House (FPH) located at the centre of UVic as an effort to revive local Indigenous knowledges, was one of the places on campus that I frequented for talks, seminars and training. I actively sought out opportunities to listen to first-hand stories of the Residential School survivors. I also attended the Indigenous

Cultural Acumen Training (ICAT) offered at the FPH annually. I shared with participants the many important nonformal learning activities on campus that international students can access to understand more fully colonialism and its links to social injustice. The Pacific Northwest Indigenous poles across the campus also gave me new insights into learning about Indigenous culture. For example, from the Pacific Northwest poles, I learnt that the carvings on them depict spiritual reverence or sacred beings. One creature often carved on them is the thunderbird which symbolises power and strength. I also learnt that this knowledge and carving skill were passed down through oral tradition from generation to generation.

I acknowledged in the workshop that much was involved in seeking out and participating in these learning opportunities. I realised when speaking on this topic with my participants, that intentional nonformal learning about social injustices takes time and dedication to paying attention to advertisements and other outreach activities. There is no 'one place' on campus or in UVic where this can be found. International students have many demands on their time and engaging in these extra learning activities may not be possible, particularly if students must work. Yet we also acknowledged that these types of opportunities are imperative if we are to gain the critical consciousness needed to truly understand colonialism and its impact on us – most of us came from colonised countries. It is imperative in an unjust world to understand the incredible loss that 'epistemicide' and epistemic injustice represent, particularly in relation to environmental problems and rising racism (and sexism but that was not discussed in the study and I will address this later on). It is equally imperative if we are to contribute to the transformation of relations with Indigenous peoples whether we stay in Canada or return to our home countries that have Indigenous and/or other marginalised populations. As Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) articulates, "the sharing of resources and information may assist groups and communities

to collaborate with each other and to protect each other...Sharing is a good thing to do, it is a very human quality" (p. 110). But we cannot share if we are not even aware of what colonialism is and the challenges it has brought. We need to learn and be critical of this issue through our learnings, and to share with others, as a way to decolonise our daily (personal and professional) practices. And for most of us, to re-learn and uphold our traditional ways of knowing the world, as to not perpetuate the product of colonialism in furthering epistemic injustice and epistemicide. I will discuss what we felt UVic could do to help this situation in the final chapter.

In the next chapter, I continue to outline the findings with a focus on the personal insights we gained from our own experiences.

Chapter Five

Findings: Part two

This findings chapter addresses our personal learning from our own experiences around the important issues including belittling, dealing with inferiority, racism and Islamophobia, confronting Islamophobia, as well as learning and unlearning our own assumptions. There was also a new awareness about complexities and inconsistencies between issues and actions. Other important findings include the development of a critical consciousness of our own privilege, empathy with others, the types of positive changes we can take or plan, as well as what had become for many a tough decision between staying in Canada or returning to our home countries given what we have learned and experienced studying and living in Victoria. Similar to the previous chapter, I include images and photographs as they were such important representations of our learning.

Learning from experience

For educators, such as Peeters et al. (2014), an essential part of learning is learning from experience because it is so integral to growth and change. Despite all the wonderful learning that comes from formal and nonformal learning opportunities that participants in this study discussed, experiential learning turned out to be the most powerful and transformative way that we were all learning. In particular, our own personal encounters with injustice. Through these personal encounters we shared the implications of experiencing this pain on our own assumptions and past actions and for the future.

Experiencing belittling

Central to the majority of studies of international students is something called ‘culture shock’, where students find themselves in situations that are totally different to what they know (e.g., Boafo-Arthur et al., 2017; Gbadamosi, 2018; Lee, 2017). One of the ‘shocks’ for some of the participants was around multiculturalism.

Canada is much more multicultural than our home countries. For Jenny, moving to Canada from China was her first real introduction to multiculturalism, although there are diverse populations in China which I address below under the themes of privilege and empathy. For the first time, however, she saw on a daily basis, people from very different walks of life socialising and living together, as she explained using a photo that she took (see Figure 6). She shared that the photo was of a painting in the UVic library where she would spend most of her time on campus and saw it as a symbol of her seeing and recognising “people of different history…I recognise the diversity.”

Figure 6. Symbol of multiculturalism, photo taken by Jenny

Jenny's formal introduction to the discourse of multiculturalism, however, was through a course titled *Education Philosophy*. There was an emphasis on language learning issues for new immigrants to Canada, but it was Jenny's experiences that had the most impact. Due to her English, Jenny found herself feeling what she described as very much the "outsider". Despite her background in Teaching English as a Second or Other language (TESOL), when she offered to assist with teaching English to other students, she was belittled by her own supervisor for her 'imperfect' English. Jenny argued that "I might make errors of my own, but that didn't mean I didn't know the grammar rules, that I didn't know how to teach it."

Layla experienced a similar discomfort due to her accent and capacity with the English language. She spoke about the insecurities she was being made to feel due to her accent but also, how this had pushed her in a new direction. She noted that "instead of focussing on grammar and vocabulary, I really focused on my pronunciation…I didn't want to have someone to be like, 'you sound different, where are you from?'" Adding to this was how often people thought "I was less of an intellect because I didn't understand English well." Although Fricker (2007) uses the term 'testimonial injustice' to mean 'not being believed' she also speaks to it as our words not being taken seriously. I would argue that what Jenny and Layla were experiencing is a form of testimonial injustice. It may not be what they say but it is certainly 'how' they say it. While language is discussed in the literature, I have not seen it positioned as a 'social injustice' in the way it was in this study and I will discuss this in Chapter Six.

Racism, Islamophobia and inferiority

To be treated as inferior was another form of experiential learning the participants shared. Layla who is Muslim and grew up in the United Arab Emirates shared a painful learning experience of covert racism and Islamophobia during the UVic orientation day–the first day of

her undergraduate studies at the university, of which she would be spending the next few years to complete her bachelor's degree. She captured this incident in the photo in Figure 7 as a way to try to visualise the pain of what she had experience. Her story:

> we [the new students] were trying to get to know each other and I was already talking to someone, and we turned around to talk to the people behind us, and they literally didn't acknowledge me, but they acknowledged the other person that I was with because they looked similar. They were all of the same race, and I was obviously different [being black and Muslim].

She used the juxtaposition between a 'STOP' sign – meaning wait or do not move – and a pedestrian crossing sign – signifying a welcoming space where one is able to move – to visualise symbolically of the incident, of how she felt as though she was motionless when she was not being acknowledged by others in the group. She explained, "it seemed like I was just stopped where I was. She [the person who she was with] was able to cross to the other side, but I had to wait behind this STOP sign."

Figure 7. STOP, photo taken by Layla

Despite efforts to be friendly by introducing herself saying "My name is [Layla], they literally just looked at me and then continued to talk to her." Layla talked about how painful it was to be disregarded but also, instances, almost on a daily basis, where she was made aware of her identity as a Black and Muslim woman in a negative way. She referred to this as being viewed as 'inferior' due to her appearance, for dressing 'differently' referring to her hijab. For Layla, this was a very new experience because she is part of the majority in her predominantly Muslim country. In other words, she lived in the privilege of the majority, where most people were like her. Not being in the majority had implications which I address shortly. While I share here Layla's encounter and learning, the majority of us had experienced racism and feelings of inferiority as well, including myself. Some of us had also experienced Islamophobia like Layla of which I share more below. Together, we were able for the first time to discuss openly the damaging impact of racism and Islamophobia – both covert and overt. This speaks to the importance of experiential learning, albeit it is problematic, but it also speaks to the importance of the workshop space I had created as a way to deepen our conversations and have the important discussions that we may not otherwise feel comfortable talking about. I will expand on this in Chapter Six because it is part of the learning of living and studying abroad.

Learning and unlearning assumptions

Earlier I used the term 'unlearning'. In our case, unlearning is learning to challenge our own assumptions as a means to expand consciousness (e.g., Hislop et al., 2013; Steyn & Davis, 2012). This came out in how we were 'unlearning' assumptions about mental health and homelessness as noted in Chapter Four but it emerged in other ways too.

The first was around our initial assumptions about Canada. Layla and Rae spoke about their previous understandings of Canada as a welcoming and accepting country given its highly

diverse population. However, as Layla noted, although "[Canada] was advertised as very diverse, everyone's welcome, people here [were] going to accept you for who you are…that wasn't the case." Both of these women are Black and visible Muslims as they wear the hijab. Layla expressed about being astonished at the assumption by other non-Muslim people that she was 'oppressed' for donning a hijab, when in fact it was her choice. Rae experienced the same belief that she was 'forced' to wear a hijab. She added that "when I came here, this was something that I never thought of, but people telling me that I was 'oppressed', I felt like I was being oppressed by them telling me that I was oppressed [for wearing the hijab]." Rae in fact wears the hijab even though her father was against it as "he was afraid of people's perceptions of me having it on" and the baseless discrimination she would endure. Her father's belief is well founded, according to Rathmath et al. (2016) as "those who choose not to be 'free of religion' are too often viewed as oppressed" (p. 35). This is particularly true for Muslim women who find it "much more difficult to achieve their goals and ambitions" (p. 35). Rae did, however acknowledge that there was a great deal of gender discrimination and policing of what women wear and that "women in certain parts of the world are forced to wear it [the hijab]."

What these two women were teaching us was just how oppressive assumptions can be. It reminded us just how much we have all been taught quite intentionally by vested interests to see Islam as oppressive to women (which it can appear to be when misinterpreted of course) since the incident of 9/11. This belief is manifest at micro levels – people's assumptions – and at meso and macro levels – oppressive security and surveillance measures. While no one is excusing racist and Islamophobic behaviour, returning to become a critical thinker means seeing the political manipulations and their implications as well as the real pain caused by the ignorance they instill.

The politics that affect our lives, that lead to problematic assumptions and of course practices, became visible in other ways for the participants. For example, through their involvement as members of the UVic Muslim Students' Association, watching and reading the news media, and conversations with friends, Layla and Rae had become aware of Bill 21 in Quebec and its detrimental impacts on fellow Muslims' rights to practise their spiritual beliefs openly. Bill 21 is structured to ban public workers from wearing 'religious symbols' including the hijab. Although Layla and Rae live in Victoria, they felt personally affected by the bill and viewed it as a form of Islamophobia. This not only contradicted their initial impression of Canada as a welcoming and accepting country but also helped them to see how Islamophobia can become politically and systemically entrenched, although this was only in Quebec, despite the protests by citizens across Quebec and the rest of country. Troubled by this, Rae, who was involved in the Muslim Students' Association at UVic, exercised her agency by giving a speech during a council meeting in Victoria to speak against Bill 21 having passed into Quebec Law, and the issue of Islamophobia in Victoria/Canada at large.

By sharing this with us, Rae showed us how this informal learning from her experience was not only powerful, but also transformative as it moved her to use her voice and action to speak up and create positive change. Undoubtedly, Rae's participation in the UVic Muslim Students' Association for several years also propelled her the courage to speak up publicly as a gesture to challenge Bill 21. These two types of learning that are outside of the classrooms are proven to have positive impacts on participants like Rae, as we learn later in the chapter that contents and discourses on social justice are missing in her formal education experience, something that is unfortunately common in some of the faculties at the university.

Grappling with identit(ies)

It is often evident to us who we are, however, as researchers have observed, identity is not as simple as we may think (e.g., Corlett & Marvin, 2014). Our discussions about colonialism and its impact on Indigenous peoples provided a way for some of us to talk about issues of our own identity in ways I was not expecting.

I begin with myself. During the workshop, I was the first to open up about the Indigenous communities in Malaysia. Approximately 70% of Malaysians are Indigenous peoples and I actually belong in the percentile. However, I had to acknowledge, and I have raised this before, that I am privileged although I am Indigenous to Malaysia, and I spoke about how this privilege has prevented me from exploring my indigeneity. I knew a bit about my roots and ancestors from listening to family conversations, but I had never looked into those roots. I acknowledged too that I have not gone through the struggles that the smaller Indigenous groups in Malaysia did and so it was 'weird' for me to view myself as 'Indigenous'. My ancestors faced the violence of British colonisation (amongst several other) but I was born into the peaceful country that is Malaysia today – another privilege. When I first moved to Canada, I avoided talking about my Malay/Malaysian identity for the fear of being seen as 'different' which made me less privileged, the 'outsider', similar to Jenny's experience I shared above.

It was not until I moved to Victoria and commenced my studies at UVic that I started looking more into my roots, and asking my parents questions. I am now comfortable talking about my ethnic/Indigenous identity, my own journey of decolonising. Conversing with Elders, being friends with the Indigenous peoples here in Canada and listening to their stories of fighting for the rights to their own land, reviving their local languages, and re-learning their culture, I learned from their resiliency in all settings of formal and nonformal education and informal

learning. I also saw many commonalities between the culture of the Indigenous peoples here and my culture. Our values are similar, the ways we share knowledge are similar, the ways we know the world are similar. I started to appreciate my local language more and tried to integrate it into my daily life as much as I could. I made an effort to cook traditional Malay cuisine and learned more recipes, and became more open to sharing my culture with friends and colleagues in Canada.

Sharing this story about myself prompted a whole conversation regarding acknowledging our (Indigenous) identity. Rae for example, shares a similar predicament. She acknowledged that she knew about her great-grandmother's indigeneity, but her family had never had those conversations in their household. She recalled that

> when I think about the ways that I learn [and] it's also through oral traditions, and when I think about the ways that we use different medicines and things back home, it is a lot from the nature that surrounds us, but I don't know if that's sufficient enough for me to 'claim' my indigeneity, and I'm not actually sure how to come about that information either…it's not a conversation we have. It's a conversation I want to have, but I also don't know how much information my parents have about their own indigeneity or what that looks like.

Listening to this, Jorge pointed out "that's the product of colonisation right there." He elaborated what he meant by that, saying "it's the Western type of identification that says you need to check your type of ancestral blood." This prompted Rae to say

> that's the part of the learning process that I want to do because I agree that I can – how ever I work it, it has to be about me…I just think it's more of a process of learning for me to figure out where I stand. And if I am Indigenous, what are the other Indigenous

> grounds that I'm on in my own country? Where are my parents' sides? Because I know my mum's side, but I don't know about my dad's side.

Jorge then opened up about a similar struggle with his Indigenous identity. He spoke of his parents having a "block" in terms of knowing and discussing their own identities and as a result he does not "ever say that I'm an Indigenous person. I have a background and I have Indigenous roots, but I could never say I'm an Indigenous person." This was an interesting view from Jorge as in another discussion that took place in the workshop, he shared that living in inequities in Canada made him realise "all of [my] intersectional identities because they became more obvious, and that was when I also connected with the identity of my Indigenous roots." He said that "it was a weird thing, back in Ecuador, 15% to 20% of the population is Indigenous, and I think I consider myself as an ally." It is interesting that although Jorge acknowledged his Indigenous roots, he continued to self-identify only as an ally. I was not sure if this had a lot to do with shame on the negative narratives that colonisers had created about Indigenous peoples. My and Jorge's comments prompted this from Rae,

> I'm fully with the idea that I personally don't claim – I feel weird about claiming status for someone that has gone through so much struggle. If I myself haven't seen that in my own life. That's very hard for me to do. So, like [Indigenous] people here, I understand the transgenerational struggle, but also if I don't know about that transgenerational struggle then I have a very hard time claiming something that has so much 'power' and 'status' behind it. That feels very heavy to me.

Her comment about who has been in the struggle and who has not is important. Who is visibly Indigenous, who has suffered and fought back against this form of discrimination all their lives? What are the implications of simply 'claiming' this now as part of one's own identity? For me, it

comes down to decolonising and respecting reconciliation (in the Canadian context). As I shared in the workshop, I have learnt a lot from probing into my ancestry in an effort to decolonise myself and to honour the struggles my ancestors had to go through. I learnt about the *Nusantara*, as it was known by its non-colonial name or the Malay World where we came from. I learnt that we were a regional Indigenous community covering Southeast Asia and we extended beyond just Malaysia. I also learnt about the diaspora of the Cape Malays in South Africa. I thought this grappling with identity was a very interesting conversation. It shone a light on the general sentiments of how colonialism still had an impact on how people, in this case, some of the participants viewed Indigenous communities, equating their struggles with identity by excluding their Indigenous identity, or the opportunity to explore, honour and learn from it.

Comfort versus Discomfort

While some participants expressed a willingness to engage in a more in-depth conversation about the difficulties they experienced in recognising their Indigenous or ancestral identity others expressed concerns about their gender-based identity as women. Jenny shared with the group how after moving to Canada and studying at UVic, she began to realise the traditional gender norms that she had had to adhere as a mother and a wife. She shared that, “I know the feeling of coming from a traditional family, women have the 'responsibility' to give birth.” She also expressed how she was expected to carry out household chores and take care of her two sons on top of being a graduate student, but the same expectation was not put onto her working husband. Unfortunately, her concern was not fully reciprocated by other participants as I had hoped, and the conversation did not go any further. On one hand, this could suggest that while the participants were comfortable to discuss certain issues, they were not as receptive to discuss other issues, in this case, issues of gender. Cannella and Perez (2012, p. 280) highlighted

that the "neoliberal patriarchal structure that is increasingly foundational to academia, or the White male dominance…controls everything from university administrations to publications." Consequently, according to them, although "impositions of patriarchy within academia are not always directly physical or sexual" however, the "daily impositions of intellectual and emotional oppression can result in a form of violence over mind (and even body) in the long run" and this includes the apathy to discuss gender issues in any given setting. This challenging issue of comfort and discomfort in education is something I will discuss in Chapter Six. There were also candid conversations amongst participants that took place outside of the facilitated discussions in the workshop on the topic of sexual identity, in particular 2LGBTQIA+. However, as the participant had requested me to exclude these discussions from the chapter due to the sensitivity of their personal issues that were discussed and the possibility of 'outing' them, I was unable to do so. I will return to this in my reflections in the final chapter of this dissertation.

No place in the classroom

While there is no doubt that nonformal education and informal learning heightened our awareness of social (in)justice, not all participants could say the same about their formal education at the university. For the undergraduate participants, particularly Rae, nonformal education and informal learning were the only ways she was exposed to discussions about social justice issues. Choosing the image from the packet I have provided (see Figure 8 below) she expressed deep frustration in her classroom experiences. For Rae, the photo represented what she called "a one-man band" which she explained like this:

> he has his harmonica and his symbols on top of his head. He has his drum, and this [was] kind of how I felt like because I was always trying to start these conversations [on social justice issues] in my classrooms, and asking the people in my classes, 'What do you think

about this?' and 'What would you consider about this?' and 'Have you heard about this?' And I kept getting a lot of 'I don't really care', 'I don't really know' or 'I don't want to have that conversation' or 'It's not important to me' or 'That has nothing to do with me here' and I just felt like I kept hitting a wall. Nobody wanted to talk [about social justice] and so I kind of felt like I was having this conversation with myself…I felt like I had to create every perspective and I had to have all those ideas from myself. It was really hard. And I generally felt like it was a bit stagnant there.

Figure 8. One-man band, image was provided in the workshop

From here she argued that what she learnt from her formal education as a student in the Sciences was that social justice had no place in the classroom. Referring to the image again, she added that her experience with her formal education when it came to social justice was

> more like this guy. He seemed like he [didn't] even belong in this space, and people [were] just looking at him weird and that he [was] not supposed to be there. That [was] how I felt with social justice issues, and the world around us had no place in the classroom. It wasn't a conversation to be had and so I very much felt like an outsider or like someone who kept trying to make trouble or like I just really did not belong there [in the class].

The result of the exclusion was "I got less interested in social justice issues over my first two years in university because it wasn't something discussed." However, once she began volunteering and meeting other like-minded people and seeking out nonformal education opportunities, Rae began to get the information she wanted and needed. The absence of social justice issues in Rae's formal classrooms is for her a loss of opportunity to expand her knowledge. The reasons social justice issues are excluded from particular classes or perhaps better said discourses and canons, is not something the other participants or I could answer beyond the obvious knowledge exclusions and superiority of the sciences, but it is something that needs to be studied, and I will address this in my discussion and concluding chapters.

UVic's inconsistencies

It can be difficult to identify the underlying causes of problems due to the fact that they are often overlooked (Francis et al., 2016) but learning to identify and address these discrepancies is, of course, a fundamental component of adult education (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001; Freire, 2000). This learning to observe and to identify inconsistencies occurred in a variety of contexts in this research. It came out around the mental health, environmental and colonial issues I addressed in Chapter Four.

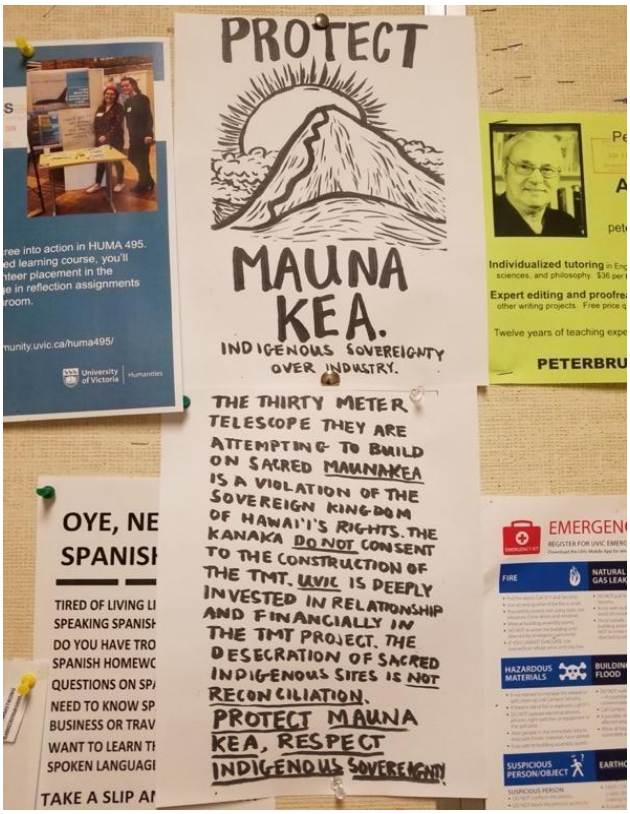

Figure 9. Protect Maunakea, photo taken by me

There were also other ways this came out and in one instance, it was about UVic. As part of the photovoice activity, I took a photo of the poster below (see Figure 9) that I came across on a board in the Clearihue building on campus. The poster highlighted UVic's financial relationship to the Thirty Meter (sic) Telescope (TMT) project, to build a thirty-metre telescope on the sacred mountain of Maunakea in Hawaii without the consent of its Indigenous community. In our discussion at the workshop I mentioned,

> when you read UVic's strategic framework of fostering relationships with Indigenous communities, [UVic] say[s] they're taking actions towards reconciliation but at the same time, all the things that you don't see like where they invest in, or the projects that they collaborate in, it sets a different tone.

This underlines the complexity of the issue with UVic's inconsistent efforts in regard to upholding reconciliation.

In our discussion, we recognised that this issue of inconsistency between policies and practices, in particular to sustain reconciliation in Canada however, is not unique to UVic. While UVic does contribute to the issue, when viewing the larger scope of the matter, it was evident to us that there is a discrepancy between the Government of Canada and the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission. According to Shelley (2014), the refusal of the federal government to cooperate and share "millions of residential school documents contained within its vaults despite its commitment to do so in 2007 under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement" is one of the main challenges to the advancement of reconciliation (p. 17). She emphasises that the turbulent relationship between these parties contributes to "repeat setbacks…in a battle for control over history" (p. 17). This issue of inconsistency further highlights the complexity of power and politics that I addressed in Chapter Four, in the different levels of macro, meso and micro that it operates. The presence of power imbalance can continue to perpetuate injustices despite having the best intentions in written policies.

Learning and unlearning privilege

The notion of privilege and 'unlearning' privilege is central to adult education. Matsuo (2019) argues unlearning as something that is vital to change and growth. He highlights, unlearning "is important for the growth of…individuals because existing knowledge or habits are often barriers to new learning" (p. 465). This unlearning is "often triggered by an external change or crisis…which may induce individuals to reassess their beliefs and routines" (p. 468). I have drawn attention above to issues of privilege, but here I turn to this idea of (un)learning privilege and how it was illustrated in a number of ways.

To begin, Jorge focussed on how much he felt he was "living inequities" in Canada never experienced before in his own country. He spoke of going "through an immediate class change" when he found himself facing certain barriers (e.g. financial, difficulty to find housing) as an 'immigrant' in Victoria and Canada. He expanded his notion by comparing this to his life during his master degree in Ecuador, where he had the support of his parents and did not have to worry about his basic needs such as shelter and meals as he was living with them. For Jorge, his informal learning experiences helped him to realise "all the advantages and privileges that I had in accessing education, accessing a comfortable way of living, a stable income, all of those became contested when you were an immigrant." One of the distinctive situations that he found himself in was when "a couple of our Canadian friends [were] saying they were putting boundaries to the amount of work they were doing through the week because it was too much to handle, while we (international students) are pleading for more than 20 hours a week just to get enough food on our plates."

My own experience relates closely to those of Jorge. Coming from Malaysia, I was in the majority of the ethnic group back home. Being in the majority comes with its privileges as well. My first few encounters with covert racism in Canada as I noted in Chapter One, were appalling but also, eye-opening as I realised they were going to be a constant challenge for me as long as I lived in Canada. It has, however, made me aware of the privileges that I had at home where I did not have to worry about being discriminated against, at least where my background and appearance are concerned. I did not have to be worried about practising my culture and spirituality openly. This is not to say that living in Malaysia did not come with its own challenges, but my privilege meant I had to be less wary of being me. Becoming aware of

privilege plays an important role in developing empathy for those who are less fortunate, and I will come back to this shortly.

Layla told a complex tale. Living in the Middle East "it's very hard to be a Black Arab even though [I] grew up speaking Arabic [my] whole life. But because I'm darker than most people, I'm automatically 'less of an Arab.'" She also explained how this was something that she had never spoken about because of the complexity of the issue and the country she was living in. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, the participants in this workshop had previously shared that they did not have the freedom of expression in their own countries to discuss complex, yet critical social issues. She said that "you [couldn't] speak about what [was] going on in the country or there [were] going to be consequences" as there was a lot of "'hidden power' that you don't see" as she put it. However, she acknowledged the privilege she had in the Emirates despite being a Black Arab, due to "my parents' (social) status in the country, so that's something that I feel like I hid behind."

The challenges we faced as international students made us more aware of the privilege that we had living in our home countries. With this awareness, we were able to see other people's pain in new ways.

Developing empathy

Scholars argue that in order for social justice and change to happen, there must be empathy (e.g., Segal & Wagaman 2017; Wilson, 2011). Empathy is "the ability to walk in another person's shoes, or to put aside your own responses and reactions so that you can grasp another's. It is the bridge between perspective and the motivation to help" (Wiggins & McTighe cited in Wilson, 2011, p. 214). There were a number of instances in the data where participants talked about a sense of 'empathy' and its implications.

Jenny talked about developing a new empathy towards Indigenous peoples in Canada perhaps more importantly, in China. There are 56 ethnic minority groups in China according to her and she spoke directly to the Uyghur communities:

> For some of the people with similar experiences in my country, it's very complicated. You might have heard about Tibet, or somewhere else [in my country] where there were Uyghur Muslim communities as well, and it's a very complicated situation I should say. So, I developed empathy for these groups of people and to see how the—I cannot say the government, but how, in a political way that things can be dealt with…I realise we can be different from each other…[and] I try to have an open heart and still expect that my journey [to learn] will continue.

In thinking about this comment, I could not help but notice Jenny's reluctance to blame the Chinese government for its actions. While my first instinct was to be critical, I am aware that she, like other Chinese students I have met, fears the consequences that she might face if she were to speak against the Chinese government. As I noted earlier in Chapter Four, in some countries people do not have the privilege to speak freely, and there are many things that stand between learning about an issue, feeling empathy, and being able to act upon it, even if that is just to criticise your own government. In Jenny's case, Chinese government holds great power over its people as discussed above. Her ability to acknowledge publicly in the workshop, although this was a safe space as I discuss this later, the similarities in the Indigenous struggles in Canada and China showed a budding new consciousness and I would argue, courage.

Maia argued that "in my personal life, I have also been experiencing some social injustices" and she positioned this as "a gift because it makes me have empathy and understanding and be more sensitive not only because of how I was feeling but also to what

others were feeling. So then when I live it, it makes me think that I should be more sensitive to these issues." In his post-workshop interview, Jorge also illustrated a new sense of agency. In particular, the discussions and activities in the workshop made him realise that

> there were people who were facing heavier issues than the ones that I was facing. So that gives [me] more [of] a sense of humility to it. It's like you are not the centre of the world. You are not the only one suffering, you are not the only one going through things. And your 'things' may sometimes be seen not as complicated, not as profound as what the others are facing. I think that led me to a feeling of having more empathy and solidarity.

Change is possible

Another key element of social-justice oriented education is to create the conditions whereby people feel a sense of agency and power to work for 'change' (Freire, 2000; Tuckett, 2018). But what does change mean? As we discussed the different social justice issues throughout the workshop, we naturally deliberated actions we could take to bring about positive changes. We agreed that change was needed to improve the current situation of the world in order to sustain it for the future generations to come. Maia pointed out that with time, changes could be happening in this world generationally. She drew inspiration from examples of gender issues and women's rights, saying "not too long ago, [women] couldn't vote, and some women couldn't drive or own a driver's license so [the progression] of women's rights is a great example of changes that can happen." She expressed her thoughts that we, participants of the workshops, were going through the "shift of paradigm" at that moment and wanted to "co-create the narratives [of change] in this workshop and outside." She viewed our involvement in this workshop of taking up difficult, yet important discussions on social justice as one of our

contributions as agents of change. She also reminded us that change was "not only about the future but also about the past and the present."

We acknowledged that speaking up about social injustices and taking informed actions that contribute to positive changes were equally important. Even before participating in the workshop, all of us were already taking the initiative to be involved in the different kinds of engagements on campus that were related to social justice. For example, at the time of the workshop, Layla was a volunteer for the Human Rights Education programme at UVic and was involved in coordinating talks and workshops on anti-racism. She was also a member of the Muslim Students' Association and had the opportunity to partner with local organisations such as the Inter-Cultural Association on forums related to Islamophobia. Since becoming a student at UVic, Maia had been volunteering on-campus at the Food Bank and the Human Rights Education programme. She also assisted in coordinating the Social Justice minor programme through a work-study opportunity at UVic. Of course, we recognised and discussed the collective responsibility, also as detailed in Chapter Two, was needed to make a change and "to protect, participate, collaborate, cooperate, share, respect, trust that [would] lead to social action" as Maia expressed. She added that "focus is very important in order…to come up with sustainable behaviours, that includes physical and mental changes," as we play our roles as part of the collective.

Following this, in the individual post-workshop interviews, I asked them about the sorts of new actions they might have taken to gauge the impact of the workshop as agents of change. The general consensus was that we were all taking action in our own ways, on- and off-campus, personally and professionally. We understood that no actions in the collective or individually for that matter, were either too small or too big if it meant that we were proactive in contributing

toward positive changes in social justice. All of them saw their involvement in social justice as part of their lifestyle. What the workshop had done though, was inspire them to be more deliberate in the opportunities that they sought out. For example, in her follow-up interview, Rae mentioned how she was constantly involved in different social justice activities since the workshop, but she said "it's definitely made me search out certain events more. I'm targeting, for example, anything to do with arts." She shared that she was also involved in an on-campus campaign known as *5 Days of Action* which "promoted equity, diversity and inclusion across campus and the ways that different student groups, faculty groups, staff, professionals of different arenas could do better at promoting equity, diversity and inclusion." She attended anti-racism and decolonisation workshops and was looking forward to volunteering at the National Day of Remembrance and Action of Violence Against Women at the time of the interview.

However, it is important to note that in many of the individual post-workshop interviews the participants admitted that social justice work could at times be taxing emotionally, particularly if you are experiencing injustices yourself. We need to be mindful of this and think about what self-care needs to look like to avoid burnout.

Speaking guilt: To stay or to return?

Speaking about change raised another issue which international students who study aboard face, which is whether to return to our home countries upon the completion or to stay in Canada (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). It became evident in our discussion that this was not an easy question to answer. As the study by Wu and Wilkes (2017, p. 125) noted, "student's ambitions and life goals change throughout the course of their studies and hence, international students' perception of where to go after university is a complicated and dynamic process." Most of the participants including myself were going back and forth between the two

options. But we also discussed the possibility of a third option, that is to move to an entirely different country. From our discussions, all of us had the intention of making changes in our home countries regardless of where we ended up living after the successful completion of our studies. In fact, as noted above, all of us had been engaging, taking action and contributing to the social issues of our choice in our own ways. As we discussed this further, one thing that was clear was this feeling of guilt should we decide to remain in Canada or move to a different country. In weighing his options, Jorge shared that he would be inclined to stay in Canada because

> from a practical perspective, our [Ecuadorian] passports [were] so bad. [I] needed a visa for like 70% of the world. So from that point of view…if I [could] have a kid that [was] Canadian and had access to 90% of the world, that for me would be [beneficial].

If he decided to remain in Canada permanently, he would be able to keep his Ecuadorian passport as well, but that was not the case for everyone. Jenny would have to give up her Chinese passport and she "would have to withdraw everything. It [would be] a very tough decision." To add to the complication, her younger son possessed a Canadian passport and would have to apply for a visa to visit China, but she said that "I [knew] everybody in my country [would not] want to give it up."

Some participants were undecided due to the complexity of their country's political climate. Layla who grew up in the Emirates expressed that freedom of speech there was almost impossible because

> the locals, even though they knew something was wrong, they would never ever say something bad about the country…it's just very solid they would never ever do that. So, I don't think there will be a change, and it sucks because here [in Canada] I can talk freely.

However, she also noted that she would return because

> I know even though I said it was impossible to change things in the Emirates, I'm still very hopeful. I feel like I'll figure it out or find a way to change things, and whether that's in my career or getting thrown out of the country, I'll figure it out.

Being born in Sudan, Layla also felt the obligation to change things in Sudan, arguing

> I do feel guilty, even though I didn't grow up in Sudan, but I was raised in a Sudanese household, I eat Sudanese food, I speak the Sudanese-Arabic dialect, and I feel very connected to those roots, and I have a Sudanese passport. So now coming here [to Canada], and thinking of settling here, I felt guilty...like I needed to go back to Sudan and apply what I learned over there, I think I'm getting to terms with the fact that I still have a long way to actually make a difference in Sudan, and to take advantages of being here and learn. But yeah, it's a struggle.

Rae's initial intention was to return to the Bahamas but then things changed:

> I literally had the intention that I'd come and I'd study in Victoria, nothing more. I wasn't interested in getting involved in clubs. I wasn't interested in finding a family. I was just coming to study and I was going back home, and that was the plan and it wasn't until my second year when I started looking for friends that I found a community that I didn't know I needed and then it just turned into something more meaningful and then I realised I kind of fell in the situation where I was growing a life here.

For almost all of us, to stay or to return is not be an easy decision but one we will need to make when the time comes.

I now turn to the next chapter to discuss significance of the results of this study, as outlined in Chapters Four and Five.

Chapter Six

Discussion

In this chapter, I elaborate on and evaluate the significance and relevance of the findings in this study. I begin with the research question(s) that guided this study as a reminder followed by a summation of the findings from Chapters Four and Five before discussing their significance and relevance to my research question.

Guiding questions

The research question that guided this study was: How does living and studying in Victoria and at UVic encourage a critical consciousness about social injustices in a group of international students and what are the implications for change work in the future? As previously mentioned, there were also a number of sub-questions that directed me towards my primary question. These sub-questions were asked to explore the participants' understanding of the meanings of social justice and injustice, the social issues that we learned and how we were experiencing them (if any), and the roles that formal and nonformal education as well as informal and experiential learning played in raising our consciousness. The sub-questions also aided me to investigate further the injustices we witnessed. Moreover, there were sub-questions that looked at the challenges we were facing and the actions we took to resolve them (or otherwise), and the impact(s) of which our new learning had upon our actions when we return home.

Summary of findings

As outlined in Chapters Four and Five, the findings of this study focused on the ways in which we developed our critical consciousness based on our learning experiences and social justice awareness through formal and non-formal education, as well as informal learning as international students at UVic and in Victoria. Through our discussions, we came to the

understanding that social justice encompasses more than just equality and fairness. It also focuses on having equity, protecting our dignity and finding (inner) balance within our personal lives and society to ensure a harmonious existence for all. We recognised that social justice should not be limited to just human issues, but should include other non-human aspects such as the environment. Through this process, we were able to discuss complex or taboo issues that we previously could not in our home countries, notably mental health and its challenges. Our formal and non-formal education, as well as informal learning, enabled us to conceptualise the relationship between various social justice challenges and how each was impacted by the other. We were able to acknowledge the linkages of these impacts across the macro, meso and micro levels of society. Our knowledge of colonialism too was further deepened through our education and learning experiences as international students at UVic and in Victoria.

The findings highlighted a number of personal implications as a result of developing critical consciousness on social justice through our education and learning experiences. One of the reasons for these consequences was the lessons we learned from our own experiences of confronting injustice. As we discussed more deeply the issues of injustices, particularly the repercussions of colonialism, some of us grappled with our own identities. The absence of opportunities in our formal classrooms to learn and discuss about social issues for some of us made us lean into our nonformal education and informal learning for these engagements. We also observed inconsistencies between the policies and practices at an institution such as UVic in addressing certain social matters, which further emphasised the complexity of social justice. Through our education and learning, we learned about the privileges we possessed and ways to challenge them in order to prevent the perpetuation of inequalities, which subsequently enabled us to develop empathy towards others. We also reflected on the need to exercise our agency and

to take action in dealing with injustices, comprehending that it is a collective responsibility as much as it is a personal one.

Integration of Indigenous philosophies and other excluded perspectives in formal education

Integrating Indigenous philosophies and perspectives is still an issue to be addressed in formal education including in higher education. Marker (2019) found that higher education institutions "still exert a centrifugal force to marginalize and resist Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems" (p. 501). Similarly, Tuhiwai-Smith (2005, p. 86) raised the issue of how Indigenous knowledge is viewed as "Other" in Western academia. McLaughlin and Whatman (2007, p. 3) highlighted that being the 'Other' "constitutes Indigenous identities as 'colonised' as much as it constitutes Westerners as 'the colonisers'". However, in the same way that Indigenous identity and subsequently knowledge precede the coloniser's gaze, Indigenous knowledge exists both outside and within the "colonised/colonisers cultural interface" (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2007, p. 3).

Nonetheless, many efforts to this effect have been carried out globally through the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in curricula (Mampane et al., 2018; McLaughlin & Whatman, 2007; Mohd Roslan Rosnon, 2016). A university in South Africa noted that the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in higher education is needed in order to decolonise education and to find suitable local solutions to solve the country's global problems (Mampane, et al., 2018). The focus on 'normalising' the integration of the Orang Asli education programmes in Malaysia were done through "acknowledging the rights and equality of [the] Orang Asli people in education and in line with UNDRIP [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples]" (Mohd Roslan Rosnon, 2016, p. 27). Dei (2001, 2013, 2019) emphasised that having discourses of decolonisation in higher education encouraged critical consciousness

amongst students as it allowed them to recognise the injustices that they witnessed or might be facing, as well as the multiple intersections and complexity that they entailed. Having this critical awareness regarding social (in)justices is crucial in order to break the cycle of being 'oppressed' as Freire (2000) calls it.

As shown in my study, when Indigenous and other excluded perspectives are incorporated in our learning, it allows us to view social justice more broadly and in a more complex manner. We were able to recognise other non-human species as part of our social responsibility through our formal education, as some of us have had the opportunity to undertake formal courses offered by the university that incorporated Indigenous and other perspectives that were historically and systematically excluded from formal higher education. Through her course on *Environmental Psychology* at UVic, Maia became aware of the gravity of environmental injustices we were dealing with today. She had learned not only to be critical of the human factors that had created the environmental crisis but also to comprehend how lifestyles in the global North were being sustained by those in the global South. She noted that this however, excludes the Indigenous peoples living in the global North as they were also subjugated to sustain this lifestyle. Maia was able to reflect that she was also responsible for some of these actions that contributed to the detriment of the environment. With this self-actualisation, Maia became more mindful in the ways that she could help to improve the environment in a positive manner through concrete actions such as recycling and reducing waste in her household.

Having the opportunity to explore, reflect and discuss these various issues and perspectives in our formal classes enabled us to develop 'new' consciousness about the injustices that we otherwise would have not been aware of. Further, having the knowledge democracy of diverse perspectives and knowledges from different cultures beyond Western knowledge in our

formal classrooms gave us unique perspectives to consider as we exercise our critical consciousness. The different knowledge that we acquire through our formal education expands our understanding of the responsibility we have, not only towards ourselves, but also towards others, both human and non-human species, in taking a stance in social issues that affect us as a global community. This outlook also aligns with the Indigenous and global South values described in Chapter Two (Akimoto, 2014; Dzulkifli et al., 2018; Palakkappillil, 2014) which emphasise three prominent aspects of viewing social justice holistically, having the need for balance to achieve social justice, and understanding the need for collective effort to ensure that we live in a just and harmonious society.

While some efforts have been made as far as Indigenous knowledge inclusion goes, there are still barriers that need to be overcome. According to McLaughlin and Whatman (2007, p. 5), one of these barriers is "non-Indigenous academics, who often control the parameters of the embedding processes, cannot 'see' Indigenous knowledge outside of the coloniser interface." They pointed out that "most universities accept that Indigenous knowledge is 'out there', but have no idea how it articulates with Western knowledge systems" (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2007, p. 5). It is necessary for universities to overcome any obstacles that can prevent the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge for a more holistic and decolonised curricula for students. Scholars (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2007; Mohd Roslan Rosnon, 2016) affirmed that one of the ways to achieve this goal is for non-Indigenous academics and leaders alike to work closely with Indigenous communities. Building and nurturing partnerships with Indigenous communities through reciprocal collaborative efforts can ensure for a successful implementation of Indigenous knowledge inclusion in higher education.

The power of nonformal education and informal learning

One of the most powerful learnings amongst the participants in this study was through their nonformal education and informal learning. Terrazas-Marin (2018) found that by providing students with spaces for nonformal education in formal courses, he observed how students developed competences such as values, leadership skills, social skills, team building and attitude development. The nonformal education activities provided another space for students to have critical reflection and dialogic interactions which developed transformative learning[1] through "a significant sense of their experience, changing the way in which they construct their knowledge and how they deal with the requirement of incorporating changes to their subjects" (Terrazas-Marin, 2018 p. 122). Nonformal education is "intentional from the learner's perspective" and exemplifies "a shift from institutionalised control over knowledge towards individualised control and self-directed learning" (Johnson & Majewska, 2022, p. 13). Hence, there is a greater emphasis on "intellectual, emotional, social, and behavioural concerns" and less emphasis on cognitive skills in non-formal education as it is associated with a wider range of learning activities than formal education (Johnson & Majewska, 2022, p.14). Similarly, through peer learning and social interaction, informal learning helps to convey the values, norms and behaviours that are seen as important in society and can encourage the development of social skills (Johnson & Majewska, 2022). Both nonformal education and informal learning are found to be intrinsically engaging which motivate the learner to learn (Johnson & Majewska, 2022).

In the case of my study, while a number of us had some exposure of social justice discourses in our formal education, this was not true for everyone. Some participants felt the

[1] I have not used transformative learning as lens in this dissertation as it has not yet been made fully applicable to arts-based studies. I may however use it in a future article to expand that theory and practice. I have also not included the idea of service learning, although my recommendations touch upon it. In my future education work, I will incorporate service learning opportunities.

need to seek out own resources through nonformal education opportunities. These included on-hand activities on campus such as volunteering, attending workshops, being involved in awareness campaigns (e.g., Mental Health Awareness Week) and joining on-campus clubs. Informal learning was through conversations with our peers and observations of objects on campus such as paintings, posters, and Indigenous poles. Rae who was doing her undergraduate programme in the Faculty of Sciences experienced this lack of exposure. With the absence of social justice contents and discourses in all of her formal courses, she found that her most profound learning about these issues was through her nonformal education and informal learnings. As a Muslim, Rae faced many encounters of Islamophobia in Victoria and was adversely impacted by the harm it caused. This prompted Rae to seek out support as well as to spread awareness on Islamophobia. As a result, she found herself to be an active member of the Muslim Students' Association at UVic. Through this involvement, Rae was able to stand up against the passage of Bill 21 into Quebec Law, by speaking at a council meeting held in Victoria. Rae's story showed that these types of education and learning were beneficial in providing a meaningful learning experience for her to be action-orientated and transformative in overcoming her hardship.

The positive value of nonformal education have led universities to provide more opportunities for students to take part in other types of learning to complement their formal education (e.g., Joseph & Rouse, 2017; Kindon & Elwood, 2009; Lee & Kelley-Petersen, 2018; Terrazas-Marin, 2018). While nonformal education and informal learning are becoming more accepted in higher education, they are yet to be given the same recognition and visibility in the way they shape learners as formal education has (e.g., Kaminskiene & Stasiunaitiene, 2013; Singh, 2015; Souto-Otero, 2021). The intricacies of the "validity and reliability of this process,

especially in the context of higher education" is one of the main challenges that contribute to the lack of recognition for nonformal education and informal learning (Kaminskiene & Stasiunaitiene, 2013, p. 30). In comparison, ways to measure and evaluate students in formal educations is well-established and testing has been around for a while. However, this is not to say that the recognition of nonformal education and informal learning in universities is completely out of the question. Studies show that universities are still in the early stages of evaluating and acknowledging nonformal education and informal learning outcomes (e.g. Johnson & Majewska, 2022; Kaminskiene & Stasiunaitiene, 2013). More and more research to develop appropriate assessment systems for nonformal education and informal learning are underway.

Complexities and the power of experiential learning

Experiential learning is considered to be one of the most effective forms of learning (Butler et al., 2019; Kolb & Kolb, 2008, 2017). Experiential learning is defined as "a process of constructing knowledge that involves a creative tension among the four learning modes that is responsive to contextual demands" of which are "concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation" (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 44). To clarify, in experiential learning, students actively partake in the acquisition of skills and knowledge through real-life experiences where they "participate in a concrete experience (Do), reflect on that experience and other information (Reflect), develop logical theories from current and previous experiences and knowledge (Think), and use those theories to make decisions or solve problems (Apply)" (Butler, 2019, p. 13). Kolb and Kolb (2017) view experiential learning as a "holistic theory that defines learning as the major process of human adaptation involving the whole person" (p. 11). Experiential learning can happen in "all arenas of life" including the three

breadths of education and learning discussed in this dissertation: formal, nonformal and informal (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 43). But since informal learning is such an integral part of our daily lives of which we (involuntarily) learn at all times, this form of learning is sometimes referred to as experiential learning (Council of Europe, n/d).

The results of this study indicate that experiential learning was the most impactful and transformative form of learning for the participants. Through the experience of hardship, each participant developed a critical attitude towards social issues. Layla's encounter with racism and Islamophobia is one of them. When Layla moved to Canada, she experienced racism and Islamophobia firsthand. She felt the pain of racism and Islamophobia and reflected on her encounters. While this experience hurt her, it enabled her to think critically of how damaging racism and Islamophobia was. Layla took it upon herself to attend her first anti-racism workshop at UVic to learn more on the issue. She then became an active volunteer of the Human Rights Education programme after seeking out more opportunities. Even though Layla's hands-on experience with racism and Islamophobia was problematic, she developed growth in her critical consciousness that led her to take informed actions.

Examples from this study show the complexity of experiential learning that is not often discussed. Although experiential learning can be beneficial, at times it occurs at the expense of the learner. While we did become social justice advocates in our own right due to the adversities we confronted, I could not help but to ponder upon the magnitude of the pain, humiliation, stress and anxiety we endured. Was it worth it? I do not have the answer for the question, but the complexity of experiential learning is noteworthy for the learner. From my point of view, to make the most out of experiential learning, having a facilitated safe space where we can acknowledge, reflect, discuss and apply the learning is imperative and I believe my project was

such a place. Being in a safer and empathetic environment helps mitigate the potential risks when we are prone to feeling vulnerable due to the nature of experiential learning and of course, the subject matter.

Learning/unlearning of issues

The importance of learning cannot be overstated. Learning nourishes the mind, enables individuals to develop, broadens our understanding, and discovers new and thrilling experiences. One of the key stages of learning ironically, is unlearning (Becker, 2018; Hislop et al., 2013; Matsuo, 2019; Peschl, 2019). Learning through the process of unlearning is essential for organisations and individuals alike, as existing knowledge or routines are often obstacles to new learnings (Matsuo, 2019). But what does 'unlearning' mean? Hislop et al. (2013) define unlearning as "abandoning or giving up knowledge or behaviours without making any judgement on the status of the knowledge or behaviours being unlearned" (p. 542). Becker (2018) refers to unlearning as "individuals letting go of past practice or knowledge and embracing new ways of behaving or utilising new knowledge" (p. 107). Unlearning, however, is not to be mistaken with 'forgetting' as the act to unlearn something in this case is done deliberately (Hislop et al., 2013).

The participants in this study demonstrated their capabilities to learn new social issues by unlearning the 'unseen' particularly our privileges. Take Jorge for example. Growing up in Ecuador, Jorge was living a comfortable life. He did not have to worry about having a roof over his head or a meal to eat as his parents were supporting him. When he relocated to Victoria, he encountered unexpected challenges in terms of finances and accommodation. This made him realise how privileged he had been while residing with his parents in Ecuador. Coming to the realisation of his privilege, Jorge took an interest and became attentive to the issues of housing

shortages and homelessness in Canada, Ecuador and around the world. He acknowledged and understood the dire consequences of the lack of affordable housing that resulted in homelessness.

On the other hand, I became aware of the privilege I had living as a majority in Malaysia from attending formal courses at UVic that exposed me to discourses of Indigenous issues in Canada. This made me conscious of the struggles of other minority groups in my country, in Canada and globally. I also became more familiar with issues of racism as I was facing them firsthand since moving to Canada, something that I had not experienced previously. More importantly, we discovered that unlearning allowed us to develop empathy with each other and others in understanding the struggles that we and/or others are going through.

While unlearning is one of the important processes of learning, it is often difficult, time-consuming and challenging especially at an individual level (Hislop et al., 2013) and not everyone is open to unlearning. The reason for this difficulty, according to Hislop et al. (2013), lies in the degree to which "people are attached to their existing knowledge and ideas, and their existing knowledge and ideas shape and blinker how they make sense of events, which can make it difficult to understand the limitations of existing knowledge and ideas" (p. 548). Matsuo (2019) argues that some of us are not receptive to unlearning because "individuals tend to maintain the status quo and prefer to continue following existing routines to which they have become accustomed" (p. 465). But in order to achieve social justice, we must be receptive to new ideas. Unlearning also enables us to cultivate empathy and connect with others to overcome injustices in society. The refusal to unlearn implies that we are complicit in the perpetuation of injustices. Therefore, it is our responsibility to be committed to push through the discomfort of unlearning to make way for new knowledge to combat social injustices.

Praxis for action and agency

Praxis is essential for anyone to develop critical consciousness in pursuance of transforming the world as a better place (Edwards-Groves & Gray, 2008; El-Amin et al., 2017; Freire, 2000). Mahon et al. (2019, p. 464) define praxis as "a form of deliberate action in the social (and physical) world based on critical and reflective thinking." This implies that praxis bridges the gap between theory and practice. Edwards-Groves and Gray (2008, p. 85) state, "developing a praxis stance is the most highly desired outcome the university hopes to achieve for its students" with the aim that students will "learn to act not just with technical skill but also with moral and ethical integrity." El-Amin et al. (2017) emphasise, while learning is important, without actions, the learning becomes meaningless and discouraging for students. The presence of critical consciousness should not only allow us to see and feel injustices around us, but also to enable us to be agents of change by transforming unjust situations through our informed actions in our everyday lives (El-Amin et al., 2017; Freire, 2000).

This idea of praxis that calls for reflection and action was demonstrated by the participants in the study through our different learning interactions in both our formal and nonformal education and informal learning. I was one of them. I became particularly aware of and passionate about Indigenous issues as part of my learning experience. It was the start of my awareness about the struggles of the Indigenous peoples in Canada which I previously did not have albeit having studied at another university in Canada. Being a graduate student at UVic, I was exposed to this issue through the different courses that I enrolled in as part of my programme. I was also fortunate to be able to learn from Indigenous Canadian classmates who shared stories of their community regarding the genocide, abuse and discrimination they endured in what I now know as the Indian Residential School system. The education and learning at UVic

that sparked this awareness was powerful as it encouraged me to be self-reflective as well as reflective of the Indigenous peoples in my own country, particularly those who belonged to the minor Indigenous groups. As a result, I began to take initiatives and became involved in the different on and off campus opportunities such as attending talks and workshops at the First Peoples House at UVic, participating in the Indigenous Cultural Acumen Training on campus and attending the annual Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls rally in Victoria.

Cultivating praxis ensures the balance of our inner self which relates to the aspects of social justice through Indigenous and global South perspectives to maintain the balance and harmony of society through collective actions. In particular, according to *Sejahtera*, an Indigenous Malay philosophy, this inner harmony must exist between the 10 SPICES (Spiritual, Physio-Psychological, Intellectual, Cognitive, Cultural, Ethical, Emotional, Ecological, Economic, and Social) elements as outlined in Chapter Two (Dzulkifli et al., 2018; Dzulkifli, 2020). This can be accomplished only when we prioritise our inner balance as a fundamental part of our education and learning (Akimoto, 2014; Dzulkifli et al., 2018; Palakkappillil, 2014). Dzulkifli (2020) highlights "the nurturing of a balanced individual is a vital agenda and it correlates closely to reflection of the macro-cosmos, a more universal concern situating humankind" (p. 25). Thus, reflection practice in higher education is highly important.

Chan and Lee (2021, p. 1) describe reflection as "a process of thinking, evaluating, and making sense of existing experiences as well as planning for future experiences, and are an integral component of both self-knowledge and self-regulation that allows the individual to evaluate, monitor, and improve themselves." Scholars such as Chan and Lee (2021) and Ryan (2013) argue that students should be trained to reflect in profound, critical, and transformative ways in order to foster sustainable learning practices, but this is not always the case. Mahon et al.

(2019, p. 473) identify the "intensification of academic work", "lack of, or diminishing, contact time between university teachers and students", "over-regulation and standardisation of practice" and "promotion of particular constructions of pedagogical practice" as some of the constraints in implementing reflection practice in formal higher education classrooms. They claim that "a restored sense of balance" is needed in higher education to allow for more reflective practices as part of the pedagogy (Mahon et al., 2019, p. 477). In order to accomplish this goal, universities must be re-imagined as learning communities with values, rather than simply repositories of knowledge production. The efficacy of education also must be re-evaluated to ensure that higher education institutions are meeting the needs of the students to become socially responsible individuals once they graduate.

Injustices in the way we speak

The prevalence of accent discrimination in academia remains a persistent problem. To borrow from Fricker (2007) this type of discrimination is 'testimonial injustice'. She explains that testimonial injustice "can have a significant impact on how much credibility a hearer affords a speaker, especially in a one-off exchange" (p. 17). She invites us to "consider the immediate discursive impact of a speaker's accent" because according to her, "not only does accent carry a social charge that affects how a hearer perceives a speaker, it may indicate a certain educational/class/regional background) but very often it also carries an epistemic charge" (p. 17). Testimonial injustice is thus regarded as a form of epistemic injustice. Based on Fricker's explanation, I would argue that the discrimination against a person merely due to their accent is in fact an issue of social injustice as it is unfounded to question or evaluate a person's actual competency or knowledge based on the 'way' they speak. This testimonial injustice could very well impede one's ability to advance in life.

Many of the participants in this study encountered this type of injustice because of 'how' we speak. English not being our first language means that most of us speak with accents that are not typically heard as 'normal' or 'the standard' in Canada when we converse in the language. As shared in my findings, this was the case for Layla and Jenny. Arabic being her native language, Layla felt discriminated against when people judged her intelligence and credibility biasedly based solely on her accent. To avoid facing more humiliation and discrimination, Layla felt forced to prioritise on improving her accent rather than her grammar and vocabulary skills. Jenny was belittled and looked down upon by her supervisor when she offered to help other students who spoke English as additional language since she did her certification in Teaching English as a Second or Other language (TESOL). Her English was viewed as "imperfect" due to 'how' she spoke the language. In that moment, Jenny felt so "little" despite previously earning her qualifications and experiences in TESOL.

Unfortunately, this is a widespread problem that is often glossed over, despite the fact that it is as damaging to the speakers with accents as any other discrimination. But one study (de Souza et. al., 2016) finds that accent discrimination against immigrants exists and must be viewed as a discrimination. The study notes that "more prejudiced individuals discriminate against a target with a nonstandard accent because they use information about accents as a legitimizing mechanism for discriminating against non-standard speakers." According to the study, "the way a person speaks can be used as a basis for making arbitrary evaluations and unlike many other forms of discrimination, is commonly accepted and perceived as legitimate by society" (Souza et al., 2016, p. 2). In understanding the commonality of the accent discrimination that we experienced, we discussed how testimonial injustice was linked to (covert) racism because there was no substantial basis for this discrimination other than the way we speak. It is

therefore necessary to recognise accent discrimination as an injustice in order to raise awareness of its detrimental impact on speakers, and for universities to take proactive steps to implement strategies to resolve this persistent issue within their institutions.

Discomfort in education

The lack of interest or rather, ignorance of not discussing certain or in fact any social issues for some is not uncommon even in the academic world. This ignorance is particularly prevalent when it comes to gender issues and the area of adult education is no exception. Rogers (2006) found that for some years she had "been struck by the absence of gender issues from lifelong learning discussions" (p. 189) when analysing "texts which present a coherent use of lifelong learning/education as a discourse" (p 191). Rogers (2006) tries to justify that by saying

> I do not believe that the absence of gender from the lifelong learning discourse is a conscious decision, a deliberate action. I suspect that like myself, some will be surprised at this neglect of what has been a key element in most discussions of adult education (p. 197).

Feminist adult educators have, however, devoted their work to creating space and raising awareness on gender-based issues (Clover et al., 2017). To understand the underlying reason of this ignorance for some, I turn to Clover et al.'s (2017) definition on gender first and foremost: "Gender…refers to the socializing mechanisms applied to refine behaviours to meet socially and culturally constructed norms of what it means to be male and masculine and female and feminine" (p. 22). They then highlight that

> these mechanisms—what feminists call patriarchy—have problematically propelled masculinity into a hegemony of supremacy…Masculine identity is thus aligned with attributes such as globalist, powerful, intellectual, reasoned, and self-determined—factors

that bestow the agency and authority necessary to act with impunity upon the public sphere" (pp. 22-23).

The emphasis placed on men and their activities in the public space "sets the stage for the devaluation of the status of women in the domestic space because there is hardly any system of check and measure of value for women's work and worth in the home" (Onwutuebe, 2019, n/p). The inadequate recognition and "system of reward for works undertaken by women inadvertently reduce their worth in the political, economic, and social realms of power" (Onwutuebe, 2019, n/p). It is no wonder that issues of gender, especially those that focus on women, are often overlooked and not given any importance to when we acknowledge and understand the existence of patriarchy and its influence on the preferential of masculine identity in society.

This phenomenon was reflected in my study as well. One participant, Jenny brought up her consciousness regarding her identity as a woman and a mother. She expressed that growing up in a traditional family in China, she was exposed to the traditional gender norms. She was accustomed to the idea that women had the 'responsibility' of giving birth. But her mindset shifted in questioning these traditional gender norms when she moved to Victoria to pursue her graduate studies at UVic. Her concern and the issue she brought up surrounding gender roles and norms, however, was not being reciprocated by other participants and thus the conversation did not continue as I was hoping for. While I did raise the issue of gender violence especially in regard to the Indigenous communities, as a participant researcher, I was mindful of not taking up too much space in our discussions. I decided to let the conversation flow according to its own accord without probing the other participants too much. The lack of input on gender issues from other participants left me wondering if they were unfamiliar with the topic, or simply did not feel comfortable discussing it.

The negligence on gender issues for some might not be deliberate as Rogers (2006) presumed, but in my point of view, the subconsciousness or unconsciousness of not discussing them anywhere is even more dangerous as it demonstrates how deeply and systemically ingrained patriarchy is in our day-to-day lives that we no longer question it, or have the critical consciousness to disrupt this problematic phenomenon. In addressing this gap, feminists work to increase public awareness on the marginalisation of women and to demonstrate the various ways in which the preferential preferences and advantages that men enjoy over women are in fact the result of patriarchy (Onwutuebe, 2019). Onwutuebe (2019, n/p) highlights that "regardless of areas of divergences inherent in various forms of feminism (whether Radical, Liberal, Marxist, Socialist or Black feminism), effort to redress systematic injustices experienced by women due to patriarchal segregations is the main task of feminism." It is therefore essential to contribute to the advancement of the work of feminism. Collective effort is required to acknowledge and undo the problems that patriarchy has been causing. hooks (2014) wrote an entire book called *Feminism is For Everybody*, advocating that feminism is in fact for everybody. The same goes for higher education institutions. Together, we must disrupt it by undoing the learning of 'the way things have been.' Thus, universities have the responsibility to expose its students to the discourses of gender issue in their learning as a way to tackle this problem.

Art and critical creativity in academia

The interest in using arts pedagogically and in research has emerged in recent years as studies have found many advantages in doing so (e.g., Barone & Eisner, 2012; Eisner, 2002, 2008; Kraehe & Brown, 2011; Morris, 2008). One of the many advantages of using the arts pedagogically and in research is its capabilities of raising critical consciousness among students and research participants (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2019; Müller & Mockie, 2019; Moreno,

2021). According to Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2019), the use of the arts in educational and research practices "embrace[s] the aesthetics of experience" while also "embracing pedagogical knowledge and concepts of learning and critical thinking" (p. 20). Eisner (2002) affirms that "arts provide the conditions for awakening to the world around us. In this sense, the arts provide a way of knowing" (p. 10). He also argues that the arts do not limit language in the same way that words do,

> [w]e tend to think that in order to know [we] have to be able to say. I would argue that the limits of language in no way define the limits of cognition…we know more than we can tell. If taken seriously, it would expand our conception of what knowing entails…people can be literate or…*multi*-literate (Eisner, 2008, p. 27).

While this study was not specifically about the effects of using arts in learning, it was definitely an integral part of the research process. Using visual-based methods of photographs, collage and photovoice, the use of arts in this research enabled the participants to be critical as well as creative when discussing social justice issues. Despite this being the first time for the majority of participants to utilise the arts in this context, they were not intimidated by the creative process and were eager to experiment and share their new knowledge. Jenny previously confessed that she did not particularly see the arts as her strong suit and would "usually isolate the so-called art from my life." But after utilising them in this study, she found that using arts helped her to "strengthen my thinking about social issues." She was pleasantly surprised to learn how the arts allowed her to think more profoundly and critically about social justice, and deepened her understanding about these issues in the workshop, she declared "I think this was a very helpful way that lets me know everybody can use art as a tool, even though they think they are not good at it."

Eisner's (2008) argument on art, language and expression found to be true for the participants in this study. Since we were all international students from different parts of the world, most of us spoke different native languages from one another. English was not our first language. But using art as a learning medium in this study allowed us to share our perspectives and expressed our thoughts with ease. We understood each other well. Rae asserted, "arts are a great way to show creativity, to really unpack parts of us that we don't always show or don't really think about…a way of defining things for us that we maybe can't say in words, we can't present itself."

The integration of the arts as pedagogical tools into the academic environment presents its own set of difficulties. Burge et al. (2016, p. 732) highlighted that "studies that stand outside the mainstream may simply not be taken on board" especially since it is already a challenge for "conventionally presented research into university teaching to be taken seriously." Most people doubt their ability to utilise and create art based on "past experience, cultural assumptions about who can and cannot make art and the way the arts are taught and separated in most educational settings" (McNiff, 2011, p. 393). There is also a possibility that participants may feel excluded or disinclined by the use of unfamiliar media (Burge et al., 2016). While these challenges may be true for some, they do not detract from the fact that using art in this study was indeed a useful tool for developing creativity, imagination and critical awareness on social justice issues amongst the participants.

(Radical) Imagination in learning

The use of imagination in learning has been widely discussed in recent years. Scholars introduce this concept of 'radical imagination' or 'sociological imagination' (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2010, 2014; Storrs, 2009; Zielinska et al., 2011) which stresses the importance of

cultivating creativity and thus imagination to address the challenges of social injustices in our lives and in society. Eisner (2002) shares that the arts provide "permission to engage the imagination as a means for exploring new possibilities. The arts liberate us from the literal; they enable us to step into the shoes of others and to experience vicariously what we have not experienced directly" (p. 10). Enhancing and using our imagination are particularly important as it gives us "the ability to believe that things can be better" and "a key part of our social, psychological and spiritual lives (for better or for worse)" (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2010, p. iii).

One of the many examples in this study was during the collage activity we did in pairs. Jorge and Maia decided to focus on the issue of housing for their collage. Both of them faced the hardship of locating suitable long-term residences when they moved to Victoria to commence graduate studies at UVic. They were forced to rely on short-term accommodations such as AirBnBs, hotels, and hostels upon arrival which continued for an extended period of time. This resulted in a higher expenditure than initially planned and was unsustainable for them, posing an additional burden to them as international students. Rather than focusing on the negative aspects of the housing shortage, Jorge and Maia imagined the potential improvements and solutions that could be implemented to make housing available to all when they created their collage (see Figure 10).

To further stimulate creativity, imagination, and critical thinking, they deliberately affixed an image that extended beyond the corner of the paper to symbolise that "this subject is not just on this paper," reminding us that "it's an issue that happens everywhere" and not just in Victoria. Maia reiterated that "it's about [using our] imagination [to improve the situation] because we don't want to limit [the possible solutions] to just this piece of paper." Through their

collage, both Maia and Jorge highlighted that it was perhaps a necessity to use our imaginations to push ourselves to find solutions to today's social problems.

Figure 10. Imagining the possibilities of improved housing, collage co-created by Maia and Jorge

Imagination does not challenge conventional thinking, but rather offers a framework or additional dimension within which traditional thinking operates, and from which it can transcend (Egan, n/d). While imagination is an important skill to seeing new possibilities, Kind (2022) cautions us that "matters are different when it comes to instructive uses of imagination" (p. 38). She elaborates, "more important than the ability to remove constraints is the ability to impose constraints, or at least to abide by the constraints imposed by real-world facts" (Kind, 2022, p. 38). Thus, the more successful we are at 'regulating' our imagination by keeping it in line with some sort of reality, the more successful we will be at using our imagination for the betterment of our unjust conditions.

The workshop as a learning space

Workshops are important because they "provide environments for learning to occur in dynamic and powerful manner[s]…[and] can be used to promote personal growth, teach professional skills, or create change within existing systems" (Brooks-Harris & Stock-Ward, 1999, p. 1). Workshops too require "participants to take a hands-on approach to immediately implement the skills they are learning" (Fatumo, 2014, n/p). Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward (1999) define workshop as "a short-term learning experience that encourages active, experiential learning and uses a variety of learning activities to meet the needs of diverse learners" (p. 6). At the core of workshops is the notion of 'safety', which is the concept of creating a space in which participants can share issues and challenges openly without fear of reprisal (Abma, 2003; Brooks-Harris & Stock-Ward 1999; Palfrey, 2017). While no space can ever be truly 'safe' when dealing with matters of injustice – both at personal and political levels – this arts-based workshop was as close to a safe space as it could be. There were many instances in the data where participants talked specifically about the workshop space itself in terms of new learning and thinking.

Although this was not a focal point of my study, the workshop was still a significant learning space as feminist researchers emphasised that research itself can often be an essential platform for stimulating deep dialogues and learning of injustices (e.g., Leavy, 2015; Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). I have alluded to these throughout Chapters Four and Five, but there were two distinct themes that are important to discuss, namely the ability to be candid and to create the sense of community and belonging in workshops.

A place to be candid

What does it mean for individuals to be able to express their opinions and to reveal their innermost feelings, challenges and learning? Getting back to the issue of safety, in some respects, it can be risky. We reveal ourselves and our preconceived notions, which may be problematic, but it can also be liberating. de Grip and Pleijers (2019) speak to the importance of intensive connected time as a group as well as the building of informal connecting time in workshops. Similarly, in this workshop the participants could be candid in sharing our stories, our assumptions, our challenges, our shortcomings, and our pain. Because the workshop was so inviting and creative, we openly discussed social justice topics that would normally not have felt comfortable doing. Some of these conversations were not facilitated; they just happened naturally. I observed participants discussing their personal social justice concerns during breaks and while I was preparing the space for an activity. One candid moment that stood out was between Layla and Rae and the other (non-Muslim) participants. They were curious about Islam because, as noted previously, it has been portrayed so negatively in the media. The relationship that was built between the participants in the workshop made them comfortable to ask Layla and Rae questions about their religion, questions that they would not have dared to ask and quite possibly, the opportunity to ask. Layla and Rae reciprocated by being open in the spirit of learning and sharing.

Brooke-Harris and Stock-Ward (1999) emphasise that "a crucial component of directing workshops is considering the learning environment you want to create" (p. 104). From this study, I learnt that setting the right tone at the beginning of a workshop could make the participants feel welcomed and valued, of which influenced their openness to participate afterwards. As shared in Chapter Three, the first day of our workshop was devoted to connecting and relationship

building. As a group we created and discussed the community guidelines for the workshop together. I also organised an icebreaker activity to cultivate mutual respect, trust, openness, reciprocity and the co-creation of knowledge amongst the participants. These activities, although may seem trivial had a positive impact in building a sense of community and belonging amongst us, and this facilitated our active and genuine engagements to discuss social justice throughout the three days.

A place for community and a sense of belonging

Global South scholars such as Akimoto (2014), Dzulkifli et al. (2018), Dzulkifli (2020), Palakkappillil (2014) remind us that in order to realise not only a just, but balanced and harmonious society, we must be able to be and live well with each other. Since social justice is a collective responsibility as previously established, learning how to live in a community with a sense of agency and belonging is important to achieving social justice. Workshops as learning spaces have the potential in building relationships and creating community amongst its participants (Orngreen & Levinsen, 2017). This is because workshops "promote genuine participation" since participants are "expected to actively participate and influence the workshop's direction, as well to as practice the relevant techniques, skills, situations, and so forth" (Orngreen & Levinsen, 2017 p. 72).

In this study, we as international students, recognised the importance of belonging to a community in order to successfully pursue our studies and live in Canada. Finding and building our own community was also how we got involved in social justice awareness. When discussed what we understood of the word 'community', most of us, including myself, viewed it as something that was value-based. 'Help', 'reliance' and 'sharing' were the three common words that were associated with the understanding of community. Maia expressed that community was

"a group of people who help[ed] each other, share[d] space, things and common interests". She summed it up as "common-nity, community". Jorge spoke of community as the people "you [could] just rely on…because you need help or because you want to share something, you want to find a safe space…it's something that you create." I spoke to how I created my own community in Canada with "like-minded people" with "shared values" and relied on them for help when needed.

While our families are a part of our support system most of us do not have our family physically with us since we live and study abroad. Thus, we learn to ask for help and rely on others whom we perceive as our community especially in going through hardships. Rae, for example, leaned on her Muslim community for support and comfort when facing Islamophobia on her journey to critical consciousness. As well, it is possible to belong to multiple communities instead of just one, and sometimes these communities could interconnect. Rae acknowledged that "I give and get different things from each of those communities that make me a whole person." We learnt that trust, respect, and reciprocity needed to be nurtured in order to be able to count on someone, which led us to view community as value-based.

Due to the collaborative and immersive nature of workshops, participating in one gives the participants a sense of community and belonging (Orngreen & Levinsen, 2017). As participants of this study, we were building community and a sense of belonging in the workshop. We learnt that this feeling of belonging comes from the shared values of our outlook to achieve social justice irrespective of our backgrounds. According to Jorge, "the discussions that we had during the workshop were beyond my expectations, to be honest with you. Because we had a group of people that built community during those three days." He elaborated that this was possible because we were "seeing commonality in each other" even though we came "from

different backgrounds, spoke different native languages, and was in different stages of where they were in Canada and in their studies." Despite these differences Jorge noted, "the most impactful and powerful thing was recognising…that we were going through similar things although it may be about different issues." Thus, learning as a group in a workshop facilitates deeper conversations, cultivates meaningful connections and generates new understandings.

In the next and final chapter, I offer some reflections and recommendations on actions and changes that we can take to allow and support students' critical consciousness through learning particularly on social justice.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I provide a summary of the responses to the central research inquiry of this study. Then, I summarise and reflect on my research process. Next, I offer some recommendations for future work that can contribute to the development of students' critical consciousness of social justice issues through both formal and nonformal education and through informal learning. Lastly, I share the new knowledge I contributed to the field of higher education and adult education and provide some next steps to complete my dissertation.

The current research aimed to explore how we, six international students at UVic were coming to critical consciousness of social issues through our formal and nonformal education and informal learning. The main research question was: How does living and studying in Victoria and at UVic encourage a critical consciousness about social injustices in a group of international students and what are the implications for change work in the future? By conducting one-on-one interviews and a three-day arts-based workshop, the study identified diverse approaches to learning in formal and nonformal education and informal learning environments that enhanced the participants' critical consciousness where injustices were concerned. From this study, we concluded that for the majority of us, having multiple opportunities to explore topics and discourses related to social issues through a combination of the three dimensions of adult education and learning heightened our critical consciousness as part of our journey as international students who live and study in Victoria and at UVic.

The various courses we enrolled in that addressed social justice discourses in our formal education undoubtedly enhanced our critical awareness of certain social injustices, including

those related to the environment, mental health and wellbeing, and the lack of housing access. In these classes, we were able to broaden our understanding of complex social topics through the readings provided in the classrooms as well as critical discussions that sparked amongst our peers and professors. This also provided us with an opportunity to reflect on the unjust situations that happened to us and around us. The inclusion of social justice themes in our formal education directly amplified our critical consciousness of the intricacy, linkages and interconnections of these issues, while simultaneously recognising that some of the injustices that have occurred are intrinsically embedded in our system.

In addition, for the majority of us, the availability and integration of contents in our curricula about the struggle of the Indigenous people in Canada heightened our awareness of the importance of this issue in this country that we were unaware of, and this in turn made us more conscious of the oppression of Indigenous people in our own countries and across the globe. At the same time, we were also acknowledging that social justice extended beyond the human race and encompassed our ecological systems. It should be noted, however, that while the vast majority of us had the opportunity and benefit to gain knowledge and engage in dialogue on social justice within our formal education, some of us did not. Therefore, it is essential to provide equal opportunities for students to engage in and develop their knowledge of social justice both in and outside of the classroom, which I will elaborate on further in my recommendations.

Nonformal education has had one of the biggest impacts pedagogically on shaping critical consciousness for us all. The nonformal education activities we participated in were the outcomes of the personal efforts we made to pursue them in accordance with our different contexts. For many of us, personal encounter with injustices such as racism and Islamophobia motivated us to be engaged in initiatives on-campus related to critical social issues. For some,

the absence of social justice content in our formal education was the dictating factor that drove us to seek out for learning opportunities in nonformal educational settings. Some of these nonformal education activities include participation in clubs available at UVic such as the Human Rights club and the Muslim Students' Association, work-study positions on-campus that focus on social justice matters, volunteering at various socially responsible initiatives on campus such as the UVic Food Bank, as well as attending numerous workshops, talks and training courses, both on and off campus, organised by various departments at the university namely the First Peoples House as well as the City of Victoria and the Royal British Columbia Museum. These activities enabled us to gain more hands-on learning about important social issues. Some of us took part actively in the events held in conjunction with Mental Health Awareness week at the university by sharing our personal experiences in front of an audience. Some of us were involved in the organisation of anti-racism workshops and other social justice events including *5 Days of Action* through the clubs and other affiliations we were associated with. Additionally, some of us made a conscious decision to attend rallies organised by local organisations in Victoria such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and Fridays for Future. The exposure to social justice in our nonformal education enabled us to confront and challenge our own privilege, which allowed us to develop empathy towards others and the many inequities they faced.

The impact of our informal learning on our critical awareness of social justice issues was equally as striking, if not more so. This type of learning was a powerful and transformative learning process for all of us as it pertained to our personal experiences of injustices. Learning from personal experiences enabled us to ruminate on the unjust encounters that we involuntarily found ourselves in. These experiences shook us to our cores in a manner that formal and

nonformal education would not be able to, as they touched upon areas of our identity. These adverse experiences, however, served as important lessons and catalysts in our lives and studies in Victoria and at UVic, as they inspired us to become advocates and collaborators in the fight against the social inequities that we were personally impacted by, and to connect with communities of like-minded people as a means of seeking out for support and addressing these unjust situations. Some participants dealt with racism and/or Islamophobia, some dealt with mental health issues, some dealt with housing shortages. These experiences, although made us cognisant of the unjust and complex nature of our world, caused us harm. Rather than being discouraged by these events, we chose to take action and be agents of change. We immersed ourselves in activities that contribute to the positive developments of social justice from our standpoint.

Reflections on the process of the research

As I laid out in Chapter One, this study was prompted by my own experience of developing a critical consciousness of social justice as an international student at UVic and living in the city of Victoria. I noticed a shift in my awareness on social issues since becoming a graduate student at UVic. Although I did my undergraduate in another Canadian university previously, I lacked the awareness that I acquired since moving to Victoria. Together with five other UVic international students from various parts of the world, as well as their respective faculties and trajectory in our studies, we explored how we had expanded our critical consciousness of injustices from our studies at UVic, with a focus on our pedagogical experiences in our formal and nonformal education and informal learning.

In order to conduct this study, I opted to employ the mixed methods of individual interviews and arts-based methods, specifically visual-based methods. I was interested in the

depth of the data rather than the breadth of the data, both of which were feasible using these types of methods. By conducting one-on-one interviews, I was able to assess each participant's initial understanding and involvement in social justice prior to the workshop. Additionally, I had a comprehensive follow-up interview post-workshop to gauge any discrepancies in each participant's understanding and commitment to social justice as well as to assess the use of the arts as learning tools.

Using arts-based methods during the three-day workshop exceeded my expectations in terms of the depth of the discussions. It removed any language barriers we may have, allowing us to express ourselves without the limitation of mere words. Furthermore, arts-based methods enabled us to exercise our critical consciousness in a creative manner particularly when abstract representations of social (in)justices were used. Using arts-based methods provided us with the freedom to use our creativity and imagination to reflect on social (in)justices, thus enabling us to co-create new knowledge together in envisioning a just world that we would like to live in. The arts also allowed us to engage in more than just thinking; it enabled us to feel, which I believe is particularly important in this study, as having the capacity to feel allows us to develop empathy and be actively engaged in local actions and transformation.

One of the things that I did not expect to come out of this study was the impact that the workshop itself had on the participants as a learning space. Despite the fact that the participants were relatively new to one another at the outset, they developed a strong affinity for sharing from authentic points of view regarding their own personal experiences and perspectives on social justice. As the workshop progressed, there was an openness to candid conversations that occurred naturally outside of the structured activities, where participants shared their personal problems in a way that transcended the workshop as a learning space.

I learn many things from designing and conducting this study. But one of the valuable takeaways was my role as a participant researcher. Due to my dual role, I was cognisant of the influence I held over the participants. As both the facilitator and participant, I exercised caution in managing the discussions to ensure that I did not overstep my bounds. I learnt to let conversations unfold naturally in order to preserve the integrity of the dialogue. There were occasions when I had to intervene to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to express themselves, but I was careful not to over-probe participants in order to push them into providing the response I desired. In contrast, when conversations became overly personal, it was essential for me to abide by the participants' wishes not to include any part of the conversation in this study as their safety and dignity were of utmost importance.

Recommendations

While some faculties at UVic offer courses that are orientated to social justice, not all of the students in my study have had the opportunity to enroll in such courses. The reason for this is that other faculties at the university, specifically from my study, the Faculty of Sciences have structured their programmes in ways that, at least for one participant, does not appear to be centred on social justice. This means that not all students are required to learn and engage in such discussions even if they wish to. With the absence of social equity discourses and canons in their programme at the university, students lack the prospect to develop their critical consciousness on these intricate, yet significant issues, leaving them to be either oblivious or apathetic. This oblivion would also prevent students from being able to identify injustices when in reality they may be impacted by them. The failure to do so would hinder them from gaining the confidence to exercise their agency to rectify unjust situations especially since combatting injustices is a shared responsibility as established by the findings of this study. Therefore, UVic should ensure

that all students regardless of faculty, have the opportunity to be exposed to social justice in their formal education in order to help them be critical and congruent in recognising and addressing injustices. Below, I offer some of the recommendations to achieve this goal.

First recommendation: Offer a mandatory social justice course

One of the recommendations for making social justice learning accessible to all students at UVic is to offer a compulsory social justice course as part of their curriculum in the first year. Many universities have made courses compulsory for all students to support their transition to university life. Making a social justice course mandatory for first-year students across all faculties could benefit them in developing their critical thinking skills and awareness of injustices, of which could set the foundation for their tertiary education to be socially responsible as they progress through their programme at university. The results of this study demonstrate that providing an environment in the classroom for discussion and reflection on social issues increases the participants' critical awareness and advocacy in addressing prejudices in both their local and international contexts. The inclusion of this in their formal curriculum would certainly allow students to gain an understanding of colonialism in relation to Canada and the wider world, and the consequences of colonialism to this day. This learning could be a springboard for them to explore decolonising practices in their daily lives, as some of the participants in this study did.

Second recommendation: Provide diverse reading and learning materials

Another recommendation is for UVic professors to include diverse reading and learning materials within their course syllabi. This will provide students the opportunity to gain knowledge on a range of social topics and from a range of perspectives and learning materials. Implementing this 'bibliodiversity' (originally *bibliodiversidad*), a term which can be traced back to Chilean publishers in the 1990s (see Shearer et al., 2020), can facilitate the normalisation

of discussions amongst students on issues that are otherwise viewed as ‘taboo’, ‘uncomfortable’ or ‘negligible’ such as gender. This study revealed that although participants were open and receptive to sharing and discussing a wide range of socially injustice related topics that they either experienced, witnessed, or were cognisant of, there were also some issues that they were less receptive to discussing in depth. However, when social issues such as Indigenous or mental health issues were extensively discussed in their courses, participants developed a deep and passionate interest in sharing these issues and their own experiences. Further, by ensuring that students have access to a wide variety of reading and learning materials in their formal courses, professors can prevent the perpetuation of epistemic injustice and epistemicide from further manifesting in universities, thus taking a step forward towards the decolonisation of higher education institutions. For these reasons, it is essential for professors to ensure that students are exposed to bibliodiversity in their academic content that incorporates a variety of educational resources and works by authors and creators of varying genders, ethnicities, origins, experiences and so forth in order to broaden students’ worldview and provide them with a sense of confidence and familiarity with complex issues.

Third recommendation: Combine nonformal education and informal learning with formal education

The next recommendation is for UVic to work towards combining nonformal education and informal learning in their institution with formal education. As demonstrated in this study, the pedagogical impact of nonformal education and informal learning was crucial in nurturing the participants’ critical consciousness. However, the participants had to take it up upon themselves to find these opportunities if they wanted to be involved in the social justice activities within their nonformal education. While this may be feasible for some students, many of them

may not have the time to do so given other responsibilities that students have. UVic should facilitate their nonformal education and informal learning by incorporating hands-on social justice-focused learning experiences in the courses offered regardless of faculty affiliation. While UVic is well-known for its co-op opportunities, not every department requires students to do co-op, and not all of them are geared toward social causes. Closing this gap could be achieved by integrating attainable activities (e.g., attending a workshop, going to a play, visiting the museum) or collaborating in projects involving community engagement outside of the university into the formal courses they enroll in. This could enable students to not only raise awareness of the local inequities they/others face, but also to cultivate empathy and take action to improve these issues.

Fourth recommendation: Provide a regular facilitated space for discussion and reflection

The following recommendation is in conjunction with the preceding recommendation and that is for UVic professors of every faculty to provide a facilitated space that is safe for regular discussion and reflection for students in the classroom. As this study revealed, experiential learning, or hands-on learning was one of the effective ways of learning and transformation for the participants. However, it is important to note that this type of learning comes with its own set of challenges if it is not facilitated. The safety of the students may be jeopardised, as demonstrated by the stories shared by some of the participants in this study. While in some cases this cannot be avoided, it is essential to take the necessary steps to prevent it. It is therefore, in the best interest of all involved if professors foster an environment that is conducive to discussion and reflection while at the same time allows for vulnerability amongst the students.

Contributions of the study

This study has made a number of important contributions to the fields of social justice, higher education, adult education, and international education. Primarily, this study has

expanded the literature of social justice by focusing on its definition and discourse through the lens of Indigenous and global South perspectives. While there have been numerous discussions of social justice, few have been centred on the Indigenous and global South perspectives.

Secondly, this study is the first of its kind to integrate the three key dimensions of adult education – formal, nonformal, and informal – to investigate their pedagogical implications and their role in fostering critical awareness among students, particularly in relation to social justice. The results of this study have successfully demonstrated the importance of complementing the three dimensions of formal education, nonformal education, and informal learning in the pedagogical experience of students in order to foster their capacity to become active citizens.

Thirdly, this study brought both the fields of higher education and adult education together to investigate the critical consciousness of university students regarding social justice. This study examined the pedagogical approaches of adult education in a higher education environment, which had not been done in either field. As shared in Chapter Two, there is a dearth of studies on the respective roles of nonformal education and informal learning in higher education contexts. This study bridged the gap between these two dimensions of education and learning that have not been emphasised in higher education, and found them to be equally powerful, if not more so, than formal education in shaping the learning and awareness of social justice amongst university students.

Lastly, this study explored the positive side of international education that are often overlooked in research. It is undeniable that being an international student in a foreign country carries many negative repercussions as outlined in Chapter One. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the positive aspects that international students gain from studying abroad such as

the opportunity to exercise, heighten and act on critical consciousness in relation to global social issues.

Next steps

In addition to the publication and presentation of the results of the study in scholarly journals and conferences, I intend to design a creative knowledge mobilisation using the artefacts produced in the study (with permission) as a means of reaching to a wider audience, both within and beyond the university. Although not everyone will read this dissertation, as demonstrated by this study, knowledge can be disseminated in a variety of ways, and with the artefacts created, there is potential to utilise them creatively to disseminate the findings of this study to a wider and possibly to a more accessible audience. One of the ideas I have is to curate a virtual exhibition as I have prior experience with similar projects.

A study that could be conducted in the future would be to investigate the relationship between the use of arts-based methods and its implications in fostering critical consciousness on social issues. While the study utilised arts-based methods during the workshop and the discussion briefly focused on the advantages of using this method as a learning tool, it fell outside of the scope and goals of this study.

When searching for scholarly journals related to workshops and the role they play in pedagogy, I found almost none, and certainly not from recent years. Thus, the next study could also explore the function of workshops as learning spaces. The three-day workshop organised in this study as a learning environment was highly stimulating and captivating to the participants' learning. Being in this space enabled genuine, vulnerable, profound and open dialogue amongst participants, which was not something I anticipated when designing this study.

Finally, since this study was limited to six international students, it would be intriguing to conduct a similar study with a larger number of students/participants in the future.

Author's note

As a Malaysian, I do not have a family name. To cite this dissertation, please use my full name: Suriani Dzulkifli. This is another way to create visibility for non-white women like myself.

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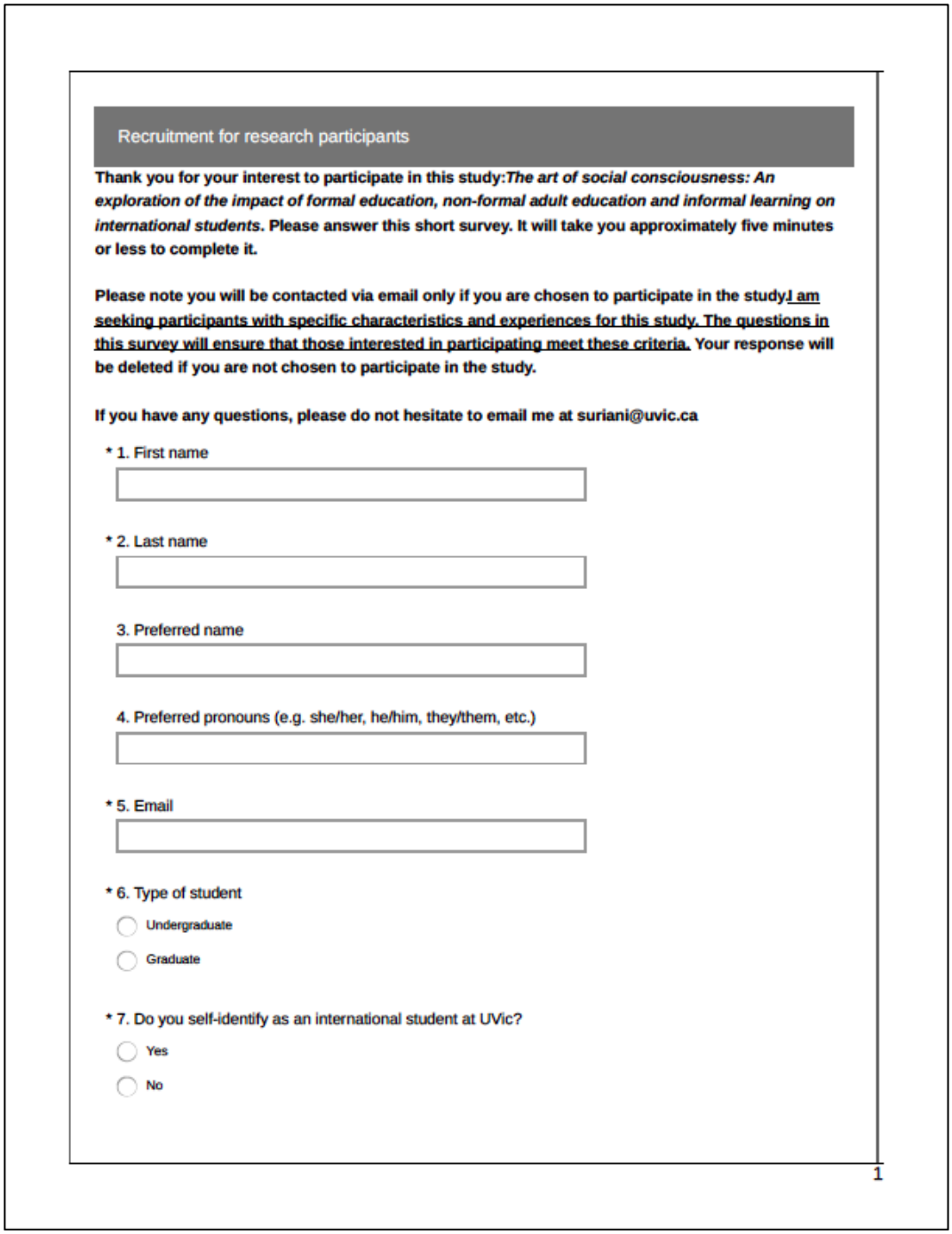
Appendices

Appendix 1



Recruitment for research participants

Thank you for your interest to participate in this study:*The art of social consciousness: An exploration of the impact of formal education, non-formal adult education and informal learning on international students*. Please answer this short survey. It will take you approximately five minutes or less to complete it.

Please note you will be contacted via email only if you are chosen to participate in the study.I am seeking participants with specific characteristics and experiences for this study. The questions in this survey will ensure that those interested in participating meet these criteria. Your response will be deleted if you are not chosen to participate in the study.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email me at suriani@uvic.ca

* 1. First name

* 2. Last name

3. Preferred name

4. Preferred pronouns (e.g. she/her, he/him, they/them, etc.)

* 5. Email

* 6. Type of student

- Undergraduate
- Graduate

* 7. Do you self-identify as an international student at UVic?

- Yes
- No

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* 8. If yes, from which country?

* 9. What is your student status at UVic?

- ○ Registered full-time
- ○ Recently graduated in 2018
- ○ Graduating in 2019
- ○ Other (please specify)

* 10. How long have you been studying at UVic?

- ○ Less than a year
- ○ More than a year
- ○ Other (please specify)

* 11. What faculty are you in?

* 12. What program are you in?

* 13. Please describe your engagement in social justice conversations, events, awareness inside and/or outside of the classrooms at UVic (i.e. taking a credit course that discusses social issues, attending/volunteering for on-campus events that bring awareness on social issues, organising an on-campus event to bring awareness regarding social issues to UVic community, etc.)

* 14. Do you own a functioning photography device (i.e. camera, phone camera, etc.)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

2

* 15. Will you be in Victoria in June/July 2019?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

3

Appendix 2

Pre-workshop interview

Hello <participant>. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. It will take you approximately between 30 minutes to an hour based on the length of your responses. Your responses will be recorded and transcribed for the purpose of data collection and analysis. Do you give consent to be recorded? <Answer> Your identity will be kept anonymous for this interview. You may stop participating in this interview at any given time.

1. Please tell a bit about your international student background. What do you consider your hometown? Or where did you move from to Canada?
2. What do you understand by 'social justice'?
3. How do you identify a situation or an issue as being socially unjust?
4. What was your involvement in social issues before moving to Canada?
5. Were there any similar social issues in your homecounty that you see or know of in Canada as well?
6. What new issues and/or idea that was introduced to you since moving to Victoria and Canada as an international student?
7. Through your formal classes at UVic, how does your perspective regarding social justice issues change since moving to Victoria and Canada as an international student, if any
8. Through your non-formal education at UVic (i.e. workshops, talks, conferences, hands-on learning, etc), how does your perspective regarding social justice issues change since moving to Victoria and Canada as an international student, if any
9. Have you been involved in the arts (i.e. photographs, poem, music) to discuss social issues and/or as part of your learning? If yes, what was the context? Please give specific examples if possible
10. Have you attended and/or volunteered for an event that promotes social justice since becoming an international student at UVic?
11. What kinds of action would you identify with contributing to social justice?
12. How have you contributed to social justice, in your own way so far? Please give specific example(s)
13. Do you have other comments and/or questions? Anything else that you would want to add?

Thank you for your time and for participating in this interview. I hope you have a great day!

Appendix 3

Post-workshop interview: Follow-up questions

Hello <participant>. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this follow-up interview. It will take you approximately between 45 minutes to an hour. Your responses will be recorded and transcribed for the purpose of data collection and analysis. Do you give consent to be recorded? <Answer> Your identity will be kept anonymous for this interview. You may stop participating in this interview at any given time.

After attending the workshop in the summer...

1. How has your perspective on social justice changed or enhanced through the discussions at the workshop?
2. How do you identify a phenomenon or situation as being socially unjust?
3. What new issues and/or ideas that were introduced or that you are more aware of now after participating in the workshop, if any?
4. How does the process of being involved in the arts discussing social issues impact your thoughts and perspectives regarding social justice?
5. How does arts influenced your ability to express your thoughts and perspectives regarding social justice?
6. Do you notice any changes in the way you think and/or behave regarding social issues using the arts? Did it help you to be more open in discussing those issue?
7. Did you find using the arts useful to your learning? How?
8. Have you been able to be more involved in the arts as part of your formal and/or nonformal learning?
9. What suggestions would you make to formal education in regards to social justice and the arts?
10. Have you attended and/or volunteered for an event that promotes social justice since the workshop?
11. How inclined are you to attend and/or volunteer for an event (i.e. workshop, seminar) that promotes social justice?
12. Will you be attending and/or volunteering for an event that promotes social justice in the upcoming school year? Or have you, since the workshop?
13. Thinking about the workshop in the summer, how do you define someone contributing to social justice now? What kinds of action would you identify?
14. How have you contributed to social justice, in your own way, since the workshop? Please give a specific example(s).

15. In the future, what kinds of action will you take to help improve social issues personally and/or professionally? Please give specific example(s).
16. Do you have other comments and/or questions? Anything else that you would want to add?

Thank you for your time and for participating in this interview! I hope you have a great day.

Appendix 4

University of Victoria
Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
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Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	**Darlene Clover** (Supervisor)	**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER** Expedited review - delegated	**19-0098**
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT	**Suriani Dzulkifli** **PhD student**	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE	14-Jun-2019
		APPROVED ON	14-Jun-2019
UVIC DEPARTMENT	**Educational Psychology & Leadership Studies**	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE	13-Jun-2020

PROJECT TITLE **The art of social consciousness: An exploration of the impact of formal education, non-formal adult education and informal learning on international students**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS **None**

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING **None**

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL
Suriani Dzulkifli - Recruitment for research participants word of mouth and listserv email script.docx - 12-Jun-2019
[REVISED] Suriani Dzulkifli - Participant Consent Form.docx - 12-Jun-2019
[REVISED] Suriani Dzulkifli - Sequential description of the procedures.docx - 12-Jun-2019
[REVISED] Suriani Dzulkifli - Capturing visual representations on UVic campus via photography.docx - 11-Jun-2019
[REVISED] Suriani Dzulkifli - Recruitment survey for research participants.pdf - 11-Jun-2019
[REVISED] Suriani Dzulkifli - Recruitment poster.pdf - 11-Jun-2019
Suriani Dzulkifli - Post-workshop interview questions.docx - 10-Apr-2019
Suriani Dzulkifli - Pre-workshop interview questions.docx - 10-Apr-2019
Suriani Dzulkifli - Making arts consciously through collage.docx - 10-Apr-2019
Suriani Dzulkifli - Critical show and tell questions.docx - 10-Apr-2019
Suriani Dzulkifli - Icebreaker activity.docx - 09-Apr-2019

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications
To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropiate standards of ethcis as outlines by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.