A journey reconsidered: An autoethnographic exploration of a CYC international practicum placement

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B.A., University of Victoria, 2009

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Supervisory Committee

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ABSTRACT

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In this autoethnographic inquiry, the author examines the complexities of international practicum placements by exploring past and present-day reflections written in response to her undergraduate practicum experience in South Africa. Using intersectional analysis, the author reflexively writes about personal desire and the intent to offer care in Majority World contexts by describing how these themes are deeply implicated by larger social, political, and historical systems and structures. In an attempt to benefit the nature of international practicum placements within the context of CYC practice, five key topics are outlined to better prepare students who might be considering practice across cultures in Majority World contexts.

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"There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered." -Nelson Mandela

Acknowledgment

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And to my dad, thank you for teaching me that anything is possible through persistence and hard work. I feel blessed to have you as my role model. I dedicate this thesis to you.

Dedication

For my dad. With love.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

I begin this thesis by sharing an adaptation of a letter that I wrote to my friends and family in Canada during my undergraduate Child and Youth Care (CYC) practicum placement in South Africa. I have revised this letter by inserting a small number of personal reflections retrieved from my journal entries with the intention of improving some of the descriptions about the background and setting of my practicum experience. I believe this informal letter describes to some extent the context, my role, and the complexity of my experience as a former South African resident.

In this research process, I have come to realize that my vision of South Africa has always been deeply rooted in my childhood experiences as a white South African child. In a sense, I was taking this 7 year-old child back with me – unaware of how my existing set of assumptions as a Canadian "global helper" might collide with all I had ever known about my distant homeland. I believe it is important to go back into this practicum experience and explore the multiple aspects of my "self" inscribed in my position as a CYC student – as this particular experience has never fully come to an end. The complexity of "helping", "doing what is right", and "being respectful of diverse cultures" still sits with me daily as I contemplate ways that I might have better prepared myself to work across cultures in diverse contexts.

Providing Context

The letter home.

To my family and friends back home in Canada, *April 4th, 2009*

My practicum in South Africa is almost over – how quickly time flies. I see this as a good time to write a letter home describing my experience and the impact it has had on my life. When I look back on the past few months, I am flooded with so much emotion, which is why it has been difficult for me to write down my thoughts and experiences on a day-to-day basis. Fortunately, I have had the opportunity in this past week to sit down and think about my experience over here, which has made me realize how much I have learned about myself and a culture that is so very different from my own.

The school where I have been working is located in a small Zulu township on the outskirts of Johannesburg. When I say "school", I am talking about two small sheds that are used as classrooms, and one larger building used as a communal space. 30 children are enrolled at the school, and over 50 children in the township attend the Sunday school service each week.

A small field surrounds the three buildings where the children play each day, and this space is bordered by train tracks and farmland. I worry about the dangers of having a train track so close to the school since each child has to cross these tracks in order to enter the school property, and most of the children like to play on these tracks once school lets out. I see these tracks as a marking of territory and land for different communities in this country, which has made me think about how visibly different I must look in this township – being the only white female in this environment.

I am living with an Indian family who established the school. For the past 17 years, their lives have been devoted to ensuring the safety and welfare of the children living in this small township. Listening to their experiences as a "colored" family in South

Africa, I have learned that racial segregation amongst the communities is still very much a part of present-day South Africa despite the fact that Apartheid has ended. Day to day I move from one space to another – a white girl living in an Indian community, then working in a Black community, noticing how distinct the racial borders are in this context. I remember the first time the family drove me to the township. All I could see was acres of tin roofs lined side by side. My first instinct was to take a picture – to capture the spirit of this place in all its beauty and turmoil.

My first visit to the school felt dreamlike. It was as if my body had been dropped down into a part of the world that only exists in our imaginations when we see UNICEF campaigns or World Vision commercials. The feeling of dislocation distressed me at first until I asked myself, "Why am I the one crying, when these beautiful children around me are always laughing?" Was I creating their misfortunes in my own mind without understanding the joy and freedoms that they actually see in their own world? My favorite part of the day became watching the children walk hand in hand (and very eagerly) towards the school. I learned their names quickly, and greeted each of them daily…telling them constantly how special they are.

The walls of the school are bare, no colored paper or posters with animated cartoon characters, but it does not seem to matter because the children truly do light up the room with their laughter and their energetic souls. Some of you have written to me asking what it is that I am actually doing over here. I find it difficult to define my role at the school because everyday I was doing something different. Some days I would just sit and observe the children during their lessons, sharpen their pencils, or help them with their writing. Other days I would teach them a game, a song, or a craft.

This was a difficult task given the language barrier, but somehow we managed to communicate…either through hand gestures, or I would ask the other teachers to translate.

From day one, the children gripped my heart, and I won't lie…at times I just wanted to stay numb and not feel the reality of what I saw in their world – the hardships, the poverty. There are days when I resent my own fortune and feel guilty for being so privileged. And still, I feel somewhat detached from the conditions that I see in the township because I have the ability to move in and out of their community – to fulfill my practicum hours, "practice" my CYC skills at the school, and then return to the comforts of living with my host family, where there is always an abundance of food, electricity, hot water, and safety measures.

The children have left everlasting impressions in my heart…and I hold happy, yet painful memories when I realize the joy they have brought to my experience simply by being curious, playful, and accepting of this Canadian white girl. I have heard a lot of troubling information about some of their lives at home, which was very difficult for me to understand and be okay with. Yet, despite some of their hardships, their time at school gives them the opportunity to laugh and play in a safe environment. And as my host family says, attending this school gives them a sense of hope.

Lara.

Locating "My Story" in this Research

Post-practicum reflection.

What IS my story?

The problem with using my own reflections as research data is that I sometimes feel insecure about my thoughts and those moments that get lost in translation. I thought my motivation to work overseas was driven by my capacity to be culturally competent, ethical, and mindful about my actions. But I didn't really think about what ignorance or naivety can do to a person when tied up in experiences that are so entangled in historical, social, and political forces. If I just tuck those experiences away in my box filled with academic papers, then what happens to the anxieties and discomforts that faced me as an international practicum student? What IS my story? More importantly, what can my experience and story say to CYC practice?

(Personal journal, July 2012)

Looking back, it is hard to imagine that 20 years have passed since my family immigrated to Canada, leaving vivid memories of my life as a white South African child. These early years were filled with childhood kinships, ballet lessons and outdoor adventures with my older brother. They are memories that have pulled me back to South Africa as a woman, to explore my professional self as a Child and Youth Care (CYC) worker more closely in relation to the land and the people who still live there. In January 2009, I returned "home" to South Africa to complete my fourth year practicum for my undergraduate CYC degree. I cannot articulate exactly why I chose this country as my practicum site, but in my heart I knew I wanted to step outside the borders of Canada to gain international work experience, and travelling to a country where I felt I had some

roots seemed appropriate. I convinced myself (and others) that my purpose for crossing borders was to "give back", and if I gained some knowledge and insight while doing so, well, that would be an added perk to my international adventure. I located my practicum site by connecting with a family who had operated a small school in one of the townships close to the outskirts of Johannesburg. It was suggested that I contact this family during my search for a practicum placement by my sibling who had attended the same college and church as the family. They opened their home to me for the duration of my placement overseas, informing me daily about the persistent struggles that many Black African communities face. What I intend to investigate in this thesis is how my assumptions – undeniably grounded in Euro-Western beliefs – can be critically examined so that CYC practitioners can work to create critically informed self reflexive practice that recognizes complexity and the inescapable problematics entwined in international practicum placements.

Facing Uncertainty

> The stranger moves on and the heartfelt promises are forgotten.
>
> (Epprecht, 2004, p. 694)

The questions that persist.

I remember experiencing a strong desire to hug the children at the school as though they were my own. They were so affectionate towards me, always holding my hand and sitting on my lap. I remember making promises to help them, to find ways to raise money for their school, for their families, and for the church. As vivid as those moments are, I also remember what it felt like to leave the settlement, to come home to an undergraduate

convocation, and receive too much praise for being "such a humanitarian." Still, what is embedded in between these memories and achievements is the developing story about my desire to revisit my birthplace, South Africa, and to accomplish good things for underprivileged children I had only visualized through World Vision commercials and UNICEF posters. Somehow the "realities" of the Majority World[1] that had been offered to me through media images triggered my desire to help. To this day, I am still not sure where this desire comes from, or how it is created. Is it possible that my desire is rooted in context and cultivated the fires within me?

Epprecht (2004) underlines some of the ethical and pedagogical challenges in work/study abroad courses within the context of international studies. He articulates two fundamental questions that will inform this thesis. First, Epprecht (2004) asks: "is it possible that well-intentioned, liberal, humanist, anti-colonialist ethics developed in the context of elite institutions in the North could be perceived as (or could in fact *be*) colonialist in specific situations in the South?" His second question invites us to consider:

> How serious is the risk that unexamined good intentions and high ideals could backfire in pedagogical terms, for example, by actually hardening Northern students' pre-existing negative or exotic stereotypes about the South, by fostering a missionary zeal that alienates the wider public audience in the North from a crucial understanding of North-South relations, or by creating in the Southern hosts feelings of burden or exploitation by the North? (p. 689)

[1] While the terms "global South", "Third World", and "developing countries" are more commonly used in literature on international work, I have chosen to use the term Majority World throughout most of this text while taking into consideration that all of these terms can be problematized because of their complexity and colonial positioning.

I have come across several questions that correspond in meaningful ways to my current thinking about international practicum placements in the context of Child and Youth Care, yet appreciate how Epprecht (2004) captures the complexities and presumptions that are inextricably linked to international work in the Southern hemisphere. His writing manifests an honest dedication to target unspoken assumptions about experiential learning in overseas placements by looking at specific ways that we can grapple with ethical dilemmas when working in Southern contexts. In light of these ideas, the following three research questions will guide my inquiry:

1. How does my experience as an international practicum student provide an important site for learning about the challenges of anti-colonialist and ethical practice in CYC?
2. How has my desire to work internationally and offer care been shaped by the social inequities and larger global cultural processes that I am a part of?
3. How can CYC professional development and education prepare students for encounters with diverse others, social inequities, and unfamiliar, cross-cultural contexts?

Background to my Research

The Deep Entanglement

My story begins a long time before travelling back home to South Africa to complete my fourth year practicum placement. It begins before I learned about social injustices, poverty, racism or human diversity. My story is deeply entangled in childhood memories where I was a part of the issues of race, identity, and privilege without even

realizing it. The Apartheid in all its turmoil and destruction did not apply to my world when I was a child, because I was not knowingly more privileged than the children who were my friends regardless of their skin color or social class. I suppose being shielded from the realities of Apartheid is part of what brings me to explore my deep entanglement with this research. I now stand in a place where I want to interrogate my newfound uncertainties by examining (very critically) and perhaps even scrutinizing my choices to move in and out of different spaces while examining how these actions can be reconciled in moments when guilt, shame and ignorance compete with all I have ever known.

(Personal Journal, September 2012)

On the surface, the making of my "international identity" begins by locating myself as the curious student interested in the *intrinsically* valuable experience (Epprecht, 2004) of overseas placements. Then again, perhaps my choice to return is influenced by the fires lit by historical experience and my location as a child growing up in South Africa. Maybe it is possible that even as a child I witnessed societal behaviors responding to the political violence and colonial activity that was taking place. Could it be that these historical emergences have contributed to or shaped my perception of societal injustices and Indigenous people in Southern contexts? It is difficult to decipher a starting point in the making of my international identity because these parts of my "self" can never fully be separated or characterized as independent or isolated selves (de Finney, personal communication, 2012). How then do I define "self" in this research given the complexity of the word and how it is used in different contexts? Bamberg (2011) suggests that quite often the efforts used to characterize self and identity are determined by our "self-

representations, ie. mental constructions about us as persons in terms of what we are identifying and with how we are identified (usually by others)" (p. 6). When I use the term self in this text, I am referring to a multi-layered description that involves my sense of personal identity (Kondrat, 1999), the unexplored *silent* parts of myself, as well as the unspoken assumptions that I make about myself. These selves have relationships with one another. They are layered, complex, and highly personal (Jones, 2009). These different aspects shape my story, just as my story helps to shape them.

In Between Worlds

"Third World/Global South/Majority World"

While the concept "Third World" is still one of the most commonly used terms for classifying global South countries, Solarz (2012) argues that the term "often simply functions in the role of an unthinking slogan, a mental shortcut, a foundation for stereotypes" (p. 1,570). This position exposes very little about the complexity of the term "Third World", but Solarz does seek to describe its meaning as ambiguous and complicated. Thomas and Wilkin (2004) address the contested ideas relating to this political concept, stating that within the context of international relations, the term "Third World", along with other concepts of the post-colonial period such as "developing countries", "less developed", and "global South"

> …reflect a common unifying experience shared by the majority of countries and people: a lack of voice or say in global affairs, a vulnerability to external forces beyond their control, (such as commodity price fluctuations, G-7 [now

> 8]/IMF/World Bank decisions, capital movements), and human insecurity which characterizes the lives of the citizens. (p. 243)

I acknowledge that this problematic term is still present in dialogue worldwide; however, given the complexity of the term and its colonial positioning, I choose to use the term "Majority World" when describing the context of my research, bearing in mind that most of the literature that I draw from in this text nonetheless focuses on "Third World" or "global South" terminology.

I find it difficult to move back and forth between worlds that are so different, which makes talking about my experiences as an international worker uncomfortable, and at times beyond description. It could be that those experiences are sacred to me, and to talk about them briefly only conveys a small portion of what I learned and witnessed in that particular context. Today I still sit in a place of not knowing whether the actions I undertook in my practicum placement benefitted the children and families living in the settlement, or if my choice to travel abroad was solely wrapped up in the benefit to my own learning. Perhaps my uncertainty is tied into both of these possibilities – neither one nor the other, but somehow both.

In this study I draw heavily on the work of Barbara Heron, whose research interests include theorizing the social construction of helping identities, North-South relations, and the interlocking forces associated with systems of oppression. In her analysis on white, middle-class Canadian development workers in Africa, Barbara Heron (2007) unveils how the desire to help "the other" in global South contexts is created by our understanding as Northerners that these exotic, Southern spaces are in need of saving, resulting in an altruistic response on the part of the Northerner. As Heron (2006) explains, "altruism has

a lot to do with the advent of large numbers of short-term international placements, of course, and this is, prima facie, a noble aspiration" (p. 1). This aspiration to intervene, and move into Southern spaces to help others is largely a result of how "Third World" poverty is portrayed in the media where heartbreaking images of children and families living in poverty are put on display for a global audience. This depiction of the conditions in Southern contexts is deeply rooted in colonial representations (Heron, 2006) thus producing a desire, or a sense of entitlement to move into Southern spaces because it is morally, and ethically "the right thing to do." However, in acting on this desire, are we perhaps further complicating the portrayal of different cultures by reinforcing Euro-Western beliefs? Do we (as Northerners) actually have the capacity to better the lives of poor, starving, stricken families in "Majority World" countries?

Thesis Framework

This research considers the complexities of international development work by using autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) to critically reflect on my experiences as an international practicum student in South Africa. From within the context of Child and Youth Care (CYC) practice and scholarship, I specifically examine the collisions between power relations (Heron, 2006, 2007), colonial history, and cultural diversity, which are deeply implicated by social, political, and historical systems and structures. In this first chapter, I introduce a reflective piece of writing to set the stage for subsequent chapters in my research. Entwined in this reflection are guiding research questions that will resurface in new and different ways throughout my writing. The journal entries shared throughout the thesis are past and present day reflections about the time I spent overseas during my

fourth year undergraduate practicum placement. These recollections provide data for a critical analysis of the challenges presented by my experiences as an international practicum student. They will also serve as a catalyst to explore how engaging in critical self-reflection during practicum placements may produce complex moments of uncertainty, fear, and shame within oneself, triggering questions of what can be done to prepare for these types of adventures in diverse contexts. Later in this chapter I briefly share background about my personal history and social location, along with my reason for using autoethnography as my methodological approach. In addition, I have opened up discussion about my theoretical positioning by introducing an intersectional analysis (Christensen & Jensen, 2012; Jones, 2009; Jones, Kim, & Skendall, 2012; Levine-Rasky, 2000, 2011), which will be explained in greater depth in Chapter Three. At the end of Chapter One, I also review some key terms that are relevant to my study. The second chapter reviews relevant literature about international practicum work, global North-South relations, and ethical implications in cross-cultural engagements within diverse disciplines such as international social work, and education. Chapter Three describes the methodology and methods of my thesis. Methodological concerns will be discussed and I will describe how I am using intersectionality as a conceptual framework in autoethnographic research (Jones, 2009). Chapter Four reveals my desire to offer care in a Majority World context by moving deeper into the heart of my on-site and present-day reflections. This chapter critically examines how time and space are implicated by dominant Euro-Western worldviews related to privilege, whiteness, and normativity. In this chapter I also examine more closely how I conceptualize myself as the *ethical/ignorant* development worker by scrutinizing some of the identified vulnerabilities and tensions

that followed me into my practicum experience in 2009 – unraveling the different layers of ignorance, innocence, and discomfort deeply entwined within my personal and professional selves. In the final chapter, I reexamine "motivations" within the context of international practicum work, and look at how different parts of my "self" have been implicated by my personal motivations for practicing across cultures. In this chapter I also raise five key ideas that might benefit the nature of international practicum placements within the context of CYC practice by revisiting some of my initial research questions as well as key concerns that I retrieved in recent literature on international work.

Researcher Reflexivity – Finding my Voice

My response to my international practicum placement has been about guilt and shame as a CYC worker. My understanding about why guilt and shame have dominated my emotional experience since travelling to South Africa will be taken up in later chapters where I will focus on my personal reflections and experiences attached to the complexities of practicum placements in international settings. As a CYC worker, I have learned to hold on to the enduring responsibility to be ethical, critically conscious, and mindful, not just in the moment or when confronted with an ethical or moral dilemma, but before, during, and after moving into different spaces. This requires critically examining how my multiple identities are experienced (Jones et al., 2012) and then finding ways to disentangle the intersecting forces that constantly collide with one another.

Post-practicum reflection.

A Brief Moment

I didn't talk a lot about my experience in South Africa when I came back to Canada. Africa was much different this time around. This time I witnessed some of the painful truths about racial segregation and societal injustices, truths that were concealed for so many years when I was growing up during Apartheid. How do I describe to people what I experienced this time around without wondering to myself whether it is appropriate to move into spaces where the people probably see me as part of the larger force of power that controlled their lives for so many years? I was a "brief moment", a snapshot in their lives. I was a girl with no long-term commitment but rather, a distant traveller who chose to move back and forth between two worlds, trying to find the sincerities in mankind while preventing these worlds from colliding too much.

(Personal journal, July 2011)

One of my challenges in this research has been to uncover the diverse range of voices that creep into my personal narratives and explore how these voices collide or overlap with one another. This idea calls into question how I produce and share my academic voice in this research while ensuring that my personal voice remains reflexive and truthful. It further challenges my perceptions about why I have always believed it is important to represent my voice as honest and good intentioned in CYC practice. Could it be that my intentions do not influence honest and ethical practice in a "good" way? Do my concerns lie in a set of beliefs that worry about my "failure" as a practicum student, or

more generally, about my professional capabilities? The danger in this research then becomes:

> How I can achieve detachment from my own emotionality in order to ferret out critical insights and address my own inadequacies that threaten my professional status in order to understand the complexity of intersectionality as I live it.
>
> (D. Scott, personal communication, February 26, 2013)

The journal excerpt that I have shared above signifies my multiple identities as a white, female Canadian university student and also documents the "innocent" parts of myself as a child living in the midst of the Apartheid. My personal thoughts in this excerpt expose my dissonance with doing charity/care work in South Africa, while also highlighting the tensions of cultural displacement as both an insider and outsider.

True to autoethnographic writing, my reflection weaves into "the fabric of concrete, personal lived experiences, championing the cause of reflexive, experimental, autobiographical, and vulnerable text" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, as cited in Jones, 2009, p. 300). There must have been subtle ways that I interpreted my context, ways that informed my understanding about life in South Africa and my future responses to wanting to go back. The realities of Apartheid were shielded from me in some respect, yet there must have been ways that I made sense of the world there that I was leaving to the world I live in now – which frames my former way of witnessing South Africa as an innocent child inside a sheltered context. This has resulted in me moving back into a part of my history and experience to explore the present day effects of colliding worlds, and what it means to help others in colonized spaces.

Analytical Approach

The central focus of my research is the exploration of my experience as an international practicum student in a Majority World context by critically examining the ethical quandaries that surfaced for me after returning home from this diverse space. This examination has implications on multiple levels; for example, being a white female, a student, a visitor as well as a former resident of South Africa. These aspects of myself are constantly intersecting and colliding.

To guide my inquiry, I have employed an authoethnographic methodological approach, which moves in and out of the emotions and experiences as both researcher and narrator by critically exploring and then mapping my personal voice and perspectives. Carolyn Ellis (2004) breaks down the roots for the word autoethnography as "part *auto* or self and part *ethno* or culture. It also is something different from both of them, greater than its parts" (p. 32). The "I" used in autoethnographic text can work in between the autobiographical and ethnographic instincts, enabling an inward/outward gaze that locates particular experiences of the researcher within larger social and historical contexts (Harris, 2011). Supporting the notion that autoethnography is more than just a narrative or story of the self, Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chan (2010) assert that, "this systematic and intentional approach to the socio-cultural understanding of self sets autoethnography apart from other self-narrative writings such as memoir and autobiography" (p. 2). Using this approach, I will be working within a particular analytical framework that draws from feminist poststructural, and postcolonial scholarship by addressing the complexities of international practicum work within an intersectional analysis. This enables me to confront issues of race, class, gender and privilege in a critically reflexive way. Emerging

out of feminist theory, intersectionality recognizes and explores multiple identities (e.g., race, gender, class, ability, sexual orientation) and makes visible the complexity of social processes by looking at overlapping, interactive dimensions of diversity. As Shields (as cited in Jones et al., 2012) explains at length:

> Intersectionality first and foremost reflects the reality of lives. The facts of our lives reveal that there is no single identity category that satisfactorily describes how we respond to our social environment or are responded to by others. It is important to begin with this observation because concern about intersectionality from a theoretical or research perspective has grown directly out of the way in which multiple identities are experienced. (p. 702)

This research does not happen in total isolation, as there is a complex story leading me as the researcher to choose this particular topic. Applying a framework of intersectionality allows for an exploration of the multiple and layered parts of identity that are constructed and negotiated within larger sociocultural contexts (Jones, 2009). Being born and raised in South Africa complicates my story because it creates different (overlapping) identities and perspectives that I have taken on as an insider, an outsider, a Canadian, a South African, and a professional helper working in complex, shifting, global environments. These positions are interlocking, but also need to be explored separately throughout my critical analysis.

Embraced by contemporary feminists and postmodern scholars, intersectionality signifies more than theories or ideologies, but expresses a layer of political consciousness and action (Levine-Rasky, 2011). By applying an intersectional lens to my research I am attempting to move away from modernist ideologies, which produce normative ideas

about social processes and human diversity (de Finney, personal communication, July 2012), while still taking into consideration that ideas of "First/Third World", "North-South", "privileged/underprivileged", "developed/developing" are thought of as normative concepts (Schmid, 2010), and should be persistently scrutinized in order to retreat from the dualistic categories created by these terms. By unpacking these ideas in greater depth, I hope to generate thoughtful discussion that does not reinforce inequality and minoritization amongst groups who are considered to be "positioned as outsiders to dominant norms, and consequently seen to fall short of the standards of the dominant group" (de Finney, Dean, & Loiselle, 2011, p. 5). To be more precise, I hope to conduct my inquiry in a way that examines how global processes and societal inequities influence our motivations and desire as CYC practicum students to work internationally in impoverished communities in the "South". Furthermore, I ask the following question: As a profession, how can we create a willingness to continually reflect and scrutinize our motivations for helping others before, during and after international field placements in majority world contexts?

Key Concepts and Their Relevance to my Study

In *Becoming an ally: The cycle of oppression in people,* Bishop (2002) states that "with so little understanding of ourselves as part of a collective entity, it becomes very difficult to figure out our own responsibility for patterns larger than ourselves" (p. 96). These patterns begin with larger global forces such as capitalism that shape my social position as well as my understanding of colonial activity: essentially everything I act on or stand for. Heron (2007) explains how vital it is to examine the ways that global forces

compromise us because if we do not understand how historicized colonial relations impact the world as well as ourselves, then "we are bound to help reproduce it" (p. 22). It is important then to examine how these global patterns transform and intersect with our "selves" and our stories through time and space (Razack, 2002). Autoethnographic inquiry reveals the deep entanglement of these stories, which are tied to history, the present day, and likely future occurrences, thus making the process of writing and structuring this thesis complex and messy. It is important at this early stage that I introduce terms such as Apartheid/Post-apartheid, Colonialism/Post-colonialism, Whiteness/White Privilege, Race/Racialization, as each of these terms will be considered in the upcoming chapters. Embedded in these ideas are pieces of my own history and personal experiences that have led me to write about the complexities of international practicum placements. For that reason, I have included a personal narrative for most of these concepts in order to illustrate the intersections between my history as a white settler and the social and political forces that shape our understanding of the human services field.

Apartheid/Post Apartheid.

> Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply. Let him not laugh too gladly when the water runs through his fingers, nor stand too silent when the setting sun makes red the veld with fire. Let him not be too moved when the birds of his land are singing, nor give too much of his heart to a mountain or a valley. For fear will rob him of all if he gives too much.
>
> (Paton, 1948, Chapter 12)

Several years ago, I picked up the book, "Cry, the beloved Country" and did not put it down for two days. Alan Paton's story taught me about the cry out for justice - a plea to end the laws that institutionalized inequality in South Africa. This book showed me the trials of a country that I had lived in but never really understood. And in many

ways, it taught me about the HOPE that some people still have despite the adversities they are faced with.

(Personal journal, January 2013)

It is not my intent to provide a thorough historical analysis about the events that contributed to the system of Apartheid in South Africa. However, it is necessary that I offer a brief description of both Apartheid and Post-apartheid South Africa given the area of my research and my evolving relationship with this country as both an inhabitant and a visitor.

Apartheid.

Before my parents emigrated to South Africa from England, my father spoke to the representative in the South Africa House in London. "What is apartheid?" my father asked. The reply was, "Economically we mix, socially we don't" (K. Jones, personal communication, July 2012).

Apartheid, meaning "apartness" or "separateness" (Davenport, 1987) worked to create a system of social exclusion and power against nonwhite inhabitants in South Africa while protecting territorial separation and maintaining white domination. The *Population of Registration Act of 1950* (Davenport, 1987) classified the South African population into separate racial groups: *Bantu* (all Black Africans), *Colored* (those of mixed race), and *White*. Grounded in a history of struggles that circulated around identity, race, and power since the 1600s, the Apartheid era is said to be the most striking example of ongoing minoritization in South Africa (Schmid, 2010).

Post-Apartheid.

The beginning of a new democratic state in 1994 brought about a time of extreme social and psychological amendment for South Africans (Steyn & Foster, 2008) as political and social equality was restored from a history of colonization and white domination. Post-apartheid South Africa is described by some as the "era of the 'rainbow nation'" (Schmid, 2010). However, despite the efforts to remediate the injustices visited upon nonwhite inhabitants during the Apartheid era, the "New South Africa" (Steyn & Foster, 2008) still remains racially segregated and skeptical in a sense. As Samantha Vice (2010) explains in her paper, *How do I live in this strange place?*:

> Our equally famous history of stupifying injustice and inhumanity feels still with us: its effects press around us every day, in the visible poverty, the crime that has affected everyone, the child beggars on the pavements, the *de facto* racial segregation of living spaces, in who is serving whom in restaurants and shops and in homes. South Africa is a strange and morally tangled place to live in.
>
> (p. 323)

Vice's last line above spells out the profoundness of both historical and present day experiences that have implicated South Africa as a country. Her description of the era after Apartheid says to me that while Apartheid as an official policy may be a matter of the past, the colonial legacy and racial discrimination still play a significant role in present day South Africa.

Coloniality/Colonialism/Postcolonialism.

In her analysis on mapping whiteness and coloniality within the human services field, Saraceno (2012) provides a useful inventory of Euro-Western world views by

defining coloniality as “an explicit analysis of the power of existing social structures and roots in colonial history” which essentially “captures the intersection of colonialism with capitalism and their modernist roots, which underpin the dominant Western ontology” (p. 252).

Saraceno also argues that colonialism is significant to professionals in the human services field because “it is embedded in all contemporary structures and institutions of Canadian society” (p. 251). According to Thomas and Wilkin (2004), there is no simple way to define postcolonial studies, but it is generally concerned with the complexities of power relations between European nations and colonized countries who have been declared as “Third World”. Postcolonial studies trace the active forces of colonialism within the context of international development work, by connecting histories of colonialism with “issues of identity, history, and culture that are the direct result of the colonial experience” (Skott-Myhre as cited in Saraceno, 2012, p. 251). Razack (2002) highlights the legacy of colonization as an ongoing process where economies continue to be affected by the settlement of White Europeans and the perpetuation of racism. Larson (as cited in Ife, 2001) refers to postcolonialism as “the body of thinking and writing that seeks to move beyond colonialist oppression, to find a voice for those who have been silenced by that oppression, and to challenge the perpetuation of structures and discourses of colonialism” (p. 113). Postcolonialism is deeply tied into new attempts to “recognize and reverse patterns of colonialist domination” (Ife, 2001, p. 114).

Whiteness/White Privilege.

The skin I live in

I didn't realize I was ignoring it while I was in South Africa, and by "it" I mean that strikingly visible difference between my skin color and theirs. It's a challenge because quite often in CYC we talk about being non-judgmental, our personal biases, and embracing diversity and I'm not saying that I didn't do that…but even those moments when I would start to think about how obvious it was that I was a visitor or maybe even an "imposter" in their eyes, well, it put me in a vulnerable state because it is not just that I have white skin and they have black. It tacks on to so much more…the power that I have (or don't have) being a white woman in the township, or my privilege, and ability to move in and out of that space when I want. It's complicated and unsettling to think about my skin color in that way.

(Personal Journal, December 2012)

Central to my analysis on the complexities of international practicum work is the concept of "whiteness". This narrative brings visibility to the notion of whiteness that often goes unrecognized or unnamed (Kivel, 2002; Perry, 2002; Levine-Rasky, 2011; Saraceno, 2012). Whiteness goes beyond talking about skin color by illustrating cultural difference, political power, Euro-Western dominance, and special access to privileges. Babbs (as cited in Levine-Rasky, 2011) explains whiteness as "more than a classification of physical appearance; it is largely an invented construct blending history, culture, assumptions and attitudes" (p. 246). Verwy and Quayle (2012) address the historical link between whiteness and privilege, explaining how whiteness almost always becomes a universal category of race and ethnicity "that also offers the opportunity to maintain this

privilege" which was "reserved for white South Africans" (p. 556) since privilege was inextricably linked to power and socioeconomic advantage. Rodriguez (as cited in Saraceno, 2012) classifies whiteness:

> First, as a location of structural advantage, or race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint", a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, at society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p. 253)

These conceptualizations centered on whiteness and white privilege co-exist with other dominant social discourses and are always shifting and changing, never being carefully separated from one another (di Tomasso, 2012). In later chapters, I will explore whiteness more critically by examining its intersection with my own historical and cultural contexts. I will also examine how my personal assumptions and attitudes merge in between these systems and structures.

Race/Racialization.

> *I didn't want you attending a state school. They believed in Apartheid. So I paid for you to go to a private school where blacks and whites were still allowed to mix.*
>
> *(K. Jones, personal communication, June, 2012)*

Racialization is defined as "the process whereby racial categories are constructed as different and unequal in ways that lead to social, economic and political impacts" (Multicultural Community Health Centre, 2007, p. 1). Rodriguez (as cited in Saraceno, 2011) highlights that "race is not a natural, fixed phenomena but rather a social construct whose one constant or guarantee is its changing significance and effects given its evolving historical interaction and intersection with the political" (p. 253). Kothari (2006) offers a

similar viewpoint in her analysis of "race" in development, suggesting that race is context-specific, always linking to specific colonial histories and historical events. Kothari asserts that the silences about race are intimately linked to "the concealment of its effects", which originate from the notion "that development takes place in non-racialized spaces and outside of racialized histories" (p. 9).

My father's choice to resist Apartheid laws by sending me to private school was only possible because he was financially able to do so. This choice also becomes political, because at the time, his actions resisted dominant ideas in South Africa that blacks and whites should be segregated. This entanglement of social structures also involves notions of power and privilege that we had as a white, middle-class family. This demonstrates that nothing is one-dimensional or explicit. Some of the ways in which his resistance was made possible was because of other privileges we had, specifically economic advantages and the freedom - because of our whiteness – to choose an independent school.

The political, socially constructed terms that I am describing here offer a brief description of some pertinent issues related to my topic. In the following chapter, I continue my research journey with an examination of relevant literature that speaks to a variety of topics deeply entangled in these key concepts. As I move forward with my analysis, my hope is that some of these issues will start to unravel with the intention to create new critical insights about international practicum work in the field of CYC.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

This literature review was conducted to explore existing scholarship on international practicum placements among university students working in Majority World, (cross-cultural) contexts. I was able to find multiple articles, books, editorials and reviews relating to the subject of international practica. The search terms I used included *international practicum work, child and youth care practice, field placements abroad, global South, Majority World, professional ethics* and *international development worker.* I initially used these terms as they seemed the most relevant to my research topic, but then later expanded my search to include *international social work* and *international volunteering* after retrieving only a few relevant articles.

I begin with a review of professional child and youth care (CYC) practice and situate the work within a broader social and professionalized context. Most of the articles published on international fieldwork have emerged from other human service fields, including social work and education, so I provide an overview of this literature next. The selected articles of this review are instrumental in identifying relevant themes and concepts connected to my research questions.

Given that my research is framed within the context of ethical practice, it is important that I begin this chapter with an overview of the professional nature of CYC – highlighting the recognized tensions and ambiguities inherent in this specified field, and connecting these ideas to theorized notions of ethical practice in CYC. I am curious particularly about the parallels between core values and principles in CYC practice with other human service disciplines such as social work and education, since much of the literature that I retrieved

on international practicum placements is written from the position of these allied professions. Following this, I shift my focus to examine literature that addresses key ideas related to international work. The articles selected for this section of the review were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. They explore generalized notions about field placements in human service professions by highlighting personal and professional implications of cross-cultural experiences in a professionalized field of study;
2. They address cultural preparation (Barlow, 2007; Razack, 2002) and cross cultural engagements in Global South communities (Crump, 2010; Heron, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2011; Kothari, 2006; Mwebi & Brigham, 2009);
3. They define the global North and global South dichotomy in the context of international work. (Heron, 2006; Hiranandani, 2011; Razack, 2005); and
4. They examine the ethical issues associated with international work in Majority World contexts (Epprecht, 2004; Heron, 2006, 2007, 2011; Larsen & Allen, 2006; Razack, 2002, 2005; Schmid, 2010, Wehbi, 2009).

Professional Child and Youth Care

Over the past several decades, Child and Youth Care practice "has diversified, developed theoretically and evolved philosophically through changing social and political contexts" (Alsbury, 2010, p. 30). In White's (2007) article, *Knowing, Doing and Being in Context: A Praxis oriented Approach to Child and Youth Care,* a comprehensive and relatively recent review of CYC practice is offered – highlighting some of the conceptual foundations that are believed to legitimize the status of CYC as a professionalized field.

The characteristics of CYC practice are deeply tied into a distinct set of professional values and principles, which support the professional nature of CYC as holistic, developmentally-informed and committed to understanding human diversity from an approach that is strengths-based and collaborative (White, 2007). In her article, White also speaks to the complexities embedded in CYC practice, arguing that our work as CYC practitioners becomes "more than just learning some theories, adopting some attitudes, and mastering some skills that can be applied in a straightforward, unproblematic manner when the time is right" (p. 242). These ideas emphasize CYC practice as dynamic and unique – "characterized by choices and dilemmas, ambiguities, ethical tensions, and competing sets of interests about what constitutes good and right action" (p. 242). In this light, the nature of CYC practice and education can be seen as more than just a prescribed set of values and theories, but rather as a complex process where practitioners build on their ability to develop reflexivity, critical self-awareness, and relational skills within diverse contexts (Phelan, 2005; White, 2007). On the whole, the complex features spoken about in CYC literature seem to indicate that the nature of the field, the different models of education, and the range of practice settings mitigate against there being one definitive way to categorize CYC as a profession. Additionally, the focus on "ethical practice" in the field of CYC remains far more ambiguous in the literature I have reviewed, since acting ethically is believed to be much more than following a definitive set of codified rules (White, 2011).

Ethical practice in CYC.

As highlighted by Freeman, Engels, and Altekruse (2004), "codes are the attempt to define the specific acts that all decent people or members of a profession would agree are right or wrong" (p. 164). Stuart (2001) articulates that "we work with personal awareness

as a fundamental principle and thus accountability for our personal and professional actions is built into the work we do and the standards we set for ourselves and our team-mates" (p. 274). My concern is: Do we all subscribe to these "codes" that are laid out for us? Or does our language, theoretical orientation, and the attributes of our professional self "create conceptual confusion in their attempt to be all things to all people" (Stuart, 2001, p. 164)? The North American Child and Youth Care Code of Ethics (Association for Child and Youth Care Practice, 1995) underlines our roles as professionals to defined principles and responsibilities. These "codes" provide us with guidelines to clarify questions concerning ethical choices and decisions. Freeman et al. (2004) argue that, "knowing a model to follow in ethical decision making or knowing what is required by the code of ethics is like knowing (in some cases) what to do, but not necessarily knowing why it should be done" (p. 173).

Professional ethics in CYC practice articulate desired competencies and guiding principles that aim to serve "practitioner self-awareness" (Garfat and Ricks, 1995, as cited in White, 2011, p. 35), accountability, and ethical responsiveness (to name a few). Yet, while ethical codes and competencies are drawn from professional "living documents" within CYC practice (as cited in White, 2011) such as the CYC Code of Ethics and the Competencies for Child and Youth Work Practitioners (CPCYWP). White suggests that ethical codes in CYC require a reconceptualized and more expansive view of professionalism and ethical practice. White (2011) argues for "a renewed emphasis on contextual understandings, emergent processes, relational and political engagement, and critical reflexivity" (p. 48). In doing so, professional ethics in CYC practice may shift from

traditional, individualistic, and standardized approaches to CYC practice, making room for more renewed ways of thinking about ethics in CYC practice.

The personal values of helping and the ethical codes in CYC practice may at times "collide", thus creating the dilemma of personal morals and values seeming to be contradictory to a critical approach in professional CYC practice. One example of this "collision" exists in cross-cultural engagements when professional standards that have been informed by CYC education and practice in Euro-Western contexts come up against the personal values of the practitioner who now experiences the ways that codified rules such as *best interests of the child,* and *dual/overlapping relationships* (to name two) are not always culturally attuned. This creates a complicated space for both the community and the practitioner. Embedded in this "complicated space" is where my conceptualization about personal morals and critical practice collide, which I will speak to in greater depth in upcoming chapters.

Linking ideas between allied helping professions.

Before moving further into my exploration about the generalized concepts of international practicum placements, it is appropriate that I underline some of the significant parallels relating to core values in allied helping professions with the professional ideologies and goals that CYC maintains as a profession. The website of the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria suggests that the ability to critically reflect and develop self-awareness is a core value in CYC education in order to ensure accountable, respectful, ethically sound practice across diverse cultures and contexts (SCYC, 2012, SCYC Values section). I have uncovered similar perspectives relating to professional values within the social work literature. For example, Furlong and Wight

(2011) emphasize the importance of expanding one's ability to engage in reflective self-scrutiny by arguing for a stronger commitment towards the development of "critical awareness", which is believed to advance ones professional approach toward respectful, accountable action – ideas strongly connected to the core values deeply rooted in CYC education. Additional key ideas addressed in social work literature are the implicit conceptual understandings of what it means to be a "self" in professional practice (Kondrat, 1999), which usually involves a commitment on the part of the practitioner to develop an understanding of social location, personal values and choices, as well as a reflexive stance to practice – all of which are similarly defined core principles in CYC discourse. Speaking more intensely to the notion of "self" in practice, social work scholars, Heron (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007; 2011) and Schmid (2010) address the connection between the exploration of "self" and dimensions of power – which can be perceived as dynamic features that emerge simultaneously in diverse professional experiences. Schmid (2010) emphasizes the necessity for practitioners to assume a reflexive stance in relation to the ways that dimensions of power and social location are implicated in professional helping relationships. Heron (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007; 2011) examines more closely how personal identities and approaches to practice are deeply entangled in larger social structures of domination. These themes will be discussed more extensively in subsequent chapters as they underline some of the central ideas embedded in cross-cultural practice in diverse settings.

While it is true that most of the literature in this review originates in other professionalized fields of study (predominantly social work), the core values and professional standards that are emphasized in allied disciplines speak in ways that are

remarkable in their similarity to the professional goals of CYC practice. In the following section, I explore some of the ways that "international field placements" are conceptualized in recent literature while also examining the personal and professional implications of cross-cultural experiences within this specified context.

Introducing the Concept of "Field Placements"

Nearly all of the published literature that I encountered on the topic of fieldwork and practicum placements focus on the experiences of professionals and students enrolled in the social work and teaching professions (Barlow, 2007; Furlong & Wight, 2011; Heron, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2011; Maidment, 2006; Panos, 2005; Pawar, Hanna & Sheridan, 2004; Razack, 2005; Weibe, 2010), with few publications on the topic of practicum experiences within the CYC profession. *The International Practicum Student Handbook* (n.d.) written by former CYC students, Nashira Birch and Paula Klassen is the only document that I was able to obtain that explores the issues and concerns that may emerge for students who are thinking about embarking on an international placement in their final year as an undergraduate CYC student. This handbook addresses a variety of issues from financial considerations to cross-cultural matters. Some examples include, how to overcome feelings of "First World Guilt", and dealing with different stages of culture shock in "Third World contexts". Other sections in the handbook include: establishing learning goals, finding a suitable placement, and cross-cultural preparation. Essentially, this document was written with the intent to generate thoughtful questions and evoke new considerations from students about the complexities of international practicum placements. The authors also stipulate that the ideas presented in the handbook are

intended to be "constantly evolving" – thus making this handbook a living document, and something that can be added to or reexamined over time. Many of the ideas in the *CYC International Practicum Handbook* speak in similar ways to the descriptions and critical considerations expressed in much of the literature retrieved for this review. In the following section, I draw primarily from current descriptions about practicum field placements within cross-cultural contexts, focusing on both professional and personal experiences that students face when practicing overseas.

The general understanding of practicum field placements is that they are designed to enrich practice in specific applied contexts (Barlow, 2007; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Panos, 2005; Razack, 2002). They also prepare students to practice self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-knowledge in their educational experiences (Lough, 2009; Wiebe, 2010). According to Gizynski (as cited in Giddings, Vodde & Cleveland, 2004), some individuals who have engaged in cultural immersion practices through university programs "consider the field practicum to be the core of their educational experience and a valued part of their training" (p. 192). In her general description of practicum courses, Razack (2002) draws a connection between theory and practice and asserts that practicum sites provide "the space to introduce new learning, [and] can lay the ground work for an anti-racist and anti-oppressive framework for practice" (p. 17). Razack's idea also supports the generalized notion that it is worthwhile to explore more extensively the personal and professional implications of "hands-on" experiences in a professionalized field of study.

Discussion about university programs in the fields of education and social work both share a common perception that practicum work serves as an orientation into the professional world (Barlow, 2007; Heron, 2005; Ong'ondo & Jwang, 2009; Wehbi, 2009),

with an additional layer that emphasizes anti-oppressive, culturally-sensitive behaviors in international practicum environments (Larsen & Allen, 2006; Razack, 2002, 2005; Wehbi, 2011). The term "anti-oppressive practice" (AOP) is referred to a great deal in social work literature – speaking to fundamental ideas and perspectives that frame one's approach to practice. Anti-oppressive approaches in social work respond to structures of power, oppression, and discrimination amongst minority groups (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005), positioning professionals in a space where they have the capacity to practice self-knowledge and self-awareness.

The practicum placement is understood to involve the student in learning outside of academic walls by exposing their knowledge within social, cultural, and political contexts in different professional environments (Lough, 2009; Mwebi & Brigham, 2009; Wiebe, 2010). This learning process, which involves the movement of theory into action – where *action* becomes *practice* within specific contexts and highlights contemporary understandings of CYC praxis where "words and actions, discourses and experience merge (Stacey 2001, as cited in White, 2007, p. 226). It is in this space where reflexive practice exists. In the experiences of practicum students, reflexivity manifests in ones ability to engage in "ethical, self-aware, responsive and accountable action", defined by White (2007) as a core feature of "praxis" (p. 226) – which lends itself to the multi-layered relationship between the diverse ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Motivations.

In her theoretical paper on international social work placements, Wehbi (2009) considers students' motivations for wanting to work internationally for their practicum

placements. Revealing her social position as a practitioner and educator in the field of social work, Wehbi (2009) attempts to "make a strong case for [our] role placement before going abroad" (p. 57). In her paper, Wehbi discusses students' intentions and motivations aimed at travelling abroad – noting fascination/curiosity of "the Other", wanting to make a difference, and giving back to others as common motivations for choosing to study abroad. "Encountering the Other" seems to be a common point of discussion in many of the articles that critically explore student experiences in international settings. These pervasive ideas centered on Euro-Western beliefs essentially create multiple layers of positioning in development work by pointing out dichotomous categories of privilege, race, space, and power.

Wehbi's (2009) analysis on deconstructing motivations for international work placements are similar to the perspectives presented by Larson and Allen (2006) in their study on the experiences of Canadian social work students engaged in a 10-day experiential learning project in Mexico. The main reasons that Mexico was chosen as the site for these students was because of its geographical location in relation to Canada, and because of its diverse historical, cultural, and social context that is believed to provide valuable learning opportunities for Canadian students. In their article, Larson and Allen (2006) discuss how international work and the promotion of cultural immersion experiences is becoming more common in social work practice. These authors explore the necessity to increase cultural sensitivity, competence, and awareness of human diversity in the context of international social work practice. They focus on the concept of *conscientization*, which is described as "the deepening attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence…from their submergence in the dense, enveloping reality of life situation"

(Freire, 2000, as cited in Larson & Allen, 2006, p. 508). In their study, many of the students reported that their experience in Mexico was an "immensely valuable learning experience" (p. 516). Throughout the article, the process of conscientization was looked at in greater depth by exploring two emerging themes; (a) whether the experiential learning project in Mexico did in fact create a new awareness about global issues such as poverty, privilege and structural inequities within the community; and (b) the formulation of an analysis and description based on the process of conscientization. Based on the discussion generated by the students involved in the study, the authors found that, "it is through experiential learning that students begin to examine their own understanding and views of poverty, difference and global connectedness" (p. 516).

Kothari's (2006) critical analysis concerning the silences around "race" in development practices and ideologies addresses how binaries are found in "the idea of (under) development itself" since "development is based on the assumption that some people and places are less developed than others" (p. 13). These ideas suggest a lack of appreciation for the colonial histories and bearings that are deeply entrenched in cross-cultural relations between professional helpers in the North and poor countries in the South. Kothari (2006) addresses these dichotomies in her article, *An Agenda for Thinking about 'Race' in Development* by highlighting "First" and "Third" world distinctions. These distinctions are rooted in colonial era orderings, which identify some countries as "civilized" while other countries exist to provide resources and labor to the imperial power. As Persaud and Walker (as cited in Kothari, 2006) theorize, these binaries "are founded upon the racialized process of othering, 'a complex of cultural and political practices that instantiate identity by framing and reproducing difference' between those

who hold knowledge and those to whom it should be imparted" (p. 13). Pflanz (2011), who uses an autoethnographic methodology to explore international development work in her research, reveals that, "it is difficult to scrutinize 'our shared presence' without binaries" (p. 64). This idea presents a particular challenge for me as I start to problematize my professional helping role versus my moral identity, calling into question how I occupy or negotiate different positions when they are "multiple and contradictory" (Heron, 2007).

Narda Razack's (2005) qualitative study focuses on the experiences of Canadian social work faculty and students (10 white participants and 8 nonwhite – referred to as minority in this article) who travelled abroad for research and practicum purposes. In this study, Razack examines how identity is constructed in spaces abroad while also investigating how "white and minority bodies are viewed differently in Northern and Southern spaces" (p. 88). These ideas illustrate how deeply our identities become tied up in complex webs of dominance, power, reflexivity, ignorance, self-awareness, and desire, while also reinforcing the paradox behind our intention to become ethical, culturally competent professional helpers.

In an effort to offer Canadian perspectives on the experiences of social work practice in an international context, Hiranandani (2011) addresses the importance of critically exploring "our Canadian identity in order to practice international work that is socially just and anti-imperialist" (p. 87). In this essay, the author focuses on the implications of "White, European, English-speaking Canadians" (p. 87) who choose to practice social work in countries identified as the global South. By asserting the importance of unpacking and critically exploring one's identity prior to working abroad, Hiranandani underlines the necessity to "set our own house in order first and connect the

dots between our own ideologies, domestic, and foreign policies, and the fate of the 'Third World' if we wish to make a lasting impact on poverty and injustice around the globe" (p. 91).

Within the sources reviewed thus far, there is a commonality to the ideas presented by some of the authors who suggest that international work requires an honest attempt on the part of the student to critically engage in self-examination (Hiranandani, 2011) on cross-cultural awareness, as well as on perceptions and values as a Canadian practicum student. In these articles, the authors also pay close attention to oppressive elements that may emerge through unspoken assumptions related to privilege, power, and global inequities (Hiranandani, 2011; Kothari, 2006; Larsen & Allen, 2006). In the following section, I examine how the internationalization of social work practice and other human services disciplines are conceptualized in global North and global South countries.

From Global North to the Global South

Much of the literature on international practicum work relies on a "First World"/"Third World" dichotomy. It seems as though generalized assumptions are made about the location of international work in the human services field, with the belief that there is a one-way movement of ideas and knowledge from Western settings to global South countries in Africa, South America, and Asia (Barlow, 2007; Heron, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2011; Hiranandani, 2011; Larsen & Allen, 2006). For example, it has been suggested in the literature explored thus far that international work means relocating our position in the "developed" nation to help communities in the "global South" who are presumed to be "in need". Haug (as cited in Hiranandani, 2011) argues that for

"Northerners to continue to go overseas to 'help' is not only unhelpful but presumptuous, paternalistic, and inherently problematic" (p. 89).

As discussed by Heron (2006) in her article, *Critically Considering Social Work Practica,* "beyond personal motivations, there seems to be something else at work that renders such choices both pervasive and normalized: something more fundamental that invites interrogation from a critical perspective" (para. 12). In her writing, Heron (2006) conceptualizes ideas pertaining to practicum work in the global South by drawing from a critical social work perspective. Heron pays respect to the importance of the use of language, which "implicitly references placements in countries of the South" (para. 7) and further notes that international opportunities, either through volunteer agencies, or through academic institutions, are not limited to Southern countries, although this seems to be the area that attracts most individuals. Interestingly, these ideas centered on movement towards "developing countries" in the South usually means locations in Africa, or South America, omitting such "developed" countries as New Zealand and Australia that are also located in the Southern hemisphere. In spite of this, Heron (2006) asserts that in the context of professional preparation, the "international practicum" most often implies that the placement is located in a "developing" country, also referred to as the Majority World or the global South.

When differentiating between "North" and "South", the author suggests that these terms "roughly correspond to the 'First World'/'Third World' terminology of the Cold War era, and the 'developed'/'developing' dichotomy" (para. 3). According to Solarz (2012), these terms have both a political and socioeconomic meaning and are rooted in colonial orderings that continue to widen the gap between North-South opposition. In short,

Heron's (2006) article addresses these complex meanings by looking at how the perspectives of Canadian social workers are constructed to understand the developing world. Challenging conceptualizations such as "entitlement" and "altruism," Heron is arguing that students should critically reflect on their motivations for travelling to the South to help children and families who are faced with systemic oppression, poverty, and colonization.

Experiences in Cross-Cultural Engagements

Much of the literature on international work discusses cross-cultural engagements as a time when practicum students are presented with new opportunities to develop relationships with individuals living in different countries and to experience diverse cultural traditions and values often at odds with their own (Crump, 2010; Giddings et al., 2004; Heron, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2011; Panos, 2005; Pawar et al., 2004; Wiebe, 2010). Barlow (2007) emphasizes that these "engagements" become "a powerful learning tool that invites students to confront different views of human behavior, learn different systems of social welfare and see different ways to remediate social problems" (p. 243). Barlow's (2007) article, *In the Third Space: A Case Study of Canadian Students in a Social Work Practicum in India*, explores the experiences of 11 social work practicum students who completed their field placement in a child welfare agency in southern India. In this case study, the students were interviewed on their experiences, while on-site field supervisors conducted observations and focus groups. The premise of this study uses H.K. Bhabha's (1994, as cited in Barlow, 2007) conceptual framework of *Third Space* to illuminate the experiences of these students. While Barlow explains that *Third Space* does

not carry a specific definition, in this article, it is described as "a place of strangeness, a borderline place where cultural differences touch and become 'moments of panic'" (Bhabha, as cited in Barlow, 2007, p. 244).

In Barlow's (2007) study, the students' connection with culture and their efforts to negotiate the differences between cultural values were highlighted through reflections on their practicum experiences in India. Toward the end of the article, Barlow discusses the notion of involving oneself in the third space, asserting that this space becomes "the space of cultural difference between Canadian and Indian culture, the possibilities to entertain difference emerged and were often articulated in the form of paradox, as for example in the comment from the student who both loved and hated India" (p. 251). The ideas presented in Barlow's article challenge students working in overseas placements to examine their beliefs on ethnocentrism and anti-oppressive practice in diverse communities.

Alison Crump (2010) discusses similar ideas in her narrative on cross-cultural engagements in the 'third space'. Her narrative exploration on her personal cross-cultural experiences of teaching English in Japan, draws from ideas similar to Bhabha's (1994, as cited in Barlow, 2007) conceptualization of "Third Space" in international practicum work. Crump's narrative however, references Edward Soja's (1996) conceptual framework of "Third Space", which "embraces the concrete and the abstract, the real and the imagined experience of culture" (p. 79). This perspective identifies the insight that experiencing culture, "is by nature complex, multifarious and ambiguous" (p. 88). Throughout Crump's (2010) narrative, she emphasizes that her cultural awareness did not begin in Japan but rather in her childhood experiences, which essentially created the foundation for her

worldview about diverse cultures. Sharkey (2004, as cited in Crump, 2010) describes culture as collective, arguing that, "it has a history that we inherit through stories. As we live these stories, we are connected to our outer culture; we share a discourse that allows us to find commonality" (p. 79). Within the framework of these ideas, it is evident that becoming involved in the third space during international practicum placements involves finding a connection to both the personal and public cultures (Crump, 2010). Crump (2010) argues that as practitioners "we must understand our personal engagements with culture and how these personal engagements are reflected back to us from the public" (p. 79). What Crump (2010) leaves out are clearly defined ethical implications that coincide with Third Space conceptualizations in considering educational experiences abroad.

The Ethics of International Work

With regard to the ethical implications of working overseas in global South communities, much of the literature emphasizes developing a stronger understanding toward cross-cultural diversity (Mwebi & Brigham, 2009) by considering anti-oppressive behaviors and culturally sensitive practices in the context of international work (Heron, 2011; Larsen & Allen, 2006; Wehbi, 2009). For example, Heron (2011) invites the reader to consider the ethical challenges associated with placements in Southern countries, specifically short-term placements that are two to three months in length, expressing her concerns as follows:

> Short-term Northerners are likely to have "big agendas" and not enough time to do everything they intend to do; there is not enough time for short-term volunteers, students and interns to share skills or complete work on a project before they leave;

> they are susceptible to illness because of food and water they have not adjusted to; short-term Northerners may be demanding or impose their own values and knowledge; they may also be arrogant; perhaps most importantly – the short-term experience may contribute to the volunteer's growth but not the NGO's growth. (p. 113)

Larsen and Allen (2006) explore similar ideas regarding student experiences and structural inequalities in diverse communities. They emphasize the creation of anti-oppressive practices in social work while establishing a more in-depth awareness of culture, human diversity, and the development of a critical response to self-reflection in international work settings. Moving forward with these themes, I want to examine more critically how these ethical complexities described in recent literature translates into CYC practice at the international level.

The Ethics of International Engagement and Service-Learning (EIESL) is a project located at the University of British Columbia (2011). The focus of the EIESL project is to develop a community of practice that sustains and supports international engagement endeavors by critically considering ethical approaches within an international setting. One of the theoretical frameworks adopted by the EIESL project is an *Ethic of Care*, which "does not promote a dependency relationship between people but talks about maintaining a relationship of interdependence and mutual efforts and benefits" ("Ethics of Care," para. 3). This important philosophy aims to minimize the power differential by finding space to work collectively with a community rather than imposing external values or judgments about how a community *should* behave. By fostering mutual efforts and critical consciousness, international practicum students may develop a stronger sense of cultural

competence and awareness in an international practice setting. Elaborating on the concept of cultural competence, a Mexican NGO employee cited on the EIESL website focuses on the responsibilities of students who have decided to work internationally shares the following observation:

> Students need to not only know the broad strokes of the culture they are coming …into but they need to also understand the divisions within it and they need to go deeper than stereotypes. Politics and history are very important and understanding these will help the volunteer to understand many things about culture. They will need to keep an open mind and know it is a process. (EIESL, 2010, para. 4)

Chapter Summary

It is evident from the literature that there are various ways in which international work in the human services field has been studied, conceptualized, and scrutinized over time. Many of the articles I looked at take the position that practicum experiences are designed to enrich the knowledge and professional growth of the student – highlighting particular standards within different helping professions in the human services field such as, "professional self-awareness", "cultural sensitivity", and "ethics of care". These themes also connect to more critical ideas addressed by some scholars who emphasize the need to examine personal motivations and how ones desire to intervene (Heron, 2007) is connected to structured power relations, systems of oppression, and privilege.

Based on the articles and studies that I read for this review – and perhaps, more specifically, those I could not find because they do not exist – it is apparent that there is a significant gap in knowledge relating to international practicum placements with respect

to CYC practice. Many of the articles touched on the historical positioning of colonization with regards to cross-cultural work in "global South" contexts, and the influence this may have on students and hosting countries who engage in cross-cultural exchanges – issues deeply connected to personal intentions, choice, motivations, and professional self-awareness within diverse contexts. Considering these ideas, I wonder what motivates CYC students to work overseas? What is their connection to the hosting country? How does their history/background impact their values about their own culture and the cultural differences they encounter in their placement? This also leads me to question whether it is possible to truly understand our positions as helpers in contexts that entangle us in local and global hierarchies and colonizing ideologies. In subsequent chapters I explore how *my* personal history as a white South African female complicated my position as a "global helper" returning to South Africa under different circumstances.

With these questions in mind, and given the overlap of similar values and professional standards within CYC's "sister disciplines", I believe I have not come up empty-handed in my quest to review literature related to my topic. In fact, given the paucity of articles on international work in CYC, I am led to believe that my study has the capacity to meaningfully contribute to the field, as well as to reach CYC students who are considering international work for their practicum placement.

Chapter 3- Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the methodological framework that I will use in this inquiry. The methods employed throughout this process have felt complex and in many ways have left me with more concerns and questions about the multiple aspects of self that I bring to this research. I believe it is important to convey my experience with honesty and self-critique through the practice of reflexivity, however recognize that "it is astonishingly easy to get lost in one's own story" (D. Scott, personal communication, February 2012), and just as easy to be unable to recognize the ways that my story or experience can speak to more – to beyond aspects of my "self" and my process. In this light, I hope to proceed with my research with enough distance to examine my topic objectively and analytically, while still allowing my "personal voice" to get to the heart of the matter.

Methods

I define this thesis as my autoethnographic journey – a process in which I aim to blur the lines between theory and method. In this process, I use personal narratives through the act of writing and interpretation as a way to theorize my research topic on international practicum placements. The data I use is portrayed through a selection of "present-day" journal entries that have been written and arranged in response to former journal entries (or as I describe them – "on-site data" or "on-site reflections") documented during my practicum experience in 2009. In addition to this, certain texts are retrieved from my practicum learning journals that were written and submitted to my supervisor in order to meet the practicum course requirements. I also use email correspondence

between my practicum supervisor and myself as another source of data in this study. Other texts that I engage with are drawn from my personal writings documented in my travel journal. Another method used in this study examines specific photographs that I took "on-site" during my placement. I found these visual representations were a useful tool during the data collection process. The photos that I had taken in the township, including the children, the community members, as well as the landscape inspire some of my reflections.

The production of my journal entries used in this thesis has been experimental, interpretive, and challenging. Furthermore, they continue to lead me down a complex path where aspects of myself move in and out of what I claim "to know" and what remains uncertain and concealed in different pieces of my lived experience. I use writing and self-examination as tools to make sense of my world and the experiences that have motivated me to research the complexities of CYC education at the international level.

Autoethnographic inquiry is unique in the sense that it prompts me to unravel the multiple layers of my experience that are tied up in the complexities of the "self". My approach in this research involves reflecting on, and interpreting "in the moment" experiences that were recorded during my placement in South Africa.

Who Benefits?

I used to think about professional boundaries in CYC practice as something we pay attention to in order to ensure the safety of our personal space while building relationships with clients. I think about Phelan's (2005) description of boundaries in CYC work which he describes as "much more intimate than in other professions" (p. 351). Is this true for all things related to our work as CYC professionals? I think about

autoethnography, and the intimate ways that I have connected with my story while still holding on to the fact that this is research, and therefore I must hold back a bit – not become too attached to the heartfelt ways that I convey my story in text. In this attempt, I hold on to the idea that I must remain honorable to myself and also to my profession. I know this process gives me the opportunity to bring forward my convictions, personal viewpoints and "self-scrutiny" (Furlong & Wight, 2011) about my work as an international practicum student, but how might other students or the CYC profession as a whole benefit from my story? How is my purpose and desire (related to both practice and research) shaped on different levels in multiple ways?

(Journal reflection, December 2012)

This journal reflection illustrates the evolving layers of my dual position as both practicum student and researcher. This reflexive space is where research and personal experience come together. In the journal reflection, I respond to the overlapping aspects of the professional and personal self that are undeniably represented as one in my work as a CYC student. This intersection between the personal and professional that comes up in my work permits me to take the position of reflexivity which Newbury (2007) defines as an approach "by which we engage in an ongoing process of identifying, considering, and even questioning the influence of personal and societal values on how we practice" (p. 53). In the same way, Pamela Moss (as cited in Butz & Besio, 2004) describes the concept of reflexivity as "permit[ting] us to position our own involvement in the production of knowledge, in the practice of science, in the politics of knowing and doing" (p. 358). Adopting a reflexive stance in practice and in my research as a CYC practicum student is

what has brought me to consider the complex and sometimes uncomfortable positions that I carry to the "developing world" as a privileged white female, inextricably linked to the socio-political contexts that are entangled in personal and professional experiences. However, the reflexive process reaches beyond my perceptions of self in both practice and research by shifting me into a space that facilitates a connection between my personal responses, and how this might have impacted (or will impact) those around me. For example, in my reflection, *Who Benefits?,* I am addressing my position as a researcher and student while also questioning how "desire", "self-scrutiny", and "purpose" might be inextricably linking me to these positions. In this light, the reflexive process becomes an unfolding process that responds to the complexities of intersectionality in my lived experience.

My Personal Pathway

Kirby, Greaves, and Reid (2006) describe the role of the researcher as someone who "needs the skills of an explorer: sharp senses of seeing, hearing, and feeling; a clear and curious mind; a bit of courage; and even a vision of the land to be explored" (p. 67). In this research, my exploration also involves the ability to move towards my data and reflect inwards with honesty and reflexivity, while moving back outwards into the role of the researcher to examine my ethnographic experience (Mizzi, 2010). This back and forth process commonly used in autoethnographic writing (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; de Freitas & Paton, 2009; Jones, 2009) is a method of engaging in reflexive writing, deconstructing the experiences, emotions, and thoughts of the writer, which in turn transforms the writing process into a "form of unusual testimony" (de Freitas & Paton, 2009, p. 479).

At the heart of autoethnography lies a common description that identifies this methodological orientation as a "process by which the researcher chooses to make explicit use of [their] own positionality, involvements and experiences as an integral part of ethnographic research" (Cloke, Crang, & Goodwin, 1999, as cited in Butz & Besio, 2004, p. 353). While I am new to this form of research writing, I am excited by the possibilities I see to initiate a sense of "immediacy" and "intimacy" (Ellis, 2004).

I have added the following passage to this section to illustrate two points. First, utilizing autoethnographic inquiry has the potential to "evoke a sense of transparency and presence" (de Freitas & Paton, 2009, p. 484) in my writing which (I hope) will capture the complexity of my experiences abroad. My second point illustrates how autoethnography fits into intersectional research by revealing how my experiences in South Africa are always intersecting, and can never be separated from the larger systemic forces that are embedded in structures of power and privilege.

The following journal entry was written upon reflection of a photograph I took while working at the school in South Africa. This photo was taken shortly after I arrived in the township for the first time. The photo shows three children playing on the train tracks, skipping from one track to another – fearless, innocent, and gratified by the simplicities of their environment.

Present-day reflection.

Landmarks

These children play on the train tracks, and I am shocked. No trepidation or concern for what may happen if a train comes. But I see this train track as representing something more than just a route for transportation or a "playground" for these

children. This track is a landmark that divides their opportunity to attend school from many of the hardships they experience once back at home in the settlement. It's a path that leads them to a place where they have the privilege to learn and to play with other children. And I stand on this side of the track…waiting to share this privilege with them.

In this study, my personal accounts reveal how I make sense of my practicum experience in Majority World contexts by sharing stories and ideas that consider emotional, political, and ethical concepts in CYC work. Within the postmodern academic world, "the narrative approaches typical of ethnography are now changing to facilitate a more personal point of view by emphasizing reflexivity and personal voice" (Tierne & Lincoln, 1997, as cited in Duncan, 2004, p. 3). Autoethnography promotes this opportunity by using personal narratives as the primary source of data. Since I will be framing my experiences by engaging in a reflexive view of my personal self (Anderson, 2006), my challenge now becomes to critically address how I will embrace a stance of reflexivity and self-awareness in my personal narratives. As mentioned earlier, adopting a reflexive stance in my roles as researcher and CYC practitioner insists that I continuously engage in critical reflection, while representing my stories in an autoethnographic style.

In the following section, I will explore my methodological approach in greater depth by highlighting the key ideas associated with autoethnography. In addition to this, I will identify some of the limitations and ethical considerations for using autoethnography in this research.

Auto – The Personal Experience

Bracketing emotions.

The moment a student considers travelling abroad to fulfill practicum requirements in CYC becomes the moment when personal stories and "global awareness" (Heron, 2011) begin to collide, because personal stories never exist outside of broader global contexts. The methodological application that I am bringing to my research creates a unique learning space to delve into the ethical complexities of overseas work. One of my concerns involves questioning whether this style of representation will be taken seriously. This concern is situated in a complicated place where my primary and secondary responses collide. When I speak about my primary responses, I am conveying the emotional, psychological, and intellectual triggers that developed from my experience as a practicum student. These triggers were influenced by how I chose to conduct myself as an international helper, how I was able to attune myself to the cultural disparities that were present in my practicum setting, and also how I responded to ethical and moral dilemmas in those moments. Some of these primary responses include tensions that surfaced due to my lack of knowledge about the cultural practices in the Zulu community and also the vulnerability and uncertainty that I sensed in myself to practice with competence and morality in a diverse context. On a subsequent level, my secondary response is informed by another distinct voice in my writing – the more nervous voice that attempts to describe the awkward and difficult parts of self-reflexive writing. This second level voice awakens me to the uncertainties and challenges of autoethnographic writing, leading me to wonder if the uncertainties and guilt that I faced in my practicum experience manifest themselves in my attempt to write with critical-reflexivity in my research. Can I convey the connection

I have to my experiences as an international worker while also distancing myself enough to critically reflect on these experiences? I find that I have multiple distinct voices in my writing that have influenced why I chose this methodological approach in the first place, which makes the power of voice a fundamental aspect in this study. Using my voice to represent my understanding of practice across cultures potentially causes a lack of attention for (or a silencing of) other distinct voices in my narratives. The voices that may be silenced (either unintentionally, or with discretion) in my study are perhaps influenced by my fear of losing credibility as a writer and as a researcher. However, I will argue that silences in my writing also have the capacity to unleash new and profound ways of thinking about externally influenced intersections in this study. My intent is to "bracket" the worries and tensions that arise for me in this process while still enabling them to be present in my work. This attempt can be achieved by engaging in a "critical appraisal of self-in-action" which Gilbert and Sliep (2009) recognize as self-reflexive practice. My challenge now is to critically explore how I will take on the position of reflexivity in my work as a practitioner as well as in my role as a researcher. At present, these roles intersect significantly, and I believe that they will continue to do so as I use "the personal" as the site for my study.

Autoethnography involves the ability to bracket emotions in order to get at what is layered under them, or what they may signify, which then brings to life "how the personal and social, past and present, are intertwined" (Ellis, 2004, as cited in Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010, p. 465). Considering this, autoethnography allows me the opportunity to make meaning of the complexities deeply embedded in the social and cultural context of my practicum while also addressing the sincerity of my lived experiences and the

significance of my responses for understanding the complexity of international placements.

Trusting the process.

In qualitative research, the quest for a trustworthy study is believed to parallel "self-discipline and vigilance about methods" (Davies & Dodd, 2002, as cited in Padgett, 2008, p. 184). According to Padgett (2008), trustworthiness involves conducting research that is both ethical and fair, and represents (to the degree possible) the most honest descriptions and observations about the experiences being researched. However, by acknowledging my experiences as partial and constantly evolving, I have come up against a significant struggle to guard my voiced experiences against too much exposure of myself as "vulnerable", "unknowing", and "self-indulgent" (Brigg & Bleiker, 2010). These concerns connect to a professional self-image wrapped up in a conflict of competencies that urges me to be competent and in control in my professional practice. Yet, these concerns also run parallel between my emotional responses to the context of my practicum placement and the writing process that has also brought out many uncertainties and hesitancies.

In short, my role in this study is complex. On one hand, the conceptual ideas, the hunches and the quandaries are details that I, as the researcher, have thought about critically and extensively. However, I am also the participant in my own investigation. My assumption is that these roles become easily blurred, which in turn produces ongoing challenges. Alternatively, my investigation on this topic might also create a unique learning space to examine my research in a courageous, unconventional way.

In recent years, autoethnographic inquiry has been promoted "as a radically nontraditional, poststructuralist form of research" (Anderson, 2006, p. 391) and is seen as

a newer member of the qualitative research methodology tree. Autoethnography infuses practice and research with critical reflection (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010) by drawing from "multiple layers of consciousness and multiple identities within the self" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Sparkes, 2003, as cited in Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010, p 452). When speaking of its purpose in qualitative research, Holt (2003) notes that autoethnography involves highly personal accounts drawn from personal experiences to enrich one's comprehension of a specific culture or discipline. In my study, this also involves an examination of practice across cultures. Although seemingly straightforward, I must consider the challenges that may arise while attempting to convey personal accounts in a way that is both comprehensive and thought provoking. Autoethnography "incorporates dialogue, metaphor, creative descriptions" (Richardson, 2000) as well as "concrete action, emotion and introspection" (Ellis, 2004). These descriptors suggest that this critically reflective process can be a powerful way to emphasize "strong convergences between personal and professional selves" (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010, p. 452) in research writing. In describing autoethnography as a "vehicle for critical reflection", Jensen-Hart and Williams (2010) distinguish a *good* autoethnographic strategy as one that assesses and compares emergent knowledge, which is uniquely "situated within selves and identities" (p. 450). Exploring the dialectical relation between body and text in autoethnographic performance, Denzin (1997, as cited in Spry, 2001) notes, "the living body/subjective self of the researcher is recognized as a salient part of the research process, and socio-historical implications of the researcher are reflected upon to study the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual" (p. 711). Taken together,

these conceptualizations imply that autoethnography is highly personal and embodied in its methodological orientation.

Connecting these current ideas to my research topic, I hope to remain consistent in my process of recognizing the influences that are closely tied to my personal and societal values (Newbury, 2007), which are encompassed in my current position as a researcher/participant. As Sumara (2002, as cited in Crump, 2010) eloquently describes:

> There is an ongoing dance of give and take, push and pull, between personal and public. Then there is a parallel struggle to find the right words to describe the dance. Changing perspectives, changing languages, changing cultural landscapes; with every change, we must interpret [our] present circumstances, but must accomplish a revisioning of [our] history. (p. 82)

In a sense, this strong movement towards personalizing research "connects the personal to the cultural" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, as cited in Holt, 2003, p. 18), and in my case, also to the political as I am moving beyond describing the local culture, engaging in an analysis about ethical issues and socio-political forces, and how these ideas are woven into the practicum experience. In this particular study, this means unraveling personal experiences in a culture "reflexively to look more deeply at self-other interactions" (p. 19). That being said, I am curious to learn whether it is possible to use autoethnography while maintaining the ability to bridge the gap between personal voice and professional knowledge.

Limitations

Too self-indulgent?

Holt (2003) mentions that, "qualitative researchers have long been encouraged to consider how their personal subjectivity influences the investigative process" (p. 24). Yet, what happens in this investigative process? Does our work become too self-indulgent or emotional? Sparkes (2002, as cited in Holt, 2003) considers these complexities by stating that, "autoethnography can encourage empathy and connection beyond the self of the author and contribute to sociological understandings" (p. 26). Given that I am in the midst of my investigative process, I wonder if I have achieved the ability to weave emotion through my narratives without it dominating the self-reflective component of my work?

Another issue to bear in mind, moreover, is how to limit researcher bias in my work (Padgett, 2008). How do I investigate and interpret my personal accounts without steering my findings in the direction that I believe it *should* go?

Young (1990, as cited in Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006) describes positionality "as a sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others and of being defined by dominant and subordinate cultures" (p. 37). Identifying myself as a white, middle-class, heterosexual female significantly impacts how I choose to represent my voice within this study. Jensen-Hart and Williams (2010) suggest that, "it is important, then, for auto-ethnographers to first provide some background regarding their social positioning to help readers understand context and identities that shape the writing" (p. 452). In my research, this is particularly important since I am exploring the complexity of my position as a former South African who returned to different parts of the land impacted by racial discrimination. This is an important layer in my research because it speaks to my dual

position as both an "insider" South African, and "outsider" Canadian visitor – entangled in complex issues relating to my childhood perceptions of South Africa under Apartheid, and the "bigger picture" that sits with me now about larger intersectional forces of race, class, gender, and power that are tied into "different" spaces in South Africa that I had not witnessed before.

Conceptual Framework – The Process

Web of Intersecting Forces

Methodology, data, methods, conceptual framework. I pin each of these titles to my corkboard, trying a new way to categorize/organize my thoughts. I line up the relevant articles, stack them underneath each title, and wait for something magical to happen, like some sort of validation or approval that this is how autoethnographies take shape. But where do I put my history and my personal connection with this topic, or the parts of my experiences that feel too risky to explore?

Intersectionality, intersectionality…I begin to dismantle my piles of data and my articles. It's messy, it's far from logical, but now it feels like this research can begin to take shape. I draw lines from academic journals, towards the tiny parts of Lara and the story that I have not yet told. I circle the truths that I'd rather not write about and highlight their relevance to this process. I do this in silence, anticipating some sort of eruption from the corkboard itself. Before I know it, I have a web of red lines staring back at me. I give myself permission to access the raw pieces of data that sit between these red lines, not knowing if I'll ever be able to carry them through to the pages in my thesis. Does the world of academia want to hear these stories? Does this story

need to be told? Once again I am questioning myself as a researcher, wondering how my experiences will become a representation of a much larger issue. This is where the layers become more complex. Layers of uncertainty in my practicum experiences and in my process as an academic writer. This is where my self, my knowledge, and my experiences collide.

(Journal reflection, October 2012)

The Entanglement of Ethics

One of the big questions before receiving approval from the UVIC Human Research Ethics Board was: How can I write about my experiences while ensuring the anonymity of those closely tied to my experiences? What do I include, and what do I leave behind? Despite the complexity set in autoethnographic writing, every effort has been made on my part to ensure that members of the community in South Africa remain unidentified in both journal reflections and critical analysis. In Chapter One, I emphasized the complexity of this study, describing the process as "messy". I describe the process as multidimensional as it speaks to the tangled layers of complicated and challenging moments in my practicum experience *and* in the research process – both of which are implicated by former and existing emotional impact. Fixed within this entanglement are the ethical considerations of using autoethnography within the confines of academic scholarship. I often wonder if my methodological approach will endure the demands put forward by academia to produce rigor, validity, trustworthiness, along with other fundamental principles essential to qualitative research. Is it possible to defend my position as an academic writer, if others merely view my research as a form of storytelling?

And so I ask: What becomes of these reflections that I have collected, scrutinized over, and shared in my research? Moreover, how do I deal with the sensitivities and vulnerabilities that are believed to make autoethnographic writing so compelling (Ngunjiri et al., 2010)? At times I worry that I will not be able to justify the multiple positions that have kept me standing in academia as an autoethnographic researcher since there are considerable expectations resting on my ability to defend the purpose of my writing. I wonder if this becomes one of the limitations to autoethnographic writing – to share the presence of my "self" in research without becoming too self-indulgent (Anderson, 2006). But what if I am? Does that diminish the academic voice and experiences woven into each page?

I am drawn to Elizabeth Dauphinee's (2010) personal experiences with autoethnography as they connect to issues of truth, power, and ethics within the context of international relations. In her text, Dauphinee claims to write out of love, sometimes out of guilt, and sometimes because she became aware that something was not the way she thought it was. I too claim to write out of love, quite often out of guilt, and wonder if perhaps the unspoken assumptions and judgments that I carry with me about former practicum experiences unavoidably silence my voice as an academic writer, or hinder my ability to write ethically and responsibly within the scope of qualitative research. I hold on to Dauphinee's reflection that:

> Responsibility, ethics, and love are not the same. But they often enable one another. Of equal significance is the fact that love is not always something that emanates from the expectations we grow to have of one another (of our spouses, siblings, children, parents, and so on). Sometimes, love is a surprise that animates our

> research. Sometimes, to love is to be answerable for our actions – for our words about others, who cannot respond from within the confines of our disciplines. (p. 818)

These ideas enliven the writing process for me in my attempt to write responsibly and ethically about the tensions and uncertainties that surfaced for me in my practicum experience.

Intersectionality Woven into Autoethnography

The expanding focus on intersectionality in qualitative research has been recognized as "a positive trend that potentially captures the complex interplay between gender and other social differentiations in contemporary, multicultural societies" (Christensen & Jensen, 2012, p. 109). Originating from Black Feminist Theory and later breaking through in European countries such as the UK and Scandinavia in post-colonial and post-structural gender studies, intersectionality makes visible the multiple, overlapping ways categories are positioned while acknowledging the complex ways that power, diversity, identity, and social systems are implicated (Burman, 2003). Anthias (2013) suggests that "intersectionality does not refer to a unitary framework, but a range of positions" (p. 4), and therefore should not be identified as "intersectionality theory", but as "intersectionality framing". Anthias also argues that, it is necessary to expand our focus on the categories by examining the "broader social landscape" (p. 15), taking into account the distinction between categories, not just their intersection. I would argue that the parameters shared by intersections such as race, gender, culture, class, and privilege (to name a few), cannot be neatly separated and need to be examined as complex

relationships within larger social systems and identity categories. Susan Jones (2009) investigates the complexity surrounding multiple dimensions of identity in a diverse group of doctoral students. As her methodological approach, Jones draws from both an intersectional framework and autoethnography, describing these two approaches as "overlapping and complementary" (p. 289). Valentine (2007) as quoted in this study supports the unification of autoethnography and intersectionality describing how these two methods work mutually to account for the:

> Multiple, shifting, and sometimes simultaneous ways that self and other are represented, the way that individuals identify and dis-identify with other groups, how one category is used to differentiate another in specific contexts, and how particular identities become salient or foregrounded at particular moments. (p. 290)

In addition to these ideas, intersectionality and autoethnography both contribute to a common objective, which is to advocate for social change (Jones, 2009) through self narratives that "critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts (Spry, 2001, as cited in Jones, 2009, p. 290).

In the chapter that follows, I examine some of the themes that I have selected to consider in response to my practicum experience in South Africa, the interpretations I have made from these experiences, and the correspondence between past and present-day reflections. The themes that have been drawn from my personal reflections relate in various ways to issues that are examined in published literature about the complexities of international practicum work, which is why I have chosen to examine specific themes related to my experience over others. It is through this process of autoethnographic

inquiry that I seek to understand the complexity of intersectionality in cross-cultural experiences by moving in towards the tensions and critical issues as I experienced them in my placement, and then moving back out into a space where I can critically reflect and respond to the deeper issues present in my exploration of cross-cultural experiences in CYC practice. I am aware that my personal connection to this study becomes a large part of the challenges associated with autoethnographic writing; therefore, it is my hope to engage with these challenges as a way to unravel some of the hidden complexities deeply embedded in my story.

Chapter 4 – Interpretation

Introduction

In this chapter, I confront the tensions and complexities deeply embedded in my experience as a CYC practicum student. Drawing from distinct moments that exist in my practicum journal and emails to my practicum supervisor in 2009, I will examine the ways that time and space intersect with my current understanding of cross-cultural helping relationships in Majority World contexts. In addition to this, I will examine the implications of CYC professional helping discourse while considering how notions of "goodness", "charity", and "institutional expectations" are deeply entangled with different aspects of my "self". The focus of my analysis fits with my intentions to work within an intersectional framework by taking into consideration various themes such as desire, time, space, and privilege and examining how these topics are interrelated and simultaneously connected to different social dimensions deeply entangled in my developing story as a CYC student.

To begin my interpretation, I will briefly describe my physical and emotional responses to my arrival in South Africa. I will then examine the notion of desire as it relates to different aspects of my "self" – paying respect to the multiple identities that are tied into the various positions I carry with me as a visitor, a CYC helper, a student, and a former South African resident. Following this, I will examine the entanglement of space by reflecting on key moments in my practicum experience that highlight my desire to work in "exotic" spaces, and the physical and emotional responses woven into this desire. I will also address how normative ideas (which have been deeply embedded in Euro-Western beliefs) have become entangled in my own desire and motivation as a CYC practicum

student. From there, I will unpack ideas related to my understanding of privilege by reflecting on the discomforts and tensions rooted in moments of ignorance and naivety.

The Arrival

I come to this study with the intent to unravel the ethics of care in a Majority World setting – to enlighten, or somehow facilitate current students and practitioners to consider the complexities of CYC practice across cultures in a persistent, reflexive, self-scrutinizing way. There is a contextual overlap between the experiences that I am attempting to address, and the experiences I am having in the course of this research process. Thus, the sense of self in the context of this study extends far beyond the examination of personal chaos that manifests in my lived experience: It also reveals how I step back from my emotionality in order to uncover critical issues that might contribute to new ways of thinking about practicum placements in CYC.

On-site reflection.

An email written to my practicum supervisor on Thursday, January 22, 2009:

I'm in London waiting for my flight to South Africa. I'm starting to get freaked out a bit and wondering what I have gotten myself in to. Will email again when I am safe and sound. Take care. Lara.

Present-day reflection.

My Body Arrives

It is a strange feeling travelling to a country and not knowing who is on the other side of the doors awaiting my arrival. I remember feeling overdressed and unprepared – sweaty, exhausted, and anxious about what to say to the customs officer. There I

stood, a former South African resident with an overwhelming sense of uncertainty about why I was actually there.

Arriving in South Africa began as a physical awakening. All at once my senses were stirred - transmitting uncertainty and nervousness to different parts of my body. My entrance into this new space produced conflicting emotional responses that were chaotic, unsure, enthused, and optimistic. It was through these responses where new contexts found a way to seep into my skin, staining my clothes with the scent of strangeness. I could smell this strangeness – hints of poverty and wealth lingering simultaneously in the air.

Arriving in South Africa became an impetus towards a space of "difference", a space that I had once thought was familiar; yet upon arrival, everything about it became mysterious. To this day, the spirit of South Africa has made me of that place – holding on to me in remarkable and complicated ways all at once.

(Journal reflection, January 2013)

The Depths of Desire

In this next section, I consider "desire" as it relates to my former position as a practicum student, while also scrutinizing current perceptions about my professional goals as a CYC worker and whether these goals have meaning in "Southern" contexts. I also examine issues of time and space within the realm of international work through the interpretation of my journal reflections. My analysis draws heavily on the work of Barbara Heron (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2011), an associate professor in the School of Social Work at York University, who uses intersectional framing to critically explore the complexities

and tensions inherent in development work by examining how personal desire and intentions are woven into issues of race, class, gender, privilege, and power – issues deeply enmeshed in North-South relations.

A photograph.

I gaze at a photo that I took one early Sunday morning in South Africa, and instantly I am taken back to the dusty road leading up to the school, which was always swarming with kids from the township. The photo I am holding shows three children – walking towards the school with their younger siblings being carried on their backs.

Each Sunday, the school fills up with over 50 children from the township. The air is dense from the excitement and laughter of each child. They sing hymns in Zulu and I am struck by the beauty of their voices – a room filled with harmony unlike anything I have ever heard before. I think about the family I am staying with, who has kept this school running through their dedication, generosity, and commitment to help better the lives of the families in this underprivileged space. I gaze back at the photo and think about my own good intentions and sense of charity – how perplexing it becomes to give all of oneself to improve the lives of others.

Present-day reflection.

Do unto others…

I understood missionaries to be "good" people doing "good" things for vulnerable children and families in different parts of the world. I learned about missionary work by meeting individuals and families at my church that talked openly about their experiences in mysterious places across the globe. From what I understood, faraway countries needed us, and if we helped them, we would also benefit. Morally, this made

sense to me. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" – a reciprocal exchange between people, society, and cultures. At the age of 10, I remember feeling optimistic by the kindness and enthusiasm of the missionary workers, and I often wonder if that was the moment when a small seed of desire to help others was planted in me.

(Journal reflection, February 2013)

My Personal Longing

International work involves a complex storyline filled with good intentions and charitable motivations (Hook, 2011), both of which are connected to a desire to help others. In *Do Unto Others,* the journal passage quoted above, I am speaking to the inconspicuous ways that cultural ideas worked through my innocence and became part of my body – creating internalized assumptions about the spirit of charity/care work (a planting of the seed of desire). Heron (2007) speaks about desire as our longing and attraction towards difference, which is "bound up in our enthusiastic reactions to the commonplaceness of the opportunity to do development work" (p. 51). In my experience, desire goes deeper than enthusiastic reactions or attraction towards difference. Desire also connects to my purpose, motivation, and the assumption that I *can* and *should* make a difference. However, this assertion is problematic because it reinforces the assumption of homogeneity, the patronizing belief that all countries in the South are catastrophic, disastrous, and in need of intervention from powerful, wealthy helpers in the North (Wehbi, 2009). I understand my connection and familiarity with South Africa as something that sparked in me a sense of desire – a yearning to reconnect with my

homeland and work across cultures in spaces I had not yet experienced. I also wished to be seen as an insider, which produced a "need to merge with 'native' culture[s] and not be seen as a visitor" (Heron, 2007, p. 3). Part of me believes my desire comes from feeling deeply connected to a country where my life began. Yet, despite this romanticized notion that I have held onto for years, I am also deeply entangled in the sufferings connected to colonization in South Africa as a white person. Therefore, perhaps my desire to revisit my birthplace was also triggered by an inherent sense of guilt since I benefitted from Apartheid in ways that I may never fully understand. Could it be that I wanted to "give back" to my birthplace as a way to counteract my relationship with the exploitive, colonial relations that I am still deeply connected to? Steyn (2009) illustrates a straightforward representation of how the system of Apartheid remained active and functional *because of* the submissive cooperation of white people living in South Africa. In her study, the realities during the Apartheid years (1948-1994) are highlighted:

> Using separate entrances, enjoying whites only transport, beaches, restaurants and cinemas, paying subminimum wages to black employees employed only for menial labour, educating only curfews, serving in the army and, of course participating in discourses that justified the status quo. (p. 8)

Is my desire to "do good" fuelled by my former position inside this "feel good history for the white society" (Mills, as cited in Steyn, 2009, p. 8)? Perhaps; however, it does not discount my current position as a privileged white Northerner, nor does it prevent me from benefitting from the social inequalities that are still present in Post-Apartheid South Africa. As Wehbi (2009) stipulates, "we are not exempt from reinforcing oppressive social relations by virtue of being from the country where we practice - cultural heritage is not a

guarantee that a student will be able to give something back" (p. 55). This idea highlights one of the assumptions made by students who choose to travel to their country of origin to fulfill practicum requirements. In these instances, the motivation to "revisit home" is linked to a desire to "give back". This leads me to more intensely question my own intentions. Did my intentions circulate around the notion that I was on some level an "insider" and therefore deserved the right to return? Or did institutional requirements and professional expectations impact my understanding of meaningful practice in cross-cultural settings? Did a personal longing to establish my professional identity as "selfless and brave" trigger my desire? In light of these ideas, I currently feel at odds with the personal desire that is embedded in the context of my story and wonder if this desire was created by personal assumptions about "making a difference" and "giving back". Perhaps the "desire" to be seen by others as altruistic or charitable by documenting my "goodness" in underprivileged spaces is what creates this newfound uncertainty that I aim to address about cross-cultural work in Majority World contexts.

The Entanglement of Time

On-site reflection.

An email to my practicum supervisor on March 16th, 2009:

Things over here continue to be challenging and unpredictable, but as I said before, I am learning tons and cannot wait to apply all of this knowledge that I have gained to my future practice in CYC.

I can't believe I'm almost done! Time flies!

Take care, Lara.

Post-practicum reflection.

Awestruck

I sit with the children - let them touch my skin and my hair. They hold their hands up to mine and then we smile…a visible difference between their tiny black hands and mine. I feel myself move in and out of a state of anxiety – wrestling with the realities of their lives and the privileges of my own. I wonder who might have AIDS, who might have no parents, no home, and no sense of HOPE. I don't feel prepared to be here but I also don't want to leave. It's like I have been awestruck by the mysteries of this land. Even so, it is difficult to play with these children each day – then return to my notebook to link our involvement to professional goals and competencies. In some ways, I feel like an imposter, a "knowledge grabber" (if there is such a term). How do I write about my practicum setting, and the skills that I am gaining when all I can do is wrestle with time that seems to slip away so fast? They are too short (these practicum placements). We swoop in, only to learn that we quickly need to swoop back out. So with the time I have, how do I move thoughtfully back into this space – this "South Africa" that seems to have transformed since I was a little girl?

(Journal reflection, September 2012)

In Barbara Heron's (2007) *Desire for Development*, she posits that "the discursive positioning of countries and peoples of the South as serving our learning and personal growth leaves our desires unmarked and masks deeper moral issues in respect to the choice we are making" (p. 47). I wonder how intensely the discursive positioning of Southern contexts addressed by Heron is entwined in how Northern countries learn about the conditions of the Majority World through stories and images that are publicized

through media? Perhaps this strong connection between Northern perceptions of poor underprivileged families in Southern contexts is where we discover our motivation to relocate and help those who are perceived as "helpless", only to find that when we do situate ourselves in these diverse spaces, our moral judgments become more acute. I believe this is what happened to me, and I often wonder if I had spent more *time* with the black community in South Africa, would I still be questioning some of the complexities of international practicum placements? Or does "more time" in a foreign practice setting enable us to address our concerns and uncertainties with greater care?

In Heron's (2011) article: *Creating Global Citizens: The Impact of Volunteer/Learning Abroad Programs,* several issues associated with short-term placements (described as two to six months) in Southern countries are addressed. In this analysis, Heron speaks to some noteworthy ideas related to "length of time" in Southern countries, arguing that:

> It is near unanimous agreement that placements of three months or less cannot enable adjustment to the country; on the contrary, the Northern volunteer, student, or intern who is present for such a short period of time is seen as virtually never getting past the initial newness stage (p. 113)

In Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, fourth year students are required to enroll in a practicum placement of their choice, and must complete a minimum of 286 hours of practicum work in this setting. This time commitment can be achieved over one or two semesters. I committed to one semester, the equivalent of four months in South Africa, which was plenty of time to complete the recommended hours onsite. I now recognize that short-term practicum placements have the potential to hold students in a

place where physical and cultural adjustment becomes too demanding given the brevity of their stay. Moreover, students may discover that certain countries only provide visitor visas for four months or less, which seems a valuable point to consider before choosing a practicum destination. In either case, it is thought by some authors that such placements may be too truncated to have a meaningful impact for both the student and the community (Epprecht, 2004; Heron, 2006, 2011; Wehbi, 2009). My placement falls into the short-term category, which leads me to question whether I had enough time to adjust or get past the early stages of strangeness in a new space? These concerns are highlighted in this post-practicum reflection, *Awestruck*:

> *How do I write about my practicum setting, and the skills that I am gaining when all I can do wrestle with time that I don't have. They're too short (these practicum placements). We swoop in, only to learn that we quickly need to swoop back out.*

In light of this, I am drawn to consider whether I thought about the ethical implications of issues such as "time" even before deciding to undertake an international practicum placement in a Majority World context. In his personal experience as an NGO worker, Epprecht (2004) argues that, "anything less than two years seems to allow the participant to avoid the emotional separation from home that is so important to cross-cultural learning" (p. 701). Epprecht goes on to say that within the scope of undergraduate courses, two years is clearly unrealistic. Therefore, a short-term placement "absolutely needs to be compensated by expanded orientation and re-entry courses" (p. 701). Reflecting on my experience, these ideas reinforce the complexities relating to ethical

practice across cultures that may come up against the restrictions of time. Some of these issues connect to cultural attunement, capacity building, and personal adjustment in overseas spaces, which are often dependent on the time one has in a given setting. This creates a unique intersection between time and dimensions of power, where Northerners have the freedom to move in and out of spaces depending on the vision and goals that they have laid out for themselves while the local people remain in context. Looking back on my experience, I wonder if the local people saw me as "another foreigner helper" coming in with a worldly agenda to "save" their needy souls, since I had arrived in South Africa with a devised "learning plan" that was merely based on my own presumptions about cross-cultural help, as well as goals I had set for myself to enhance my knowledge and skills as a CYC practitioner. Perhaps this potential response made by local community members should be taken into consideration before practicum students move into a specified context with clearly devised learning goals that might only benefit the learning of the student rather than facilitating a dispersal of shared knowledge.

In my experience I saw time as a hindrance, which impacted my readiness and ability to adjust to the culture and contribute something meaningful to the school where I was working. As noted by Heron (2011), "Northerners are likely to have 'big agendas' and not enough time to do everything they intend to do – the short-term experience may contribute to the volunteer's growth but not the NGO's growth" (p. 113). Upon reflection, I am curious about how professional CYC programs can support the desire and intention of students wanting to work overseas while also setting some preparation guidelines, examining length of stay, "personal agendas", as well as an in-depth understanding about the values and principles of the host organization or community. As previously mentioned

in my literature review, Nashira Birch and Paula Klassen, former students from the School of Child and Youth Care developed the *International Practicum Student Handbook* as a tool for students who are likely considering overseas work for their practicum placement. Based on their own international experiences, Birch and Klassen address various issues and potential questions that may come up for CYC students. I reviewed the practicum handbook prior to my international placement; however, the issues addressed in this document speak to me differently now that I am looking back on my experience. In some ways, I considered the international student handbook to be a tool that I could utilize when thinking about the "nuts and bolts" of my trip, as it merely uncovered some of the generalized notions of overseas placements such as finding a placement and choosing an organization. As I currently review this handbook through a new set of "fresh eyes", I see that many of the considerations discussed by the authors stand out for me in different ways having now experienced international work in all its complexity. For example, Birch and Klassen address the importance of understanding the history, traditions, class structure and political realities in different countries prior to leaving Canada. Reexamining my practicum experience, I realize that many of these cross-cultural considerations became more obvious to me once I was practicing "in context". Only by being immersed in my practicum setting did I consider how critical it is to understand structural, historical, and socio-political issues in diverse communities – issues I now see as very difficult to grasp without being physically and emotionally present in the practicum setting. Providing information to students in "handbook" format may be suitable and effective to some degree, but how does one prepare for the "shock" of their experience once in a different context? Is it possible to ever be fully prepared for these

types of undertakings? How important is the notion of "time" when considering the risks and benefits of international work for both the student and the organization? Speaking more broadly – stretching beyond the boundaries of CYC discourse, should universities and hosting countries demand a minimum time period for international practicum placements? As I reflect on my own experience, I wonder about the uncertainties or challenges that student's may face upon return? How important is it to engage in the process of debriefing once back home?

Perhaps establishing a more complex assessment of professional values and goals would impact ones decision about length of stay, personal intentions and repercussions for returning students. Maybe a more extensive investigation about these complex issues needs to be put in place for students who are thinking about international work.

The Entanglement of Space

On-site reflection.

Silent spaces

I'm sitting in an empty room, wondering how I came to be here, a houseguest in this home that is humble and deprived. Yet, somehow the poverty that surrounds me is filled with fruitfulness, and despite the absence of wealth, I feel welcomed and appreciated beyond words. The family has opened up a fresh bar of soap so that I can cleanse my face and hands, and earlier this afternoon they served me tea in the only teacup they had. I'm not sure where the son will sleep tonight, because he has offered me his bed. I run my fingers over the sheet on the bed, feeling guilty that I am taking more than I can offer in this moment. I feel my body tense, as I think about my white

skin in this space – how unusual I look in this part of South Africa. I struggle because I used to believe that I had remained connected to this land, and somehow when I returned, I would be able to seek out familiarity and resolution. It was naïve to assume that I would fit back into this part of the world because perhaps I was not a "good fit" to begin with.

Earlier today, I walked home with the kids who live at the house; we made up games with no rules and used our giggling as a way to communicate with each other. At dinnertime, we cooked in silence, and given the tiny space we were in, I tried to be as discreet as possible. The silence made me think about the boisterous noise at my house back in Canada.

Today I have been holding on to conflicting emotions. Becoming both fascinated and curious, yet also feeling uncomfortable and hesitant.

I wanted to take photos tonight, and document this memorable time that I spent with a black family in the settlement, but everything about this felt wrong – like I was capturing a part of their life to take home and share with others – "Look at me in this African space." No, I just couldn't. It just felt wrong.

(*Journal reflection, March 2009*)

My understanding of space begins with geographical location, for example, the physical relocation of my body from one country to another. In my experience, the repositioning of my body from Canada to South Africa situates the many parts of who I am in a complex space that is filled with vulnerabilities, unspoken assumptions and personal limitations.

The following can then be personalized: When I decided to work internationally, I responded to space with the understanding that I *can* and *should* take up the opportunity to experience diverse cultures and landscapes. This creates the assumption that I have the privilege and ability to move in and out of diverse spaces. However, my *body* is not the only part of me that assumes the ability to move. Space also denotes the movement of my emotions. In my practicum experience, these emotions moved back and forth between my desire and excitement to be in South Africa, and my state of vulnerability and self-doubt. During that time, the movement of my emotions became deeply connected to space because they moved through me, around me, and were also carried home with me. In the journal entry, *Silent Spaces*, quoted above, I am describing my emotions and physical reactions as a white houseguest in a home situated in the settlement. In this narrative, I am moving back and forth between the uncomfortable ways that my body moved in this space coupled with an emotional uncertainty, versus my sense of curiosity and innocence as a Canadian visitor. Even now as I work through the complexities of this story, I struggle to reconcile my discomfort and uncertainty with the spirit of generosity that was extended to me by a family living in poverty, which illustrates how deeply entangled privilege and power become in spaces that are racialized.

In her study exploring bodies, specialized locations, and identity in international work, Razack considers Harvey's (1996, as cited in Razack, 2005) analysis of space that states:

> Transformations of space, place, and environment are neither neutral nor innocent with respect to practices of domination and control. Indeed they are fundamental framing decisions – replete with multiple possibilities – that govern the conditions

(often oppressive) over how lives can be lived. Such issues cannot be left unaddressed in struggles for liberation. (p. 87)

These ideas situate the exploration of space (and place) at the very heart of how we position, construct, and organize our "selves" in practice by emphasizing the intersecting forces between socio-political power and human diversity. Mohanram (as cited in Razack, 2005) states that "place and landscape are not inert, but things which actively participate in the identity formation of the individual" (p. 88). While space can be related to place and landscape, their connection does not draw these three concepts into the same category.

In my journal reflection, *Awestruck*, quoted on page 72, I wrote:

I don't feel prepared to be here, but I also don't want to leave. It's like I have been awestruck by the mysteries of this land.

This elemental statement captures my fascination with distant spaces and my desire to intervene. Heron (2007) addresses the notion of the carnivalesque representation of "Third World" countries (in my case, South Africa) as a physical space that Northerners inescapably regard as exotic, something of a spectacle, "and as a zone of degeneracy inhabited by Others whose 'difference' culturally and spatially makes them distant from 'us'"(p. 58). With respect to my experience, these ideas are complicated by the fact that I was returning to an "almost" familiar space; where my former perceptions of South Africa (the childhood images I held onto) became distinctively different from and even at odds with the setting I was now involved in. This idea is also addressed in my reflection, *Silent Spaces,* when I wrote:

I feel my body tense, as I think about my white skin in this space – how unusual I look in this part of South Africa. I struggle because I used to believe that I had remained

connected to this land, and somehow when I returned, I would be able to seek out familiarity and resolution. It was naïve to assume that I would fit back into this part of the world because perhaps I was not a "good fit" to begin with.

In both reflections cited above, I am battling with multiple parts of identity that are constantly being produced – yet always in a state of hesitation and uncertainty. This is where the realities of my status as both insider and outsider begin to dissolve. My childhood imaginings of South Africa that I had been holding onto all of these years have now become pieces of a far more complex puzzle, leaving me to wonder where I fit in.

Heron (2007) critiques the identity of the "Northerner" by addressing the implication of the "white subject" as holding a complex "*internalized* acceptance of white privilege in a development context" (p. 104). Referring to my personal reflections, the image of myself as the white care worker is tied up in multiple positions of being "the outsider", "the elite white woman", "the privileged houseguest", "the expert helper", "the benevolent volunteer", "the investigator", "the diasporic South African" (travelling and living among different European countries). These positions are defined by the space I was working in, and by my taken-for-granted assumptions about development work. I can own and name these reactions and responses from my location as a privileged diasporic, while also examining how my sometimes "innocent", sometimes "ignorant" assumptions have brought me to this place of critical analysis about my unspoken experiences in international work. Yet, as revealing as it may seem to disentangle these multiple positions in my writing, I doubt these positions will ever be completely reconciled, and perhaps they do not need to be. Rather than attempting to reconcile these positions, it might be more valuable to unravel the contradictory and multiple parts of my "self" in

order to more closely examine the ways that bodies and identities transform and evolve depending on context.

Connecting Bodies, Race, and Space

A photograph.

I am looking at a photograph taken a few weeks into my placement at the school in South Africa. In this picture, I look nervous yet optimistic, like an explorer eager to experience all that Africa has to offer but not knowing how. In the frame, I am standing with the grade 1 teacher. My arm is draped over her shoulders – embracing her as if we are already friends. This photo displays my physical presence at the school, and the forming of my relationships with the staff, which causes me to think about the first time I phoned home.

Present-day reflection.

Phoning home

The phone call home feels as distant as my body does in this new place. The voice in Canada is simultaneously familiar and strange, and all at once, I am crying. I am unprepared to speak, uncertain about who or what to describe. Me? The kids? The land? There is a lump in my throat as I fight for words to describe my experience over here, but all I can do is ask "Why? Why had nobody prepared me for how I would feel?" I stand motionless in the physical discomfort of my white skin, as if my whiteness somehow outlines my connection to power, Apartheid, and everything I thought I once knew about personal integrity and human generosity. I feel at battle with parts of my "self" – the choices I make, the viewpoints I carry. These positions

seem so connected, yet simultaneously displaced. How had I imagined this experience to be? And why does it feel so different now that I am in it?

(Journal Reflection, January 2013)

Drawing from Sarah Ahmed's (2007) analysis on whiteness, Todd (2011) proposes that, "community work is one set of practices or techniques through which whiteness becomes worldly, able to assert legitimacy within, and knowledge of, racialized spaces" (p. 118). This idea ties whiteness to the positioning of bodies within historical, socio-cultural, and political contexts, influencing how our bodies and relations shift and transform in different spaces. The connection between bodies, race, and space complicates my prior perceptions about being a "well-intentioned" CYC worker in a "developing country" because it provokes me to respond to the internalized battle I have with the unequal power relations that are created through international development work (Kothari, 2006). For example, in the narrative *Phoning home,* I am questioning my intentions by feeling the discomfort of my white skin in a place of strangeness by reaching out to external forces, asking: *"Why had nobody prepared me for how I would feel?"* Looking back on this moment, my response seems just as much physical as it was emotional. I had moved into a racialized space, and it was only once I had been physically present in that space, could I see the complicatedness of my position as a white care worker. Another example relating to these issues comes up in the narrative, *Silent Spaces.* This experience addresses my presence in the house of a family who had very little to offer a houseguest and illustrates how normative assumptions and cultural differences are negotiated in a shared space. At the time I was cautious about my presence in their home but never truly considered whose space I was in, why I was there, and who would be implicated by my visit. Only now have I

considered that my relationship with the family – bounded by power and diversity – set margins between my privileged position as a white development worker, and their position as an underprivileged family with limited resources. This moment captures all of us in a racialized space where I was the privileged "outsider" wanting a taste of what it would be like to live in a squatter settlement. In this experience, I was aware that I could shower later on, compose journal entries about my experience, and take photos as though I were a tourist. All these actions and unspoken assumptions work to create binaries between the position I hold as a helper and the relationships I form with those who are being helped, and consequently, I become positioned as an onlooker. This urges me to critically examine my conflicting identities as a moral, ethical self, up against dominant positions that give me power and privilege in colonized spaces – positions such as my whiteness. In this context, Sarah Ahmed (2007, as cited in Todd, 2011) considers whiteness "as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space and what they 'can do' " (p. 118). From this perspective, whiteness is thought about as "a discursive, historical, cultural, structural, and social context" (p. 118), deeply affecting the way my body responds and is responded to in diverse contexts. Given this, when I talk about space in this context, what is implied? What does space do to my perceived notions about practicum sites and learning environments, and should these concerns be addressed in discussions with practicum supervisors or hosting agencies prior to departure? Razack (2005) emphasizes that in spaces abroad, "participants become marked by the spaces they occupy, by how they come to know themselves in this space, as well as by what is produced in terms of relational practices" (p. 90). As a result, perhaps it is important for students from Northern

countries to interrogate their imagined ideas about spaces in the South before travelling abroad, since spatialized locations are thought to be tightly woven into the production of identity (Razack, 2005). These ideas will be further examined later on in this chapter.

The Entanglement of Normative Ideas

Post-practicum reflection.

"Africa? But you are White!"

I think it's remarkable that when I arrived in Canada at the age of 7, some of the children at school thought I had been living in a grass hut with pet lions. "But you're not Black!" was a common remark I got. It makes me wonder how these ideas are formed. Is that how Africa is imagined in their eyes? Maybe that is why I never completely let go of my South African roots …maybe I wanted to hold on to "my South Africa". But I suppose many countries experience this…you know – stereotyping Canadians, thinking they all have sled dogs and live in igloos, or that Australians have pet kangaroos. It's the same everywhere I guess?

(Journal reflection, September 2012)

This reflection illustrates some of the ways that tacit assumptions are formed about different cultures, contexts, and people. I poke fun at these stereotypical beliefs to some extent; however, the underlying themes in this narrative suggest that stereotypes and normative assumptions have the capacity to creep into societal understandings about human diversity and cultural values, which I believe is important to address when considering practice across cultures.

In this section, I move beyond the notion that I am "either/or" with regard to my position as a practicum student by looking more closely at the grey areas – the layers of insider versus outsider that are occupied simultaneously at different times in different contexts (de Finney, personal communication, July 19, 2012). Even in this attempt, I am unavoidably positioning myself in dichotomous categories based on my own social norms and unspoken assumptions that arise in the use of language: I am the outsider, they are the insiders; I am privileged, they are disadvantaged; I am educated, they are not; I am white, they are black; I am at the centre and they are at the margins. All of these binaries illustrate how deeply I have become entrenched in Euro-Western worldviews about human diversity.

Normativity refers to what is socially sanctioned as normal or acceptable (de Finney et al., 2011) based on Euro-Western standards. During my placement, the most obvious indicator of my identity when I worked in the squatter settlement was the color of my skin. I stood alone as a white middle-class Canadian woman amongst a black community, holding a dominant position as the expert, the teacher, and the white helper. These implicit and visible differences send me down a complex road of human diversity. To be white in this context is to identify racial difference, which in turn sustains my privilege by placing the Other in a racial category. To be educated exposes my values about learning, opportunities, success, and the assumption I hold on to that everyone *should* have an equal opportunity to learn. To be female in this context implies that I have gained more opportunities than the women in the township because I had the freedom to move beyond the borders of my country, mainly because I have access to the financial resources to do so. By addressing these differences, I am exposing how I perceive others

and view myself – seeing us as two distinct groups, both circulating around the belief that there is difference between us, which will always be there.

Heron (2007) speaks to the functioning of these ideas in Northern perceptions about the spaces of development, defining them as "exotic places inhabited by people who are 'different' (from us) in peculiar, even fantastical ways – places which 'we' from this part of the world are free to access and alter" (p. 7). This idea highlights how our identities are constantly wrapped up in complex webs of dominance, power, reflexivity, ignorance, self-awareness, normativity, and desire, while reinforcing the paradox behind our intentions to become ethical, culturally competent professional helpers. Heron (2007) also addresses the position of development workers, outlining how "white development workers construct notions of self as resistant to discourses on imperialism and white privilege while simultaneously engaging and even embracing them" (p. 23). It is very difficult to operate fully outside of these historical notions – we are always entangled in them (de Finney, personal communication, August 20, 2012). So how then do we make sense of our positions as helpers in a history that entangles us in social hierarchies and colonizing ideologies? What is realized when we speak about the notion of guilt, and when does our guilt (or shame) become unproductive or privileged? I ask this because even the notion of privilege divides our declarations about what we have or don't have, or what we are or are not. It creates binaries even in the midst of our attempts to resist Euro-Western worldviews about diversity.

Unmasking Privilege

Peggy McIntosh (1988) talks about privilege as misleading, suggesting its implications are too positive to fit into dominant social norms that white privileged societies create: "The kind of privilege which gives license to some people to be, at best, thoughtless and, at worst, murderous should not continue to be referred to as a desirable attribute" (p. 12). This idea creates a complicated understanding about the relationship between how one recognizes privilege, and what it can actually reinforce in those who are recognized as underprivileged.

In the following reflection I draw from a learning journal submitted to my supervisor as part of my practicum course requirement. The purpose of this writing process was to illustrate student learning by critically examining professional skills, knowledge, and the self within the practicum environment. This example also demonstrates the kind of expectations that academic institutions set forth for students. These requirements positioned me as a student in a fixed institutional set of power relations where I perceived the "professional identity" to be something of great importance. My assignments guided my learning to be personally "discrete" – a task driven by student/supervisor communications where I could record personal observations and lessons influenced by those who I was working with. In retrospect, many of my learning journals written during the time of my placement focused explicitly on my actions and learning in the moment, which left little room for ongoing reflections about my response to the emotional, contextual, and evolving aspects of my work as a professional. Instead, my writing reflected "initial" responses to my experiences in the settlement – deeply rooted in Euro-Western beliefs, which impacted how quickly I made judgments

about other cultures in the face of my own personal values and privileges. My purpose here is not to define the "truths" of my story through the following writing examples, but rather provide "a personal lens which reinterprets and presents the experience" by "stepping outside Euro-Western assumptions" (Schmid, 2010, p. 172) and engaging in continual processes of self-reflection.

On-Site Learning Journal #1

An email to my practicum supervisor in the School of Child and Youth Care:

I had a very unique experience right after I submitted my second learning journal. This experience left me feeling very guilty and anxious about my previous thoughts. Anyway, I wrote down my concerns. I don't think I have ever done this before with any other assignment but after you read my learning journal, would you mind looking over the extension to my original paper?

I have attached a page to this e-mail.

Kindest Regards, Lara.

(Learning journal, March 2009)

Below is an example of what I wrote after thinking extensively about my original statement in my learning journal #1. In a sense, this example demonstrates how desire to be seen as competent and professional within the scope of CYC work is also tied into the tensions between institutional expectations and the "hopes" I had for myself as an international worker. I use "tensions" to describe this complexity because although I positioned myself "as a professional" in my practicum setting, this role also illustrates aspects of my "self" as a privileged learner – one who was able to move in and out of

different contexts, which also serves to reproduce some of my personal biases and taken-for-granted assumptions about the social inequalities that I saw in the township.

On-Site Learning Journal #2

Feeling remorse

I learned so much having experienced their world in greater depth, and now I have begun to think about the learning journal that I had just handed in. This experience taught me how as a professional I will undoubtedly make assumptions regardless of my attempt to be as non-judgmental as possible. But regardless, I feel remorseful for my original statement:

"I am not okay with this. And I am not okay with having no answers about the lives of the children I am working with. These students walk to school by themselves so I never get to meet their guardians. Even if I did meet their guardians, there is still very little that can change their situation in the settlement. This reality haunts me."

(Learning Journal, March 2009)

Following the extension I had made to my original learning journal, I proceeded to talk about my role as a helper, my rights as visitor, and how challenging it can be when faced with conflicting viewpoints about the way other people live. My reason for including this example in this chapter is to link my experiences as an international practicum student to the unspoken assumptions I had made about privilege, along with the expectations that were formed when I encountered cultural differences in my practice. I also want to highlight the guilt, shame, and personal feelings of ambiguity that surrounded my capacity to self-reflect in challenging moments and illustrate how despite my full-time engagement in a diverse culture, the institutional expectations are still deeply woven into how I

position myself as a competent, self-reflexive "professional" as well as the ways that privilege inevitably becomes etched in my position as a "global helper".

Do these types of challenging moments need to be explored before travelling abroad? Is it possible to pull apart the complexity of these ideas and "own up" to personal values that may be shaped by Euro-Western assumptions about other cultures? Perhaps it would be valuable to question the importance that Northerners place on privileges as being something pleasing and desirable. In whose eyes are these privileges made desirable? Perhaps entering new spaces that have been portrayed as "vulnerable", "helpless", and "struggling" is what creates the dichotomous ways that individuals think about privilege as being something we either acknowledge or assume we do not have. As Heron (2005) explains:

> The acknowledgement of privilege seems to strike a chord for racially-aware members of the dominant group, but I would propose that admitting one's privilege does not necessarily unsettle its operation. For this is a concept that has the potential to leave those who name it in a place of double comfort: the comfort of demonstrating that one is critically aware, and the comfort of *not* needing to act to undo privilege. (p. 344)

Heron's emphasis on the acknowledgement of privilege is relevant in this study since it is a concept that I have addressed in different parts of my experience. Stepping back, I wonder if there have been moments in this text when the acknowledgment of my privilege has served me, placing me in a position of comfort – in other words, proving that I have the capacity to be critically aware. If privilege is seen in this light, then it eliminates the necessity that it be critically explored among other intersecting forces such as power, race,

class, and gender, thus diminishing the opportunity for students to examine the uncomfortable, complicated parts of the self where new considerations for ethical CYC practice will most likely begin to emerge.

Stepping Toward Discomfort

> *Lara, you might not realize what you have learned in your practicum until you are back home thinking about the wonders of it all.*
>
> *(K. Jones, personal communication, March 2009)*

The ignorant and naive helper.

The above statement leads me to contemplate what moments and feelings may still be floundering about in the space I am currently in. Are there emotional aspects rooted in my former practicum experiences that still collide with the ethical judgments that I still hold on to about international practicum programs in the field of CYC? And if this is the case, I wonder, can this collision provide an important site for learning about the complexities of CYC practicum placements?

In this research, I have used personal journal reflections as the site of my own investigation, which has intensified my perceptions of self through "self-scrutiny" (Epprecht, 2004; Jones, 2009) and critical reflection. In the following section, I add another layer to my analysis by examining how epistemologies of ignorance (Steyn, 2012) and naivety inevitably become a part of the powerful and dominant ways that one thinks about the world. I see this analysis as being an active way that knowledge and resistance

trickle into current perceptions about North-South practicum placements by examining how ignorance and innocence work in simultaneous ways within the self.

What I understand now is there were some tense moments for me as a practicum student that I did not acknowledge during my placement. Having the opportunity now to look back on these experiences reveals the vulnerable parts of my self in a different respect. This positions me in a space where selflessness, humanitarianism, and acting in good faith (Hook, 2011) are constantly being negotiated and questioned. The negotiation of these traits is traced back to earlier ideas that I have laid out concerning my desire and good intentions as an international practicum student. In the following narrative, I move deeper into my investigation on desire and my ability to act in good faith by examining how these personal traits come up against concealed, unfamiliar forms of ignorance and naivety that are always shifting, embracing, and colliding with different aspects of my self.

Post-practicum reflection.

Battling ignorance

I remember the first time someone in Canada had asked me about the Apartheid and I responded by saying: "Apartheid, what is that?" I had never been told. No one ever talked about it. And then returning "home" to this foreign land to fulfill practicum requirements and witnessing the continuing struggles of Post-Apartheid South Africa that are so profound, so visible and troubling, well…it disturbed me and made me feel guilty for not knowing and not even attempting to understand what was going on in these vulnerable parts of the world. And when that overwhelming feeling of ignorance hits me, it makes it difficult to make sense of where my intentions and motivations to help others actually come from.

(Journal Reflection, July 2012)

In a sense, naivety and ignorance share similar "declarations of whiteness" (Hook, 2011) in this narrative. Naivety exposes a form of innocence that I held on to as an "insider" – a South African child, protected from the societal injustices that were visibly impacting me in unsuspecting ways. This form of innocence must have stayed with me over the years, enabling me to move back into racialized spaces with intent to "give back" based on what I knew about my placement and my professional abilities. Schmid (2010) examines the notion of innocence by drawing on the writings of Rossiter (2001) and Heron (2004), who argue that some social workers take on "innocence" with the belief that "good intentions will erase the 'trespasses' of social work" (p. 179), implying that innocence evokes an individual's attempt to construct the self as benevolent "which will override any other possible constructions and thus make it 'all good'" (p. 179). Other scholars such as Fellows and Razack (1998) and bell hooks (1992) are also explored in Schmid's (2010) analysis, and suggest that, "it is naive to think that one can relate in a manner that is not determined by dominant power relationships because these overshadow and inform the dyadic interaction" (p. 179). While this offers a very pessimistic understanding about the position of the helper in North-South relations, Schmid (2010) challenges some of these ideas by arguing that it can become dangerous to fall into a fixed belief that "difference divides" and "commonality unites" (p. 180). I support Schmid's quest to develop moments of mutuality in practice rather than assuming that all positions of power are fixed. I think this breaks through some of the substantial barriers that can potentially immobilize students who work in diverse contexts. In my experience, I had intended to help others, and to do so in the most non-intrusive, anti-oppressive way (Hook, 2011). In spite of this, I

can now see that my innocence was coupled with the power that I held as a privileged Northerner in combination with the realities of the Majority World context that I had not learned about.

Entering the Majority World context became far more complex than I had anticipated and exposed how deeply wedged I had become in Euro-Western worldviews. It was my *time* spent in that space that currently leads me to reexamine, negotiate and surrender my identity as the ignorant subject by thinking about ways that historical and sociopolitical forces influence what I choose to share about my personal and professional capabilities as an international practicum student. This is important to mention since there is an element of vulnerability and discomfort coinciding with my "personal confessions" that become apparent in my journal reflections. However, these vulnerabilities and personal discomforts should not devalue my personal voice (Jones, 2009) in this research despite the negative connotation that I believe attaches to the word ignorance, especially within a CYC context where professional competence, knowing, critical self-awareness (traits that seem to be resistant to the notion of ignorance) remain highly valued skills.

The ignorance and innocence that I carry with me moves far beyond my practicum experience, and cannot be viewed as individualized. It is bound up in historical processes and "is an essential part of human relations, culture and organizations" (Smithson, as cited in Steyn, 2012, p. 9). It is shared within larger systems and processes. According to Steyn (2012), the notion of ignorance is viewed as much more than a "lack of" knowledge, understanding or awareness. It puts individuals like me in a complex state of being because it exposes me to racial hierarchies and oppressive behaviors that sometimes go

unnoticed. Coming to terms with how my identity shifts and transforms through ignorance and naivety disrupts how I currently perceive my professional self. It also calls into question how personal goals and intentions have led me into moments of *uncertainty* about my practice and *guilt* about my social positioning as a privileged white helper. How do I aspire to be critical, mindful, ethical, and reflexive while at the same time admitting to the parts of myself that are uninformed and inexperienced? Are these "vulnerable" parts shaped by actions of living? Furthermore, are the inevitable forces of domination and power that weave through my learning in these practice settings unable to be excluded? Sometimes I fear it is impossible to remove myself from these inevitable forces without becoming completely immobilized, and perhaps yearning for this detachment is morally wrong in itself?

At this time, I cannot find any ways to resist the ignorant and naïve parts of my self that move into these diverse practice experiences; however, I am inspired by the work of Sarah Pflanz (2011) who addresses this complicated process on transformations of the self by suggesting that as practitioners, we learn to embrace uneasiness rather than resisting it. As Pflanz states:

> Being anti-oppressive in our practices may not be something we can just 'do' or a set of skills to learn. This implies a finished product and does not allow for the multiple layers of interaction as we move through different contexts and encounter each other through diverse experiences. It is an ongoing, unfolding process, and it involves embracing discomfort and creating room for new types of practice to emerge. (p. 67)

Pflanz' description speaks to the reflexive stance I take on as a researcher by emphasizing the overlapping, diverse layers embedded in theory and practice. In my writing, I have battled with personal discomfort in multiple ways since, "it is in the writing that the tension is embodied and enacted" (D. Scott, personal communication, February 26, 2013). My challenge has been to recognize whether I have the capacity to handle these types of complexities that surface in my writing without allowing them to override my ability to think critically about the issues I am trying to address. This involves trying to conceal the personal chaos that can potentially threaten my sense of professional competence while also enduring the truthfulness of my voice, and the sincerity of my discomfort. It is in this place of complexity and unease where I can create meaningful discussion about international practicum work in Child and Youth Care – through honesty, critical reflection, and the willingness to expose vulnerable aspects of my "self".

Despite the anxiety and discomfort that has been circling through my personal reflections and the uncertainties that stand up against these experiences, I feel deeply honored to have the opportunity to examine these parts of my practice – hopeful that I can offer critical insights that will create new ways of thinking about and preparing for international practicum placements in CYC. The following chapter offers a revised conceptualization of critical matters that might support the preparation of students who are considering travelling abroad to meet practicum requirements in the field of CYC.

Chapter Five – (Re)Considerations for Practicum Students in CYC

Throughout this thesis, I have used autoethnographic inquiry to critically examine my role as an international practicum student in 2009. Drawing from "on-site" experiences and "post-practicum" reflections has provided me the opportunity to consider, or perhaps *reconsider* some of the complexities deeply embedded in international work in Majority World contexts. It is in the spirit of my highly personalized reflections that I have attempted to reflexively examine the ambiguities and tensions that manifest in practice across cultures. In this final chapter, I summarize some of the central ideas that have surfaced throughout my writing – ideas that correspond to larger issues regarding professional development, ethical deliberation, and personal self-awareness in the context of child and youth care practice.

Creating New Dialogue

On-site data.

> Lara, if the day comes that any of us stop denying our humanity, our need/ability to care, etc., it probably is time to look for other work. I think it is important to "allow" the tears, the frustration, the full range of emotion, because that is what makes us good at what we do – caring.
>
> (Practicum supervisor, personal communication, March 2009)

The story of caring in international practicum work is intensely paradoxical and complicated. I say this because it seems that the attempt to offer care, or the ability to do so in diverse contexts cannot happen without revealing different aspects of the self

(Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010), which include the vulnerable, chaotic parts that may potentially threaten the "professional self" and therefore go unexamined. I would argue that my international practicum experience fits well into the complexity of these ideas – where professionalism, caring, ethical discernment, and personal vulnerabilities become entangled, thus making the experience of professional development and practice across cultures something that *should be* critically explored unceasingly. I also argue that it is through the examination of vulnerabilities and personal chaos that new ways of thinking about one's position as a CYC practitioner can emerge.

In writing about my own experience as an international practicum worker, I have been confronted with the complexity of examining how personal reflections not only speak to the "here and now" of professional identity development, but also the histories wrapped up in larger social processes that stretch beyond my position as an "individual". In light of these ideas, I hesitate to believe that there will ever be a prescribed view of how to understand the complexities of "good-intentioned", "ethical practice" across cultures. However, I carry a strong commitment to create dialogue and raise issues that might encourage students and practitioners to critically consider the inherent complexities and intersectionalities fixed within international helping discourse.

As I have explicitly mentioned earlier in this thesis, the entanglement of my process (autoethnographic writing), with the blending of intersectionality as I live through it, has and continues to be complicated and messy. In this "disorder", I believe that I have achieved (to some degree) the ability to make sense of my former experiences as a practicum student in order create discussion about the larger picture relating to international CYC practice. Yet, even in this place, at the intersection where practice meets

theory, where "new discoveries" uncover former ways of understanding the self in practicum settings, deeper tensions are bound to emerge:

> The tensions between passionate engagement and dispassionate detachment; between personal meaningfulness and social relevance; and between certainty/predictability in topic and method, and the uncertainty/unpredictability of topic and method are all anchored in the choices that compel a researcher to do autoethnography. (D. Scott, personal communication, February 26, 2013)

In this inquiry, I have attempted to move towards, through, and around some of these tensions in order to speak about my experience objectively and with self-scrutiny. I have also taken up the opportunity to examine the vulnerable, complicated, and uncharted facets of my experience with the intention to bring to light some of the complexities of international work in CYC practice that have emerged through my methodological exploration. I have leaned on Wall's (2006) description of autoethnographic inquiry as:

> The philosophical open door into which autoethnography creeps. The questioning of the dominant scientific paradigm, the making of room for other ways of knowing, and the growing emphasis on the power of research to change the world create a space for the sharing of unique, subjective, and evocative stories of experience that contribute to our understanding of the social world and allow us to reflect on what could be different because of what we have learned. (p. 148)

What I see as most significant in this description is the effort used in autoethnography to acknowledge the connection between multiple ways of knowing by linking the personal to the cultural, which in turn creates space to consider reflexivity and ethical deliberation in practice across cultures. But what does ethical CYC practice look like when practicing in

different contexts deeply implicated by poverty, racial discrimination, social class, and political forces? Moreover, where does a white, middle-class student such as myself fit into this setting?

As I have pointed out in the literature review, despite the challenge to find and access literature on CYC international practicum placements, the core values and professional standards that are emphasized in other disciplines in the human services field speak in ways that are remarkably similar to the professional goals of CYC practice. One example of this is reflexivity in practice, which goes beyond recognizing social location towards questioning and considering how personal values and beliefs influence the ways that we come to know, act upon, and sustain practice within the professional field. I have identified several recommendations from the social work literature that speak to some of the challenges that have come up for me in my practicum experience abroad, including for example, issues related to time spent in different countries, the "space" within or between different cultural settings, the motivations that prompt a personal desire to help in "needy", "vulnerable" parts of the world, and also the significances of these issues in relation to professional identity development and ones understanding about the tensions tied up in these matters. In the following reflective journal, I draw on these issues as I write about the aspects of my "self" that are still deeply woven into my existing interpretations about practicum experiences – the retrospective self. This reflection was written in an attempt to contend with some of my current feelings about professional "guilt" and "uncertainty" that still sits with me several years after my international practicum placement.

Post-Practicum Reflection

A gaze inward

To this day, I don't know if it was the right thing to do. But maybe I would have felt the same way had I stayed in Canada to complete my practicum placement. How have the complexities of my international experience brought me to this point in my work as an aspiring CYC practitioner? Furthermore, how can I stay connected to my experience in South Africa without feeling defeated by guilt or doubt? I ask this because I didn't want my involvement with the school to be simply cut off once I returned to Canada. But I suppose that is what sometimes happens. We go in, learn, reflect, practice, give back in some way, and then we leave without promise that we will ever return to that organization. I think about the quote by Epprecht (2004), "The stranger moves on and the heartfelt promises are forgotten" (p. 269), which then compels me to turn my gaze inward. Were my promises built with good intentions? Had I created expectations to stay connected to the school because of my own moral dilemmas? Perhaps the purpose of fieldwork in any context is to reach out to students like me – to get me thinking about how ethical issues are constantly circling around me in my practice and cross-cultural encounters. It is a messy journey, which boldly ignites larger intersectional issues of class, gender, race, and power that I (the CYC student) am deeply entangled in. It is a messy process – and in it, I have learned to focus on professional self-image, competence, skills, and mindfulness. But at the same time, I have learned that context and emotional conflict can also rupture the pursuit to be conscientious, ethical, along with many other professional qualities that supposedly define the "professional self". I now see that the "messiness" became a part

of my experience even before I arrived at my practicum site in South Africa. It was also waiting for me when I got home – a form of culture shock (I suppose), as I attempted to move back into my "Western" ways of living. And maybe it's just me. Maybe I don't have the ethical capacity to move in and out of different spaces without feeling completely confident in my motivations for travelling abroad. On the other hand, I do not think I am the first student to come home from a "Third World" country and wonder about the implications of my actions, the honesty of my judgments, and the ability to make ethical decisions based on my knowledge as a "Northerner".

(Journal reflection, January 2013)

Through this research process, I have been using the term "self" to represent some visible and very complex ideas about the ethical issues that have emerged from my international practicum experience in 2009. Even now, as I formulate this final chapter of my thesis, the complicated nature of my journey persists, and the emotionality remains. I imagine that as the reader, some features of my self have turned out to be far more visible in my writing, while other parts have possibly remained concealed and unexplored. I am not sure whether this is caused by my capacity to privilege one part of my self over another (Hoskins, 2003) or whether this is one of the presumed shortcomings of autoethnographic writing, which is that, "there are limits to self-knowledge" (Wilson & Dunn, 2004, as cited in McIlveen, 2008, p. 5) since a major emphasis is placed on the epistemological position of self as the participant, "the knower" *and* as the researcher, "the would-be-knower" (McIlveen, 2008). That being said, the dual positions that I have employed hold me accountable and afford me the privilege as a researcher to investigate

the multiple dimensions of self, while simultaneously acknowledging that these aspects of self are constantly overlapping, evolving, and never remaining static (Hoskins, 2003).

In this process, I have also scrutinized my ability to identify, interrogate, and attend to the meaningful ways in which the complex self can (and should) be critically examined in the context of international practicum work. Hoskins (2003) writes, "beliefs, values and assumptions about how the world 'should be' are not developed in a linear way. The development of perspectives is complex, including multiple sources of influence (peers, family, media)" (p. 322). When I reflect back on my own experiences, along with the ideas and beliefs that I have produced because of these experiences, I agree with Hoskins. There *are* multiple influences that complicate my personal assumptions about privilege, social justice, and human rights; because of this, it becomes a challenge to interpret and describe a well-established set of recommendations for students who might be considering learning across cultures in "Majority World" communities similar to my placement in South Africa. Hoskins' (2003) emphasis about "linearity" – how the development of perspectives does not follow a straight narrow path – highlights an important idea that not one story about an individual practicum experience can be privileged over another because these stories are always shifting and transforming. What does this mean for CYC students interested in undertaking international practicum placements? How can students prepare for the complicated aspects of international work that might confront their sense of professional competence in diverse contexts shaped by larger social processes? Furthermore, tracing back to my research question in Chapter One: How can CYC professional development and education prepare students for encounters with diverse others, social inequities, and unfamiliar, cross-cultural contexts?

(Re)Considerations for International Placements

In Chapter One, I draw from Epprecht (2004) who targets some of the unspoken assumptions about work or study placements abroad in "global South" countries. In his work, he addresses the serious consequences of unexamined good intentions and high ideals that can potentially mislead or even solidify Northern students' existing preconceptions about "exotic stereotypes" in the South and the necessity to offer help based on a Euro-Western propensity to intervene. Epprecht's (2004) ideas have stayed with me during this research process, inspiring me to further explore in my own experience the different aspects embedded in North-South relations within the context of international practicum work. Based on my personal experiences and interpretations in Chapter Four, and the literature on international development work, I have identified five topics that I hope will contribute to future knowledge and preparation for students in the School of Child and Youth Care who are considering international practicum work in Majority World contexts.

Topics to consider prior to departure.

- Motivation/Intention in relation to students' desire.
- Preparation – Length of stay in hosting country.
- Understanding historical and socio-political/cultural contexts.
- Self-awareness and unspoken assumptions about practice across cultures.
- What now? The importance of follow-up and debriefing.

The literature review in Chapter Two offers an examination on the complexities of international development work by identifying key ideas that address student motivations,

ethical issues related to development work, as well as "Northern" preconceptions about cross-cultural engagements in Majority World contexts. Embedded in these ideas lie deeper, more profound matters connected to dimensions of power, socio-political histories, and processes of colonization that I believe need to be looked at more extensively with regards to international work in CYC given the paucity of literature within this specific field.

Above, I have highlighted five topics that circulate around issues that are discussed in much of the literature on international work in "Southern countries". These issues have also been personalized in my experience as a practicum student. To some extent, the recommendations that I choose to highlight in this section expose fragments of my internalized emotions that are deeply entangled in my international experience in 2009. This is a vulnerable place where I currently position the multiple parts of my self, thus enabling me to reflexively address some of the relevant issues that may promote more critical thought related to the choices I or anyone else makes about where to practice, the assumptions they may carry with them, as well as the discomfort that may come up against their choices to "make a difference" in countries that may not have sought help in the first place. The five topics noted above cannot be neatly separated from one another, but rather should be understood as a web of intersecting ideas – inextricably linked to dimensions of power, history, class, privilege, gender, and race.

Implications for Practice in Child and Youth Care

Post-practicum reflection.

Free to wander.

Originally, I did not think about travelling back "home" to South Africa. I knew I had always wanted to, but that did not stop me from imagining myself in other parts of the world that were equally as "exotic". I remember speaking with faculty members at the school – describing my excitement, expectations, and fears once I had finally decided where to go. It all seemed so erratic, and perhaps it was in the decision-making and the planning that I became misdirected. Perhaps I should have discussed in greater depth my motivations and intentions for travelling abroad, or investigated my current knowledge about the current socio-political state of South Africa and the reverberations of colonial occupation. Maybe then I would have been more prepared, more willing to accept the complexities of practice across cultures in Majority World contexts – maybe then I would have decided that four months is not long enough.

(Journal Reflection, February 2013)

Pre-departure preparation.

It is suggested "that human beings have an innate moral sense, a quality termed 'benevolence', which leads them to reach out to others" (Smith, 2006, p. 7). I trust in this idea and believe that *my* desire to offer care comes from a place of sincerity and compassion for others. I also believe, entangled in this comes a responsibility to critically consider how or why we chose to help others based on our personal assumptions, values, expectations, and historical background.

I suggest that the practicum experience should begin long before students choose to cross borders – long before "the arrival" into new and "exotic" spaces. As cited in my literature review, Wehbi (2009) attempts to understand what motivates students to undertake international practicum placements in diverse contexts – narrowing down

specific reasons why students might travel abroad. For instance, "making a difference", and "giving something back" are two common purposes defined by students in her analysis. Wehbi argues that students should participate in a pre-departure program as a way to critically reflect on the reasons inspiring their choice to practice overseas in Majority World contexts. As Wehbi emphasizes, a pre-departure program might encourage students to critically reflect "on how they are positioned in relation to the community where they will be practicing, and what this concretely means for how their potential contributions and involvement will be facilitated or hindered" (p. 56). A pre-departure program might also support students to consider the affects of time spent in a hosting country, which may well produce additional considerations related to the construction of practicum objectives, personal agendas, and cultural attunement in diverse contexts. That being said, every student has a distinct reason for choosing to travel to different parts of the world to expand their knowledge, to gain more cross-cultural experience, and offer care – which in turn defines various reasons to offer pre-departure programs to practicum students. For many students (myself included), our attempt to offer care in different parts of the world might be largely based on altruistic reasons – to benefit the lives of others and "give back" in some regard. In this light, I question how students and faculty members might progressively interrogate the notion of altruism given that students "gain" a great deal from their practicum placement by choosing to invest time and money in exchange for a university credit and an acquisition of more practical experience. Tiessen (2008, as cited in Heron, 2011) regards this as a "consumerist" approach – a one-way direction that benefits students rather than the host community. As

I questioned earlier: Could short-term placements feed into this one-directional way of learning across cultures (Epprecht, 2004; Heron, 2011)?

I would argue that more discussion (prior to departure) on personal motivations, cultural preparation as well as an increased understanding about socio-political affairs in diverse contexts could profoundly serve students in their understanding of socially dominant assumptions that impact North-South relations, thus creating more ethical practices to emerge (Fook, 2010).

A pre-departure program need not be a "cross-examination" of who *should* travel abroad, or who might not be *ready* to do so. Rather, I suggest that this preparatory program be a reflective process by which students earnestly consider their professional judgments and ethical decision-making by examining how these issues might be implicated by intersecting forces associated with power, diversity, social inequality, and economic disparity (to name a few). In this light, students would have the opportunity to unravel the complexities of ethical practice woven into cross-cultural encounters by exploring the complicated nature and messiness of international practicum work. This in turn, might facilitate the development of professional self-awareness in students, increasing trust in their capacity to move into places of strangeness with mindfulness, humility, and respect. In addition to these ideas that address pre-departure matters, how might students make sense of these experiences after the fact? How important is the debriefing process?

Post-practicum closure.

I consider my international practicum placement to be the most intense part of my educational experience in the CYC program, and believe this is attributable to the fact that I

still hold on to the emotionality of my experiences – the uncertainties and lack of finality that still sits with me as I write these words. In my experience, I never fully attained closure once I returned to Canada. And perhaps that is not an explicit objective in specialized practicum placements. Perhaps closure is part of the journey – something we reconcile with when the time is right. Could it be that "my closure" is in the production of this research? In a sense, I feel honored to have the opportunity to reexamine my story in this light – to use my words in an attempt to offer new insights about reflexive practice in the context of international work. I can only hope that my story in this thesis be interpreted as an offering of "anti-oppressive practice" – a critical exploration of rethinking and redefining the profound honesties embedded in international work. Considering this, I am asserting that as global helpers, we must critically consider how profound the Euro-Western outlook is on countries in the Majority World, and work sincerely towards creating a space "in between" desire and action to reflect on the fundamentals of practicum work in diverse spaces. This in-between space might involve a variety of critical issues or considerations for CYC students alike. Pre-departure preparation programs may not recognize or "capture" the complexities of practice across cultures in their entirety; however, I would argue that through processes of critical self-reflection, and understanding how deeply entangled motivation and desire becomes in the development of the professional "self", the professional nature of CYC and other allied helping profession have the capacity to become more than a "snapshot" experience in cross-cultural engagements.

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