Article

Unsettling the Hegemony of 'Western' Thinking: Critical Reflection on My Journey to Understanding Campesino-a-Campesino Pedagogy

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Abstract: In the field of education for sustainability, there is a call to consider diverse livelihoods and world views beyond dominant anthropocentric, scientific, and 'Western' ways of understanding and living. For scholars and educators trained in 'Western' culture, this is complicated by how this dominant culture is infused in all our ways of thinking and being. This paper explores the authors' journey to unsettle their 'Western' thinking through analysis of reflexive field notes taken during field research. Data is shared from the author's doctoral study of Campesino-a-Campesino (CaC) as an anti-racist pedagogy. The paper tells a story of the unsettling of the author's assumptions about research, race, development, and education prompted by field experiences and guided by critical educational ethnography. An interdisciplinary approach to analysis is used including scholars in critical race theory, TribalCrit, Indigenous education, decolonization theory, and post-development theory. Conclusions illuminate researcher reflexivity, understanding critical context, learning the history of research, and shifting which scholars are considered in the analysis as crucial in the process of decolonizing the study of anti-racist pedagogies for sustainability.

Keywords: decolonizing research; pedagogy; sustainability; anti-racist; critical ethnography; reflexivity; development

1. An Invitation to Unsettle and Expand

Sustainabilities (emphasizing the plural) recognize that there are multiple ways sustainable livelihoods can and should manifest in diverse geographic, social, cultural, and political contexts. This plurality invites readers to consider sustainable livelihoods that do not originate in Western/Euro-American world views but originate in Indigenous communities and other racialized communities, and emerge from multiple ways of knowing and being. Scholars of education for sustainability call attention to the need to consider a diversity of values and livelihoods that go "beyond the dominant anthropocentric, scientific and 'Western' materialist ways of viewing the world to include local and Indigenous perspectives" [1] (p. 407). Unfortunately, historically, through the projects of colonization, development, and modernization, these local and Indigenous perspectives have been discounted as primitive, backward, sometimes ignored, and often systematically and forcibly erased [2–6]. The subjugation of knowledge and people has been justified through colonial logics of white supremacy that encode white culture and knowledge as superior [7]. Kahnawake Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred explains that the "basic substance of the problem of colonialism is the belief in the superiority and universality of Euro-American culture" [8] (p. 109). The dominance of Western/Euro-American ways of knowing in global society continues to reinforce the illusion that 'Western' knowledge and white culture are 'normal' and universal [6,9]. As Walsh explains, "the problem is not with European thought in and of itself but with the intimate entanglement of such thought to the processes and projects of modernity and, following Quijano, the coloniality of power" [6] (p. 12) The hegemony of Western/Euro-American thought continues to reinforce power relations that favor knowledge (and people) that are already privileged and marginalize knowledges (and peoples) other than Western/Euro-American [4,10,11].

The idea of an anti-racist approach to sustainability invites researchers, educators, and practitioners to unsettle the hegemony of Western/Euro-American thought and expand our thinking about sustainability to recognize that there are many ways of knowing and being that are legitimate and should be equally respected. Anti-racist approaches act in ways that reduce racial inequalities and hold that "racial groups are equals and none needs developing" [12], (p. 24). Among the many aspects of anti-racist approaches, this paper focuses on ways researchers, educators, and practitioners of sustainability can promote equity by challenging the privileging of Western/Euro-American ways of knowing over other knowledge and revaluing marginalized ways of knowing and being and the people who hold them.

As George Dei explains, anti-racism necessarily involves "the privileged acknowledging their relative power and a preparedness to interrogate and rupture systems of power and privilege in order to effect global social transformation" [10] (p. 15). For many scholars, including myself, who were trained in Western/Euro-American thinking, this is easier said than done. We are all embedded and entangled in colonial relations of power and privilege that reinforce Western/white culture as the norm [7,9]. This paper is a critical examination of my Ph.D. research journey. The purpose of sharing my experiences of unsettling during my research journey is to explore how reflexivity can move researchers, educators, and practitioners toward decolonizing research and valuing anti-racist approaches to education for sustainability. By unsettling, I mean to uncover and critically examine assumptions that may have been unconsciously entrenched. I reflect on how my experiences in the field and encounters with theory forced me to unsettle my own unexamined assumptions about, research, race, development, and education.

My Ph.D. dissertation focused on Campesino-a-Campesino pedagogy (peasant-to-peasant) as a way to empower peasants and spread agroecology practices. Campesino-a-Campesino (CaC) is a constructivist pedagogy that is characterized as horizontal because it involves knowledge exchange between peers. It is a process of collective reflection and action through which peasants share agroecological practices and innovative solutions to problems [13–15]. Agroecology is a way of farming that promotes food production in relation to nature, aligned with ecological principles, with an emphasis on farmers' knowledge of their context [16]. Although an in-depth examination of CaC is beyond the scope of this paper, I explore its character and ways of arranging learning to illustrate how my own thinking changed through its study. This paper will focus on moments of unsettling in my journey to understanding CaC as an anti-racist approach to education for sustainability. Thus, various aspects of CaC are woven throughout this paper as they apply to moments in my journey. I will first briefly explain the form of the paper and the framing of my analysis. I will then share my story in five parts: (a) How I came to this research, (b) Navigating research and privilege, (c) Understanding how racism operates in Mexico (d) Narratives of 'development' as sites of struggle, (e) Uncovering latent assumptions about education

2. An Academic 'Story'

The form of this paper is an academic 'story' where, in line with Indigenous education, the story is a vehicle for learning (for the writer and the reader) and a way to explain a perspective as it unfolds [17]. As such, it is written as a narrative in the first person. This story is not chronological but visits various points in the timeline of my journey to convey the changes in my understanding. To develop this paper, I read through my reflexive field notes taken during my research (2018–2020). These were taken alongside my descriptive case notes each day during my three visits to Mexico. In these reflexive notes, I reflected on my role as a researcher and/or how my experiences changed my understanding. Several scholars in contemporary ethnography emphasize the need for researchers to reflect on "their own positioning and biases in relation to the people and the landscapes of activity they are engaging" [18] (p. 409). For the purpose of this paper, I chose reflexive notes that represented a change in my perspective or evidence of an

acknowledgment and unsettling of my biases. In so doing, I answer Fortier's call for "non-Indigenous academics to make transparent even the most vulnerable and shameful inadequacies of our research" [19] (p. 33). I then explain my engagement with literature that helped push my thinking. I also include, where applicable, actions that I took as a result of this unsettling. This is, of course, only part of the story and more can be found in my Ph.D. dissertation [20]. I also consider my dissertation the first step in my decolonizing journey as my experiences since have further pushed my thinking and changed my approach.

My doctoral research was done by combining critical educational ethnography [21] and case study methodology [22]. This design was used to explore a case of CaC pedagogy in practice in the municipality of Calakmul, Campeche, México, focusing on five communities as sites within the broader case of 15 practicing communities. The facilitating organization was *Fondo Para La Paz* (FPP) or Fund for Peace, a small Mexican NGO in operation for 40 years. At the time of writing, FPP was working with communities in three regions of Southern México. Their mission was to, "promote the development of Indigenous communities living in extreme poverty, increasing people's capacities to generate their own living conditions" [23]. Their small field teams in each region worked with communities to support self-sufficiency through sustainable community development programs that were developed through reflexive and participatory processes in each local context [20].

The focus of critical educational ethnography (CEE) is "radical moves toward justice within the context of education (be it in or out of schools) for communities with whom research is being conducted" [21] (p. 147). A blended methodology, CEE, brings important elements of critical ethnography into educational ethnography. It takes up critical ethnographers' insistence on "viewing power, practice, and meaning as essentially indivisible contours of history and society" [18] (p. 407). CEE is characterized by essential elements including (a) articulation of critical context, (b) understanding and defining culture, (c) negotiating relationships and embeddedness, and (d) inclusion of multiple ways of knowing [21]. These elements together guided me to, among other things, negotiate a reciprocal research agreement with FPP, keep reflexive research notes, and engage participants in reflections on my analysis through member reflections [24]. For a more detailed description of these methods see [20]. Part of my story is how I came to choose CEE as a framing device and how I chose to enact this framing in context. This will be explored in the section on navigating research and privilege.

3. Interdisciplinary Framing

In this paper, I use an interdisciplinary approach [25] drawing on various scholars in decolonization theory, critical race theory, tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit), anti-racism, critical ethnography, Indigenous education, and post-development. I choose those whose writing was critical in helping me to understand moments of unsettling and change my approach to research.

I draw on concepts of race to highlight how racialization, a social process of assigning race and its associated meanings, continues to justify the inequality and oppression of Indigenous peoples [26]. As Walsh points out, the social constructions of race have their roots in historical processes of colonization [6] and thus are intertwined and endemic in settler-colonial societies [11]. Both antiracism and critical race scholarship point to the part that white privilege plays in reinforcing inequalities through a "system of opportunities and benefits conferred upon people simply because they are White" [27] (p. 27). As Bonnett further explains, "non-white identities, by contrast, have been denied the privilege of normativity, and are marked within the West as marginal and inferior" [28] (p. 188).

As Ghanaian-born anti-racism scholar Die explains, " . . . social formation[s] provide the structures within which values, ideas and norms of dominant groups are hegemonized in society" [10] (p. 11). These social formations are imbued with power relations that dictate who has the right to decide what a sustainable livelihood should look like; who is considered to have expertise; who is the teacher, and who is the learner. These power

relations have led to imperialism where "White Euro-American culture(s) as the norm from which to evaluate other cultures" [10] (p. 12). As Lumbee scholar Brayboy explains, "theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change" [11] (p. 403). As white researchers, educators, and practitioners, when we, perhaps unconsciously, act on the assumption that Western/Euro-American knowledge is universal, we neglect to consider ways of knowing and being as they are understood in other cultures. Through this neglect, we not only ignore important considerations for sustainability, but we also continue to perpetuate the imperialism of 'Western' ways of knowing, effectively erasing and replacing these other forms of knowledge.

As Barker claims, "there remains in Western culture a choice between imperialism and emancipation, and that means that imperialism and colonialism are social states, not cultural tenants or imperatives" [29] (p. 341). This leaves room for scholars trained in Western/Euro-American traditions to unsettle and open our ways of thinking and choose to be anti-colonial and anti-racist in our approaches. For white scholars, these approaches involve critical reflection, recognition of white privilege, and taking responsibility for addressing racism. Critical reflection can lead to uncomfortable moments of epistemic friction [30], wherein "our taken-for-granted assumptions about the world begin to crack" [7], (p. 558). According to Seawright, these moments can be transformative and lead to critical consciousness needed to, first, recognize how taken-for-granted assumptions may be rooted in racism, sexism, classism, and second, to imagine and enact alternatives [7].

4. How I Came to This Research

Growing up on a homestead milking goats and pulling carrots, on Turtle Island (Canada), was formative in my understanding of sustainability. It cultivated an openness to the viability of livelihoods that many might consider alternative. I am also a white settler[1], who has only recently learned the colonial history of our settler state and the harms done to people who are Indigenous to this area. As a white settler, I cannot help but be unsettled both by learning the historical and contemporary harms done to Indigenous people, as well as the prospect of decolonization. As Unangax̂ scholar Tuck and collaborator Yang [31] write, settler academics must not forget that decolonization is not a metaphor. This work forced me to recognize my complicity in systems of injustice and challenged me to stay with that feeling, to not make moves toward innocence [31]. This is very humbling work that continues to expose the limits of my understanding and the extent of my privilege. I live in a time when many white settlers are learning about this history and beginning to understand and struggle, as I do, with how to act now that these harms cannot be ignored. This paper is about my mistakes, challenges, and learnings in my attempts to change my approach.

As a scholar of education, my focus is on peer-to-peer learning models as ways to promote sustainable livelihoods. Through my study of pedagogy in graduate school, I came to understand that the ways in which we learn affect what we learn as much as the content of what we are learning. The ways, the arrangements, and the pedagogies through which we learn and share knowledge are infused with both cultural understandings and power relations. Prompted by rereading Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed during my education doctorate, I began to search for contemporary examples of Freire's [32] conception of consciousness-raising education where educators are partners or allies in the struggle against structures of oppression. My search led me to several studies of CaC pedagogy in Latin America. CaC is said to be a Feirian popular pedagogy because of its horizontal and constructivist nature. For example, through organized groups, Campesinos/as show each other agroecology practices they have used on their own land and encourage others to try. They then meet to reflect on their experiences. My search for more about CaC led me to Eric Holt-Giménez's book, Campesino-a-Campesino, which chronicles how international peasant farmer exchanges spread sustainable agricultural practices from Guatemala to México, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Cuba during the 1980s and 90s [15]. More recent scholarship highlighted the importance of CaC as an educational methodology in the

growth of agroecology and food sovereignty movements [13,14,33]. La Via Campesina, for example, has taken up CaC as an important tool for teaching and learning agroecology practices among peasants and small-holder farmers [34].

CaC is often compared to agricultural extension, a model of agriculture education practiced in many parts of the world where agronomists or extension officers from universities or companies teach farmers techniques that have been developed to improve production. In his writing on extension, Freire critiqued traditional extension methodologies on epistemological grounds [35]. Extension, as he defined it, involved bringing an already elaborated concept to someone who presumably does not know it. The extension also has the effect of negating the knowledge already possessed by peasants themselves. The traditional extension then is seen as an act of replacing local knowledge with knowledge of so-called 'experts', which reinforces hierarchies of knowledge and expertise. Emphasizing the importance of participation in the construction of knowledge, Freire argued that extension erased the capacity of people to gain the intended knowledge because knowing requires a subject's action in transforming their own reality. In Freire's analysis, without participation in the construction of the elaborated concept, the target of extension becomes an object. As an object, the Campesino/a is expected to passively receive this information and put it into practice. However, as Freire argues, only a subject can act, and through this acting, know [35].

In contrast, CaC is described as a participatory tool that ensures Campesinos/as are included in agricultural development as the drivers of knowledge construction and sharing activities [36]. Those who are the leaders in CaC are called agroecology promoters, or in this case study, promoter guides. Their role is to share their knowledge of agroecology practices with interested neighbors and community members and help guide their implementation if needed. For ANAP (Cuba's small farmers' union) CaC is defined as:

> a form of promotion and improvement of production systems, which places farmers in a position to achieve higher levels of sustainability, based on the principle that participation and empowerment of the actors themselves are intrinsic components of sustainable development, and therefore focuses on the initiatives and protagonism of peasants [13] (p. 73).

Although peasant protagonism has no direct translation from Spanish, I use it here to mean the collective power of peasants to create their own sustainable livelihoods. By centering knowledge, action, and collective power of peasants, CaC poses a challenge to the social conception of Campesino/a as "less than". This social conception of Campesinos/as as illiterate, poor, and incapable, has been both historically constructed and socially perpetuated to maintain economic, racial and social inequalities in México. My research was guided by the question: Could CaC be an anti-racist pedagogy that empowers peasants to self-determine their sustainability? Excited by this question, I searched for examples of this pedagogy in practice in the region where it originated, developed, and spread [15].

5. Navigating Privilege in Research

When I proposed the study of CaC in México, my dissertation committee was skeptical. Even after I explained that I had traveled, lived, and worked in México for several months at a time between 2005 and 2008, they were not convinced. I understood why when I read through the long list of papers and books they gave me to read that told the story of the historical harms of research in Indigenous communities. This gave me pause. In selecting this topic of research, I had to ask myself, how could I avoid perpetuating inequalities while conducting research as a privileged white woman in a cross-cultural setting with people who have fewer material resources. In my case, both economic and racial privilege needed to be recognized and reckoned with. After the first meeting with agroecology promoter guides in México I wrote the following in my reflexive journal:

> Today, Maria asked if I had traveled on an airplane and how long it took me to get there and how much it had cost. I answered honestly, adding the fact

that my university had funded my trip to be there. This made me keenly aware of the economic mobility I experience. I also recognized that my ability to fly cheaply depends on those who have more economic means than myself, who fill up flights to Cancun from Canada and the USA, making my flights cheaper. As these vacationers fill up resorts in Cancun, they lure Campesinos/as out of the countryside all over the peninsula toward Cancun in search of jobs, and economic mobility. They make up the bulk of the low wage labor, grounds keepers, room cleaners, that keep resort owner's profit margins high. The fact that my currency has a favorable exchange when paying for hotels, transportation and meals depends on global histories of colonial power. This positions me at an advantage, with more means to access what I need and want [37].

In this reflexive note, I recognize my complicity in systems of global colonial power, and the privilege they afford me. My presence there was a manifestation of my middle-class white privilege. This presence was not neutral but was complicit in systems that pull Campesinos/as away from their substance livelihoods toward resorts, which contribute to the exploitation of their labor and loss of their Indigenous cultures.

As Daphne Patai explains, "it is the very existence of privilege that allows the research to be undertaken" [38] (p. 137). Patai claims that the existence of inequality between researcher and participant makes research inevitably unethical. This inherent inequality is partly due to the split between subject and object on which all research depends " . . . imply[ing] that objectification, the utilization of others for one's own purposes (which may or may not coincide with their own end), and the possibility of exploitation, are built into almost all research projects with living human beings" [38] (p. 139). Ethically, researchers must question "the quality and consequences of their own curiosity, the extent to which their ways and means of knowing and understanding less respected than exploited other human beings" [39]. In other words, if there is little or no benefit to research participants and possible harm, does the researcher's interest in knowing or understanding outweigh the rights of the participants? In research, we do not just learn for learning's sake, "It is not done 'for nothing' in a totally disinterested way. It is for something, often it is to help us understand something" [40] (p. 133), and learning through research can be extractive and predatory. We extract understanding and report it to the academic world for the purposes of our own career advancement [38]. My heart sank.

The reading list given to me by my committee was important in understanding the legacy of the purposes and historical harms of research. Between the 1920s and 1950s, the so-called 'Golden Years' of anthropology, researchers voyaged, or were sent off to 'exotic' countries to do fieldwork [39,41] among the 'savages' of other 'backward' cultures [42]. Their reports, often racist, were consumed with fascination and filed away for the grand purpose of contributing to the knowledge of the diversity of human cultures [43]. However, whose interests was this research serving? This knowledge was often used in the service of the colonial project of maintaining power by controlling the 'troublesome groups' [44]. Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith identifies research as "a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other" [45] (p. 2). Matua and Blue Swadener add how the act of research itself can be a colonial act [46]. The act of representation is colonial when "the individuals have been stripped of their power for self-definition and self-expression by being cast in the role of the marginalized Other" [46] (p. 12).

My heart sank even further when I read on page one of Smith's book on Decolonizing Methodologies that research is a powerful and dirty word in Indigenous peoples' vocabulary that still "offends the deepest sense of our humanity" [45] (p. 1). It offends in several ways, including that "Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us" [45] (p. 1). Experiences of Indigenous peoples with research have included lies, empty promises, coverups, betrayals, and inaccurate/fictional ethnographies [47]. The assumption of the authority of privileged 'Western' researchers to represent other cultures is called out as a

perpetuation of colonialism. The inherent questions are, whose interests does the research serve? Who stands to benefit/be harmed by the methods and products of the study?

Taking seriously these ethical concerns, I paused to consider my own motivations and role in pursuing this research. Daphne Patai challenges those considering doing research across race, class, and culture to not be overwhelmed into inaction by the difficulties we face but to act if the study is worth doing [38]. In choosing to act, my motivations were, first, to use my relative privilege to give voice to perspectives that had been marginalized and may not have otherwise been considered in academic discourses around sustainability. As Fine et al., explain, my goal was to "transform public consciousness and 'common sense' about the poor and working classes, write in ways that attach lives to racial structures and economies, and construct stories and analyses that interrupt and reframe the victim-blaming mantras . . . " [47] (p. 169). Rosaldo offers that, "dismantling objectivity creates a space for ethical concerns . . . enabling social analyst to become a social critic" [48] (p. 181). The purpose of ethnography becomes the communication of interests and aims of marginalized peoples, making ethnography a political act [48]. Second, I was motivated to find ways to work in partnership and reciprocity with research participants, so as to develop relationships of solidarity.

I looked for methodologies that would guide me in making my research useful to communities and give them power in defining how they would be represented. I came to use Critical Educational Ethnography as outlined by Howard and Ali, because its goal was the "uncovering of useful and productive knowledge that will help address a concern of the local community" [21] (p. 158). Community members take the role of identifying the concern to be addressed. In this way, CEE addresses the question, "whose interests does the research serve?" posed by the movement to decolonize research methodologies. Howard and Ali argue that critical educational ethnographers must, "approach local communities not simply as subjects of researchers, but as full partners in the research itself" [21] (p. 151). In practice, this decentering of researcher authority should come in the form of involvement of research participants in every stage of the research from design to analysis [21]. When I reflect back on my attempts at involving participants in research goals and design, I admit that they were only partially successful.

I used a reciprocal research agreement with the community organization FPP as one way to align my study with their priorities and to reciprocate their energy in supporting my study by contributing to their work. In my conversations with FPP staff, I asked if there was a particular product or form of labor that I could offer in return for their participation in my research. They identified what is called a *sistematización,* which I learned was a document outlining an approach or system. In this case, FPP's approach to building CaC networks with communities. Including this as a product of research changed and enriched my research in several ways. I added several questions to my interview guide for staff and participants to help build my understanding of how this program had developed over time and I held several interviews and meetings with staff to collaborate on the development of the *sistematización*. Thus, co-developing the *sistematización* with FPP served the interests of the community organization and also guided the direction of my research.

About a year after we made the reciprocal research agreement, I met with FPP staff to present a draft of the *sistematización* and ask for feedback and changes. When I listen back to the recording of this meeting, I laughed at the exclamation of relief I made when the coordinator said the work I had done would be very useful to her team. I share this for two reasons. First to demonstrate how a reciprocal approach to research makes the success of the research contingent on its usefulness to the partners in research. My success depended on my collaborative relationship with community partners and the relative contribution of my work to theirs. Second, as evidence of the time and trust that FPP staff had given me before they knew if my work would be useful, or not. In later communications, I was told that this document had helped FPP secure funding to expand the program and train new staff. This was when I felt that the research agreement had been reciprocal.

My second attempt to be guided by local concerns and involve participants in research came in the form of member reflections [24] where initial analysis was shared with research participants, and they were asked for feedback. In this way, my analysis evolved in conversation with participants. Member reflections in this case took the form of short narratives I wrote based on interviews and observations, which I read out loud to each group. Throughout the reading of the narratives, I paused and asked questions about what I felt were gaps in my understanding and questions about the accuracy of my representation of their reality. By engaging in member reflections, I gave authority to participants, if partially, in how they were represented. There were very interesting and important changes made as a result of member reflection sessions. Even though not all groups were equally engaged in the process of member reflections, all of the participants expressed that they were happy with how they were being represented and wished to have their names on their quotes and photographs. Some even expressed that they felt honored that I had come from far away to learn from them and share their perspectives.

As an interesting unintended benefit of the member reflections process, FPP staff expressed that the short narratives I created for member reflections, would be useful in their fundraising campaigns to support CaC. They also shared that the narratives gave them a view of participants' perspectives of their work that they rarely got an insight into, as they mostly communicated with the promoter guides in each community. In this way, I felt that my efforts served the purpose of making participant perspectives and priorities clearer to the facilitating organization. Up to this point, my work had been useful to Campesinos/as through their relationship with FPP, not directly to Campesinos/as themselves.

The limitations of this study came in many forms. Within my Ph.D. program, students begin with a research proposal and then the ethics review process before beginning any fieldwork, thus the purposes of research are necessarily defined ahead of time. Additionally, given the timeline of a Ph.D. program in Canada (4 years), there is not sufficient time for authentic relationship building necessary for communities to truly define the purposes of the study. It is my hope that the relationships I have formed thus far will facilitate this process in the future. Given these limitations, even though I had hoped to find a way for participants to define the direction of my research, it proved unrealistic and even problematic.

In my experience, Campesinos/as are very busy with the work needed to feed their family. For example, near the end of one member reflections session, when I asked a participant if she had more time to discuss what I had written based on interviews with her and her fellow community members, she said she hadn't yet made the tortillas and it was getting late. I felt that asking more of Campesinos/as time would have been disrespectful. There were more immediate needs to be taken care of. I wrote in my reflexive journal "If you can't have a garden because your chickens will eat the seeds you plant, you don't need a discussion: you need fencing" [49]. Those with privilege and the means to buy fencing may have time for discussions. At the time, I felt that asking them to define the direction of research would have been pushing an assumption that research *in itself* has inherent benefits to participants. This is not to say that working with participants to develop a research project is not possible, but that I failed to do so. I acknowledge that cultural differences, institutional processes, and power differentials prevented this research from being truly participant-directed. Thus, despite my efforts to the contrary, my research remained colonial in nature. Systems of white privilege afforded me the opportunity to continue this research, despite its limitations. Learning from this experience, I continue to challenge myself as a researcher to work in ways that engage participants of research in the goals and design of research from the initial stages so that they hold the power to decide its direction.

6. Understanding How Racism Operates in México

Howard and Ali argue for a focus on historic, political, economic, social, racial, and cultural inequalities that may contribute to the research problem [21]. Critical ed-

ucational ethnographers ask, "what are the social conditions that create this particular context?" [21] (p. 148). George Dei explains that "an understanding of how racial, class, gender, and sexual identities are implicated in ways of knowing and of knowledge itself is crucial to the anti-racism project for transformative learning and social change" [10] (p. 14). In this case, identifying the critical context in this study included examining the history of the region within the broader history of México, race, gender and class structures, land tenure structure, and the legacy of 'development' in the region. In this section, I share how my field experiences and my encounters with theory changed my understanding of racism as it is experienced by Campesinos/as in the case study context.

In 2005, in the same state where my future research would take place, my Mexican friend told me that someone she was dating wouldn't speak to her anymore because she had traveled with me to visit Campesino/a villages. She explained that people of the upper classes refused to visit poor villages or associate with those who did so. At the time, I understood this to be explained by classism and began my study in 2017 with many experiences living in México where the race was rarely spoken about.

During my second research visit, on the way to a community participating in the case study, the Indigenous staff of FPP asked about how Indigenous peoples were treated in Canada. After I answered with what I knew about the colonial harms that continue to perpetuate inequalities today, FPP staff began to tell me stories of anti-Indigenous racism in México. One was about a woman they knew who had lost a child while waiting for care at a local hospital. The storyteller named this racism, explaining that the woman had been denied care and stayed the night on the floor of the hallway because she was Indigenous and spoke her own language more fluently than Spanish.

In my search to better understand racism in México, I found critical race scholars who explained how race, gender, and class are intertwined in México and how race plays out in dominant social metanarratives [27,50]. Moreno Figueroa explains that in México the existence of racism is often denied because of what she calls a Mestizaje logic, where it is socially accepted that, "in Mexico, there is no racism because we are all 'mixed'" [50] (p. 388). Despite this assertion, there is still an assumed and engrained white superiority, which manifests in discrimination toward those with 'Indigenous features' or darker skin compared to others [50]. Mestizaje logic has its roots in ideologies of the early 19th century in Latin America where newly independent nation-states attempted to build national identity through homogenization. The mixing of races was promoted as a chance for moral and social improvement for the (Indigenous) individual, at the same time as serving the state's interests in the creation of a unified 'Mexican' identity [50]. This explains how racism can be at work in "a context that not only denies it, but where people do not recognize themselves as racialized, [and] there is no public discourse about it . . . " [50] (p. 388). As Moreno Figueroa explains,

> Those who locate themselves as Mexicans have learned to see and praise Indigenous peoples as an essential and vital part of the national culture and landscape, "giving 'sense' and depth to Mexican history, but they do not seem to have any desire to 'look' like them [50] (p. 393).

This quote shows the contradiction lived by Indigenous peoples in México that reflects societies' willingness to celebrate the richness of culture, but not the bodies of those who enact this culture.

Since México is a settler-colonial state, Indigenous identity is both "legal/political and racialized" [11] (p. 428) which is explained by TribalCrit as a liminal space. The legal/political aspects of Indigenous identity reflect the complex history of colonization, attempts at homogenization of a Mexican identity [and erasure of Indigenous identities], and their current relation to the Mexican state. TribalCrit offers a way to understand the experiences of those living in this liminal space where a simple binary of White/Black does not apply. For Campesinos/as the intersection of class, race, and Indigenous identity comingle to marginalize their social status [51]. For Campesinas, gender also intersects with class, race, and Indigenous identity to create further harm to their persons [51]. What I had

witnessed at work in México was the marginalization of Campesinos/as to a liminal space created by these intersections. This liminal space reflects contradictions in, for example, the societal appreciation for handmade tortillas, but racism toward the very people whose hands grow the corn and make the tortillas—those with darker skin, speaking Indigenous languages. The writing of critical race theorists Moreno Figueroa, Crenshaw, Solórzano and Yosso, and TribalCrit scholar Brayboy, helped me understand and articulate the unique positions of Campesinos/as in my representations of their experiences and perspectives.

7. Narratives of 'Development' as Sites of Struggle

In my interviews with promoter guides, I asked what motivated them to do this work. Mariana said, "Yeah, well, what are we going to do? Sometimes we do not have money when we do not have a crop to sell . . . Here, flat out, we have no resources, we have no salary, or government cheque, we are Campesinos working in the fields." [20] (p. 146). She talked about the loss of crops by many in her community due to the recent drought, and their strategy of raising chickens, pigs, and growing home gardens to feed her children. She also said the women in her group are very motivated to find ways to continue their lifestyle. She explained, " . . . If we look for work outside, who is going to take care of our children?" [20] (p. 146). It is important to explain that those I interviewed came here on the promise of government land grants, from other states in México where they had also led a Campesino/a lifestyle, living off the land. Mariana showed me that while continuing this lifestyle may be a choice, within this lifestyle, there are things that are not choices: working hard to grow and raise food. Mariana made clear that she was aware of the choice to leave and look for work, but that she would not have anyone to care for her children if she did. My reflexive notes on the day I interviewed Mariana included these reflections.

> Talking to a friend at home today, I found it hard to translate what I am learning here. How do I explain the Campesino/a lifestyle to 'modernized/urbanized' people who might conceptualize it as a sacrifice, as a giving up of things. I told her that maybe it is closest to the idea of 'homesteading' but it isn't the same. There isn't the same cultural family history [in homesteading]. This is really Indigenous people carrying on their traditional lifestyle, despite the struggles they meet. Why do we think about 'development' as empowering women to work outside the home, when this is not what they want? The women I spoke with here don't want to leave their families to work. Here, working in the city, or in town would mean leaving their community and giving up the raising of their children . . . [37].

In the reflexive note above, I identified discourses of 'development' as a site of struggle between 'Western' conceptions of living and those of Campesinos/as. Understanding the history and goals of the project of 'development' was a significant site of learning in my research process. The marginalization of Campesinos/as is bound up in the history of the 'development project' and current power structures that reinforce settler state control to define what 'development' means.

When I researched the history of 'development' in México, I came upon post-development scholars who characterized the 'development project' as imperialist and an active continuation of the colonial project into the post-colonial era [52]. They identified the process of labeling a country as 'underdeveloped' as a process of "naturalising the norms and historical processes of the European Self" [53] (p. 2551). Post-development theorists understood the development project as an unjustified intervention in the lives of those who were deemed as 'less developed'. They trace the origin of 'development' back to a speech by Harry Truman made in 1949 wherein he called for the more developed countries of the world to solve the problems of underdeveloped countries, thus dividing the countries of the world into a hierarchical binary that reproduced the colonial relations of the previous historical period [52,54,55]. For example, in Truman's speech the people of 'underdeveloped' nations were characterized as suffering poverty because of primitive and stagnant economic policies and those from more 'advanced' nations had a moral obligation to help [54].

This helping was done with the assumption that the helper knew the best solution for the 'helpless' [56]. This highlights the reinforcement of the hierarchies of knowledge in the export of Western/Euro-American conceptions of development. If we are to take an anti-racist approach to sustainability, we must continue to challenge still active concepts of underdevelopment as fictions created to perpetuate hierarchies.

Particularly relevant to a Campesino/a population today is the project of development's perpetuation of hierarchies constructed at the time of colonization including, the privileging of 'Western' knowledge over other forms of knowledge, urban over rural, white over other races/ethnicities, men over women and 'Western' forms of pedagogy over other forms [3,4]. For Campesino/a populations in México, the project of development manifested in a campaign to modernize the countryside through Green revolution agriculture technologies and practices which, it was thought, would lead to the disappearance of the peasantry [57]. It was predicted that through modernization Campesinos/as, who were considered inefficient producers, would either become modernized farmers or become the working class as they entered the capitalist system through wage labor [5]. This prediction was false. In Latin America alone, an estimated 65 million Campesinos/as continue to live from subsistence farming and 'petty commodity' production [58].

In my field experiences, I began to recognize narratives of 'underdevelopment' in rural development programs designed by the federal government that perpetuated hierarchies of knowledge and maintained a paternalistic relation with Indigenous communities. For example, several initiatives designed to give Campesinos/as what was considered by the federal government to be a 'dignified life' did not make sense in the context in which Campesinos/as were living. One example among many in Calakmul was the installation of flush toilets in a region with severe and increasing issues with drought, and lack of access to clean drinking water. Campesinos/as I interviewed did not have access to enough water in the dry season for drinking, washing, and watering gardens, let alone for flushing toilets. Standing water in flush toilets was also identified as a potential breeding ground for mosquitos carrying malaria. Another example is the installation of cement block houses with metal roofs under the banner of a 'dignified life', when Campesinos/as in this region prefer their traditional housing with thatched palm roofs and mud/clay walls because they stay cooler in the extreme heat of the region. This top-down rural development approach shows ignorance of the geographies and social realities of the area and a disregard for local knowledge. This example highlights how the Mexican government continues to work in a paternal relationship with Indigenous communities. If the goal of 'development' is a 'dignified life', multiple ideas of what constitutes a dignified life must be considered based on the social, geographical, and cultural context of each area.

Langdon suggests that decolonizing 'development' would need to include decolonizing the minds of many, and "moving from patronising, colonising interventionist approaches to a much more mutual process ... " [59] (p. 387). He points out that moving to action through mutual, collective processes involves changing the "very process of engaging in such action" and destabilizing "power dynamics of whose knowledge counts." [59] (p. 387). In the case of CaC, the way that it operates to build networks of mutual knowledge sharing and support among Campesinos ensures that education aligns with their chosen way of life as Campesinos/as. This contrasts with continuing narratives of 'underdevelopment' that were perpetuated through rural development programs in this context. Learning about narratives of 'development' and their origin shifted my perspective and brought forth questions about who is expected to learn and who is expected to change in our goals for sustainable 'development'.

8. Uncovering Latent Assumptions about Education

As a scholar of education, I wanted to understand how CaC pedagogy facilitates an atmosphere of cooperation, sharing, and co-creation of knowledge which facilitates the development of protagonism among peasants [13,14]. As a student of Western/Euro-American educational theory, I began by reading 'Western' social learning theories. I recognize this

now as the wrong approach. This learning was sparked by reading Mignolo [60], who helped me to recognize that the social learning theories I was exploring were 'Western' social learning theories that were based on observations of European or American educational settings and should not be universally applied. As Dei, reminded me, cultures differ in their approaches to learning and education [10]. This learning was a process that evolved over time and was influenced by many different experiences. I highlight a few of these here.

After reviewing and finding resonance with several 'Western' learning theories including self-determination theory [61], modeling and role modeling theories, various theories of agency [62–64], and Freire's consciousness-raising education [31], I attended a course in Cuba on CaC methodology in 2017 and was left with a sense that these theories didn't fully represent what was at play in CaC pedagogy. Conversations during field experiences revealed my biases that were shaping how I approached my analysis. This reflexive field note, during my first visit to the area where I began my research reflects a shift in my understanding of CaC.

> Today, it was made clear to me that CaC pedagogy is operating all the time on an informal basis. Of course, Campesinas/as are sharing knowledge with each other as they learn from their practice. Today I was told a story of one community member in Calakmul who had taught over 70 other Campesinos/as how to produce honey organically. The Campesino who told me this story, also said "hace falta un facilitator" [what is missing is a facilitator]. He saw a need for a facilitator in organizing this sharing of learning on a larger scale. He explained that there could be so much more done with the help of a facilitator [65].

I acknowledged at this moment that I had inadvertently assumed that CaC was a program of some kind with a beginning and an end with someone (possibly external) who was in charge. I had been thinking of it in the same way as one might think of school from a 'Western' perspective. Through conversations, on this day, I realized CaC, as a term, may be an attempt to formalize or define pre-existing cultural ways of sharing knowledge. After this conversation with a veteran Campesino promoter of agroecology, I saw the role of the facilitator as one of encouraging further elaboration and organization of preexisting cultural practices. What I had missed, was the recognition that the educational practices of CaC were already in these communities.

Looking back, it was alarming for me to realize that this blind spot still existed despite my training in Cuba on the CaC methodology where facilitators explained that agroecology knowledge and practices do not need to come from outside but can be generated collectively within the community. This demonstrates how engrained colonial thinking can be. I was using Western/Euro-American theories to evaluate other cultures [10]. Recent scholars have pointed out that despite efforts to decolonize methodologies, most research in social science is structured by the limits of 'Western' ontologies [66], through a lens that makes results "perceptible or legible to scholars who are thinking about the world exclusively through Western ways of knowing [19] (p. 20). With this understanding came the realization that I needed to look for learning theories that did not originate in the 'Western' tradition to understand CaC. Unfortunately, although the reflexive note shared above was taken early in my field experiences, its importance did not fully translate into practice until after I had completed my dissertation. It was not until more recently that I turned to theories around Indigenous ways of teaching and learning to better understand how CaC reflects cultural ways of sharing knowledge.

Although Campesinos/as I interviewed were from two different Indigenous cultures (Cho'ol and Tzeltal) and some did not identify as Indigenous, they were all living a Campesino/a lifestyle of subsistence farming in Indigenous communities. Although ways of teaching and learning are different in different Indigenous cultures, several scholars of Indigenous education have put forth elements of Indigenous Education that they believe are common to Indigenous populations of the Americas. I share one example here that has particularly strong resonance with CaC pedagogy.

Tewa philosopher Greg Cajate in his book Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education [17] describes various elements of Indigenous education that align with CaC. To illustrate synergies, I have chosen a few elements to highlight. Cajate describes Indigenous education as, "learning about life through participation and relationship in community, including not only people, but plants, animals and the whole of Nature . . . a communally integrated expression of environmental education" [17] (p. 26). The communally integrated quality of Indigenous education aligns with CaC's participatory approach where Campesinos/as learn together and problem-solves through action and reflection on issues in their communities. Important to the discussion of decolonizing education for sustainable development is Cajate's statement that "each person and each culture contains the seeds that are essential to their well-being and positive development" [17] (p. 29). The way CaC situates knowledge and expertise in the community rather than with outside experts shows an enactment of Cajate's statement. If each Campesino/a is the protagonist in their own learning story, then the facilitators' role is fundamentally different from an "extension officer" or a teacher, bringing knowledge to others. Facilitators in CaC facilitate, or make easier, the process of knowledge sharing between peers. This results in learning and implementation of agroecology practices that are unique to each person in relation to their own land and experiences, and their own sustainability. This is fundamentally different from a view of education, or agricultural extension, where the solutions are created by an 'expert' outside the community, who is coming to teach Campesinos/as about what sustainability should look like.

In teaching agroecology, CaC aligns with Cajate's conception of Indigenous education by promoting farming in relation to nature and teaching "a way of life that sustains both the individual and the community" [17] (p. 30). Importantly, agroecology is said to be, based on Indigenous farming practices. In a review of literature on agroecology in México, authors describe the emergence of agroecology as a science in the 1980s and 1990s, as the result of Mexican agronomic scientists being inspired by traditional Indigenous peasant farming systems observed during intense fieldwork in the 1970s [67]. Taking this history into account, CaC can be seen as working to rescue, revitalize and share practices and knowledge traditional to this region that may have been eroded through processes of colonization and the project of modernizing agriculture.

9. Summary of my Learnings

Although my journey in understanding CaC as an anti-racist pedagogy has just begun, what I have learned, so far, is that CaC can be understood as anti-racist in its facilitation of the empowerment of Campesinos/as to work toward their own version of sustainability. To be anti-racist, education, including education for sustainability, must value diverse cultural knowledge and be culturally rooted to be relevant for learners [10]. By centering Campesinos/as as protagonists, CaC values diverse cultural knowledge and ways of teaching and learning that originate in each context where it is practiced. By working through peer relationships CaC sets up fundamentally different ways of teaching and learning from that of traditional agricultural extension. Although there may always be a power imbalance between those who have the knowledge and those who want to learn, the balance of power between those who consider each other to be peers is importantly different. Peers assume competence in each other; thus, the relations of power are more balanced. Each has something to learn from the other. CaC operates in ways that assume and build the power of those who have been marginalized by dominant systems.

CaC makes empowerment real, not by giving or lending power, but by assuming it is already there. This power is predicated on a fundamental belief by the facilitating organization in the capacity of Campesinos/as as holders of knowledge that will lead them toward self-sufficiency. This knowledge is not based on an abstract concept of 'development' created far away, but on knowledge and experience of the local context that is needed for building sustainable livelihoods in this context. This valuing of Campesino/a knowledge and expertise is unique in a society that continues to treat Campesinos/as as

"less than". To move toward anti-racist approaches to education for sustainability we must interrogate the history of 'development' and how it affects our conceptions of who has the expertise to decide what sustainable development looks like. By teaching agroecology, CaC contributes to the revitalization and learning of traditional Indigenous agricultural practices and knowledge that may have been erased through colonial processes.

This paper illuminates researcher reflexivity as crucial in the process of decolonizing research and transitioning to anti-racist approaches to education and sustainable development. I shared the story of my learning journey to demonstrate how my white privilege and unexamined biases limited my understanding and representation of CaC and the perspectives of my research participants. My experiences unsettled the hegemony of 'Western' knowledge in my own thinking and led to moments of epistemic friction that gave me pause. In these pauses, I opened my mind to new ways of understanding CaC pedagogy. This matters because I am now able to recognize and interrogate systems that continue to marginalize Campesinos/as and can work to bring their knowledge and perspectives to discussions of education for sustainable development where 'Western' discourses are still accepted as the norm.

Through reflecting on my research journey, I have learned several ways that researchers can unsettle the hegemony of 'Western' knowledge and revalue marginalized ways of knowing and being. First, learn about the colonial history and social relations of power (race, class, gender), that affect each context. My learning journey reinforced that racism operates differently in each political, cultural and historical context and is greatly influenced by colonial histories. Learning this critical context is especially important in cross-cultural situations to understanding the perspectives of participants and communicating their interests and aims. CEE as a methodology was helpful in guiding me toward understanding the critical context including how racialization, gender, class, Indigenous identity, and narratives of 'underdevelopment' influence the daily lives of Campesinos/as. These understandings can be used to transform public perception about Campesinos/as and "interrupt and reframe the victim-blaming mantras" [47] (p. 169).

Second, consider the history of research itself and how it may perpetuate colonial relations of power. Learning about and reckoning with the histories of anthropology, forced me to consider every step and decision in my research process in a new way. To decolonize our research methodologies, we must interrogate the history and purposes of research and find ways to involve subjects of research in all stages of design and elaboration of study so our research can be in a reciprocal relationship with participants. Part of this learning involves navigating the privilege of doing research and offering our labor as researchers in reciprocity for the efforts of our participants. Changing the research relationship to one of collaboration revalues the knowledge and expertise of participants and moves research away from its extractive history.

Thirdly, expand and shift the scholars we consider in our analysis. Engaging with scholarly work that originates outside dominant 'Western' ways of knowing is necessary to understanding diverse manifestations of sustainability and education for sustainability. The exercise of trying to make CaC fit into 'Western' theories of teaching and learning was useful in the sense that it allowed me to see where CaC was different. Encountering decolonization theory forced me to consider that my attempt to explain CaC through 'Western' social learning theories was perpetuating the imperialism of Western/Euro-American knowledge. I had fallen into the unconscious pattern of assuming that 'Western' knowledge is universal, and in doing so neglected to consider ways of teaching and learning as they are understood in other cultures.

As I shared at the beginning, this is only a part of my story, and my learning journey continues. As a white settler scholar, I have much to learn and reckon with, but through the sharing of my reflections, mistakes, and limitations, I invite others to also engage in reflexive practice. As Fortier writes, "the responsibility of non-Indigenous peoples to engage in self-reflexive and critical actions and research around their own relationships to colonialism

and the process of decolonization is important in the development of self-determining relationships of solidarity" [19] (p. 22).

Institutional Review Board Statement: The doctoral study, which this paper is based upon was conducted in accordance with the Ethics Review Board of Queen's University.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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Notes

1   For a detailed discussion of the term settler see Barker, 2009.

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