

I want to experience the solidarity of allied actions that refuse fantastical narratives of commonality and hope. Determining what exactly needs to be done will involve the kind of creativity that Indigenous peoples have used to survive some of the most oppressive forms of capitalist, industrial, and colonial domination.

Kyle Whyte, "Let's Be Honest, White Allies"

Through travelling to other people's "worlds" we discover that there are "worlds" in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable.

Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, World-Travelling and Loving Perception"

"If you have come to help or fix then I say thank you and ask you to go away, if you have come to stand beside me in my pain then I say welcome."

Nura (Pitjantjatjara elder) central Australia



# Decolonizing Service Learning

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## **Territorial Acknowledgement**

In keeping with regional protocol, we acknowledge the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and honor the sovereignty of the Six Nations—the Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Seneca and Tuscarora—and their land where we are situated, where we live, and where this workshop is taking place. In this acknowledgement, our intention is to demonstrate respect for the treaties that were made on these territories and to mourn the harms – some ongoing -- of the distant and recent past.

# Introduction: What Brings Us Here?

# Why Service Learning?

Questions Open to All:

1. Why do we do Service Learning?
1. What do we want students to take away from Service Learning?
1. What struggles do we face meeting these goals?

# Common Criticisms of Service Learning

1. Poverty Voyeurism & Exploitation
2. White Saviorism & Paternalism
3. Centers student experience over community wisdoms
4. Lack of intellectual, academic rigor
5. Methodological Confusion: is it a pedagogy or is it a text?

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1. Our own experiences with Service Learning

# Service Learning as Colonialism

Anibal Quijano, “coloniality of power” :

[The] specific colonial structure of power produced the specific social discriminations which later were codified as ‘racial,’ ‘ethnic,’ ‘anthropological’ or ‘national’, according to the times, agents, and populations involved. These intersubjective constructions, product of Eurocentered colonial domination were even assumed to be ‘objective’, ‘scientific’, categories, then of a historical significance. That is, as natural phenomena, not referring to the history of power. This power structure was, and still is, the framework within which... the other social relations of classes or estates [operate]. (“Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality”, in *Cultural Studies*, 2007)

- Social and economic structures of power and control that constitute modern, liberal societies beyond formal colonialism, i.e. white supremacy as different than white privilege
- Points to extant racial, political, social, and epistemic hierarchies - that appear to be natural and normal. This is the pre-formed lens through which we are trained to see the world.

# Coloniality and Power Relations in SL

We must pay attention to the way knowledge is produced and who is allowed to produce it within the power relations that make up the practice of service learning:

1. Teacher-Student
2. Institution-Community
3. Suburban-Urban
4. Intellectual-“Native”
5. Theory-Practice



# Coloniality and Knowledge Production in SL

Arrogant Perception

→ Arrogant perceivers do not identify with the other, do not let the other rub off on them, remain untouched by their experience of the other, and feel no sense of loss in their encounter with the other. (Maria Lugones, Marilyn Frye)

Orientalism

Controlling Images

# Coloniality and Knowledge Production in SL

Arrogant Perception

Orientalism

→ Orientalism involves mastery and dissemination of knowledge about the other, an ontological and epistemological distinction between the self and other, a 'western' style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the other. (Andrea Pitts)

Controlling Images

# Coloniality and Knowledge Production in SL

Arrogant Perception

Orientalism

Controlling Images

→ Controlling images (different than stereotypes) are created and maintained by people and institutions with social power, and are used to justify the oppression of those whose images they craft. They objectify individuals and groups through binary, oppositional thinking that is lived out via the controlling image. (Patricia Hill-Collins)

# Ethics as Responsibility to the “Other”

Arrogant Perception

“True togetherness is not a togetherness of synthesis, but a togetherness of the face-to-face” where one encounters the other, not as content or thought but as an other to whom one must respond. It is a relation that leads one beyond one’s own being.

Orientalism

“The face is what one cannot kill, or at least it is that whose *meaning* consists in saying ‘thou shalt not kill.’”

Controlling Images

“I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity.”

(Emmanuel Levinas)

Break for Questions and  
Comments

# (some) Goals and Objectives for Decolonial Service Learning

- 1. Disrupting and shifting narratives, giving a fuller account of history
- 1. Developing political literacy (Paulo Freire)
- 1. Building coalitions, not community (Kristi Dotson)
- 1. Building kinship relations (Kyle Whyte)

# Proposing a Decolonial Praxis

- Active resistance to “colonial unknowing”
- Disrupting Warfare by Narrative Means
- World-Traveling, Playfulness, Co-Constituting World Building
- Creating space for difference, anti-assimilationist pedagogy

# Proposing a Decolonial Praxis

Active resistance to “colonial unknowing”



“Colonial unknowing” refers to “practices aimed at producing historical unknowing about originating stories in the U.S., which facilitates compliance with settler futurity.” We resist colonial unknowing by making space for narratives and wisdoms that do not serve the political status-quo. (Kristi Dotson)

Disrupting Warfare by Narrative Means

World-Traveling, Playfulness, Co-Constituting World Building

Creating space for difference, anti-assimilationist pedagogy



# Proposing a Decolonial Praxis

Active resistance to “colonial unknowing”

Disrupting Warfare by Narrative Means



World-Traveling, Playfulness, Co-Constituting World Building

Creating space for difference, anti-assimilationist pedagogy

We must deconstruct ways that meanings are constructed and/or influenced by power. Narratives are a way to recognize or map the workings of power and to examine the way the engine of United States' political economy runs on the fuel of certain cultural politics. Narratives undergird the political economy, they continue to allow the political status quo to resist change. (Wahneema Lubiano)

# Proposing a Decolonial Praxis

Active resistance to “colonial  
unknowing”

Disrupting Warfare by Narrative  
Means

World-Traveling, Playfulness, Co-  
Constituting World Building →

Creating space for difference, anti-  
assimilationist pedagogy

We must travel to others’ worlds,  
not as a conqueror or an  
imperialist, but playfully, open to  
surprise and being affected by the  
other. When we travel to a world  
that is not our own, we see its  
inhabitants as subjects and  
agents, not as objects and victims.  
(Maria Lugones)

# Proposing a Decolonial Praxis

Active resistance to “colonial unknowing”

Disrupting Warfare by Narrative Means

World-Traveling, Playfulness, Co-Constituting World Building

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“Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters.” (Audre Lorde)

# Towards a Decolonial Praxis: Immersion East Side

- Strategic design as a seminar
- Rethinking what “service” means and what counts as service
- Upstream course projects
- Let narratives emerge from community members, engage community as ‘teachers’
- Compensating community members, being respectful guests in the community
- Building a decolonial lexicon, decolonizing language
- Constant reflection (academic and emotional) for students and faculty
- Intellectual humility: decolonizing work is an ongoing process, is an aspirational goal

# Institutional Commitments

## Time

To build and maintain community relationships

To develop courses and programs for authentic decolonial service learning

## Money

Investment in faculty

Investment in community and people who are now part of their “faculty”

## Willingness to Change

Decolonial Service Learning will challenge narratives and identities

Decolonial Service Learning will force students, faculty, and institutions to engage in decolonial self re-construction

Decolonial Service Learning will not be measured by standard academic metrics

Without a rigorous and consistent evaluation of what kind of a future we wish to create, and a scrupulous examination of the expressions of power we choose to incorporate into all our relationships including our most private ones we are not progressing, but merely recasting our own characters in the same old weary drama.



- Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light: Essays*, pg. 11

# Questions and Comments?

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Find Immersion East Side on  
Facebook and Instagram, we  
promise to update more regularly  
if you do!

# References

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